The Contradictions of Masculinity:

Desire, emotions and masculine identities of seven heterosexual Mexican men

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ABSTRACT

Studying men and masculinities in Mexico through feminist sociology is necessary to tackle gender inequalities. These inequalities can be as extreme as the institutional, sexual and physical violence that occur in disproportionate numbers, or as quotidian as the micro-machismos that go unnoticed as forms of everyday gender violence. It is paramount to understand masculinity as a system of domination and differentiation as well as a gender identity that is performed by bodies that feel, are affected and recognise themselves as masculine and as men. By doing so, the road towards equality will include a strong critique of how men have learned to pursue a certain form of masculinity.

To question men's relation with masculinity and their experience of recognising themselves as such, this thesis took a narrative approach to the analysis of video diaries, generated through an affective methodology with seven Mexican men about their sexual-affective heterosexual relationships. The methodological process involved a relationship of ethics, friendship and co-production. Each of the seven men recorded themselves talking about their relationships, their partners and themselves in a uniquely vulnerable, honest and reflexive manner. The video diaries were then turned into seven narratives that were organised discursively into topics of: Emotions, Desire and Identity.

The analysis centred on affective practices, emotions, social mediations of desire and masculine identity as ongoing negotiations in a particular geopolitical context. The men in this study constantly situated themselves between the hegemonic discourse of masculinity in Mexico and alternatives closer to a feminist approach. This positioning showed how their practices and ideas, while still part of the hegemonic system, were also able to challenge it.

Thus, this thesis demonstrates the value of an affective methodology for working with men to analyse masculinities. The men who participated in this research revealed their

daily navigations between multiple forms of masculinities and the hegemonic system still embedded in them. Such everyday negotiations highlight the very real challenges to be overcome in the movement towards more equal, free and ethical relationships between women and men.

Furthermore, by offering a situated study of how Mexican men negotiate their masculinity, this research contributes to broader Anglophone literature on masculinity, which tends to be rooted in the Anglo-American experience. While concerned with relatively privileged Mexican men, it shows how such men negotiate global stereotypes such as the macho, the provider, the lover or the rebel.

Finally, this thesis reveals how masculinities are manifested, as gender identity, with specific practices, desires, emotions and ways of being in the world; and also as a symbolic-material system of hierarchical organisation of sexed bodies. Thus, analysis of sexual-affective heterosexual relationships, through a focus on masculinities, can bring to light the contradictions and conflicts of being a man situated in a privileged position within the sex-gender system, in a social context that is increasingly questioning the position and the system that maintains it.

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During this PhD I was a dishwasher, a waiter, a line cook, a chocolatier, a tutor, a university teacher, a waiter again and a government employee. I hurt my back, I took on yoga, I lost my hair, I became a vegetarian, I moved houses seven times. I fell in love, I got a heartbreak, I made new friends and I lost others. That is why I also want to acknowledge myself, especially my hands and my back, for not quitting on me.

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INTRODUCTION

This research began with an interest to understand my position across the debates about gender equality. As a social subject my position is shared by several people that define themselves as, or are defined as men and as heterosexual; as such, understanding my situated position helped me unpack that of others and vice versa. However, it was not until I started this research that I realised the consequences of the privileges that are granted to certain identities and denied to others in the context of Mexico. Questioning these privileges does not happen often and does not happen naturally, at least not in a personal level (Kimmel, 1993). Privileges are upheld partly due to their elusive character, it is because of their tangible benefits that those who have them often refuse to question or detach from them.

My theoretical standpoint to the study of masculinity, sexual-affective practices, and gender relations is akin to social constructionism. This perspective does not advocate for essentialist explanations, rather it admits the vast importance of language as producer of the social reality that constitutes us. From this perspective the construction of reality is understood as a collective process, which is traversed by relations of power. At the same time my position is not that of a radical antirealism, as I will explain in following chapters.

It is my intention that, throughout this thesis, my own subjectivity as a heterosexual Mexican man is questioned and taken out of the assumed place of the absent researcher. Certainly, I am also a subject of this study as the critiques and analysis I pose to my participants implicate me as such. This inseparability is best reflected in the chosen methodological tools, namely, video diaries and narrative productions, as well as in the questions that feminist theory and practice ask to the study of men and masculinities. (García and Montenegro, 2014).

Men and masculinities studies and feminist theory must move side by side. Authors like Michael Kimmel, Victor Seidler, Michael Messner and Raewyn Connell are just a few that frame their studies of masculinities within a feminist perspective. For authors like bell hooks, that distinction is not even relevant, as she has assumed, like many others, that the "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" hurts us all (hooks, 2005). If men and masculinity studies strive to be transformative, they will have to be politicised through feminism. These studies understand masculinity as a relational concept, which is defined only through what it is not, that is, in relation to its surroundings. Masculinity can be defined as a configuration of practices that are simultaneously positioned in various structures and differ in their historical trajectories (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Unpacking that definition, masculinity becomes a system that is not static; that is not inextricably linked to the materiality of the bodies although strongly intertwined to it; that has both a relational and a contingent character, is historically situated, works within a power structure, it is an organiser of affect and desire, and a producer of dominant and subordinated positionalities.

Studying masculinity has become relevant since people realised that it is not enough to understand the struggle and the situated position of women and subaltern identities, but it is also necessary to comprehend how power is exerted, how the institutionalised hegemonic system of masculinity operates and what effects it has on men, women and other gendered identities.

The question is not if men should be part of the conversations around gender inequality, but how men should engage with the issues that relate to the oppression of women and other marginalised gender identities. Many authors agree that men have a place in feminism (Jardine and Smith, 2003; hooks, 2005; van der Gaag, 2014; Adiche, 2014); however, this place cannot be the same as the subjects in the situated position that directly speaks from the place of inequality and oppression (Haraway, 1988). This discussion has to do with the place of enunciation and the issue of representation. Men

doing feminist research have to engage in this discussion and use it as a framework, thus avoiding the ventriloquism that, according to Haraway (1988), would be overcome by a reinterpretation of the subject-object dichotomy.

In this sense, men should not claim to speak on behalf of or from the situated place of the oppressed or subaltern. Instead men should: a) address their own position as gender subjects and their relationship with other gender identities, b) acknowledge the relations of power at play and their effects in gender relations and, c) have a critical transformative perspective that aims towards social equality.

By looking at the relation between power and gender, the very concept of masculinity opens up, revealing a myriad of possibilities and interpretations. People performing multiple forms of masculinities begin to reclaim spaces both in academia and the public sphere. The study of toxic, dominating, patriarchal or hegemonic masculinity, infers other possible ways of being and doing masculinity that authors like Jack Halberstam, Paul B. Preciado or Raewyn Connell have thoroughly understood. These authors concur on the performative malleability of masculinity, while also acknowledging the presence of hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemony refers to a historic situation in which power is won and held (Carrigan et al. 1985). In the case of masculinity, this power is maintained by a group of people, biologically recognised as men, which inhabit positions of power in different spheres of social life (economic, political, sexual, and so on). However, it is the creation and maintenance of these positions that legitimates a pattern of practices that becomes hegemonic. In other words, hegemonic masculinity is not an *a priori* of the bodies biologically characterised as men, but rather a position susceptible to being occupied if one meets the requirements. Hegemonic masculinity is established as a system that produces the cultural, economic and political values that are beneficial to a dominant group; it is not a concrete image of the ideal man that one can achieve to fully embody.

Nonetheless, it confers privileges to certain individuals positioned in strategic places within said system; in other words, men perceive and obtain a series of benefits that come with the maintenance of the hegemonic system of masculinity.

Dominating masculinity is the expression of the hegemonic system of masculinity. It is the most overwhelming reference that men have, it imposes over other forms of masculinities through norms and sanctions; it is often violent, it is rooted in the myths of masculinity (such as strength, heterosexuality, reason, domination, aggression and control), and it must continuously prove its worth. In my research, hegemonic masculinity is understood as a mobile system that creates sex-gender representations and organises them normatively in the social fabric. It unfolds as an ideology in institutions, social frameworks and culture. Men strive for the promised privileges of hegemonic masculinity through the internalisation of dominating masculinity. However, it is in the field of the performative where dissidence, transformation and renegotiation can also occur.

Closer to my research, authors like bell hooks and Victor Seidler, focus on the complex emotional structure that men have developed under hegemonic masculinity. For hooks (2005), men will not save themselves until they learn how to love and practice more equitable and just relationships. This idea, if taken out of context, could ignore the systemic character of masculinity, as masculinity is not only found in the relational, but in ideology, which shapes the structures of societies. The patriarchal capitalist system nurtures the relationships of inequality that currently exist. Economic precariousness, alienation and consumerism are just a few elements tangled with hegemonic masculinity and the sex-gender system, which Gayle Rubin (1986) has defined as the process in which biological sexuality becomes a social product. Therefore, a complete analysis of the *masculine question* should address both the systemic and the relational spheres.

Methodologically, focusing on a specific phenomenon is an appropriate way to reconcile the systemic and the relational. For example, Michael Messner (1992) has tackled the

relation between masculinity and sports; and in Mexico, sociologist Oscar Hernandez (2016) has centred on the relation between work precariousness and masculinity in the northern territory of the country. By analysing a specific practice, it is possible to bypass the difficulty of studying something that, for the most part, is assumed as a natural element and thus, invisibilised (Johnson, 2005). Hence, in my research I set out to study men and masculinities within sexual-affective relationships; however, I continuously relate these specific relationships with the understanding of masculinity as a system of domination and representation.

Sexual-affective relationships are a space where the public and the private merge, where diverse everyday practices unfold, where affect and emotions are constantly renegotiated within cultural frames that exist in the junction of the normative and the innovative. They are a space where it is clear to see the relations of power that are mediated by the sex-gender system; where the learned role of heterosexual men is enacted in relation to their female partners. Even though there are several studies about masculinity and the field of emotions, the sphere of sexual-affective heterosexual relationships and masculinity in Mexico is still underexplored. That is, underexplored from a feminist and gender perspective. Hence, this research aims to expand the knowledge of gender relations from the study of sexual-affective relationships from the perspective of seven heterosexual Mexican men.

Research objectives

Men's character of "genderless subjects" is one of the elements that has maintained hegemonic masculinity. As long as men are taken to be synonymous with humankind, there will be implications in the production of science, cultural and social representations and in the entitlement of privileges. Conversely, masculinity studies that are built upon a feminist perspective will not take this for granted, "but will analyse the very processes by which [men] have been able to acquire that status" (Gosende, 2004: 185).

In his research about heterosexuality, love and society, Paul Johnson (2005) encountered a starting problem: the silent character of heterosexuality as a principle of social organisation. Like Johnson, in my research, the problem of asking heterosexual *cis* men about masculinity and heterosexuality is that they are concepts that have been assumed to be the general silent norm. Therefore, to simply ask about them would most likely return very broad answers, closer to common stereotypes than to the actual lived experience of the people being questioned. Therein lies the need to study a specific expression of these silent concepts, so that the phenomenon can become visible (Johnson, 2005). The specific expression of masculinity that is the objective of my research is framed within sexual-affective relationships, but it is not limited to them, in the sense that what individuals bring into a relationship is a whole series of trajectories, from personal experiences to cultural and geographical backgrounds. To analyse sexual-affective relationships of heterosexual men it is necessary to understand a whole range of external factors or trajectories, which are not exhaustive at all, but choices about the stories those men decide to tell and the questions I, as a researcher, decide to ask. The value of Roland Barthes' "A lover's discourse: Fragments" (1977) is precisely that he looked at the pieces that make up what is understood as love. Similarly, my research put together fragments that spoke of sexual-affective relationships; fragments that evolved through a period of a year, showing a specific period in the lives of seven men.

In this thesis, I explore how hegemony is maintained and power negotiated by analysing these men's discursive and affective practices (Wetherell, 2012). This is not to say that heterosexual men are permanently in a dominant position that is total, universal and unidirectional. Rather, it is necessary to comprehend that the interactions between sexed bodies are immersed in a sex-gender system (Rubin, 1986), which is intersectional. Multiplicities of factors, which can be thought of as trajectories, connect in a determined space and time in a concrete body that configures as an individual. This statement can be written otherwise: that an individual is not defined by their body but by their trajectories.

Starting from this place, it is easier to comprehend that men, who completely incarnate hegemonic masculinity, do not exist. This recognition does not contradict the fact that certain groups of men have more access to privileges that are denied to others.

Nader's (1972) concept of 'studying up' is used in this thesis in two ways: the study of how hegemony is maintained and the study of how hegemony affects the men it is supposed to privilege. It is paramount to understand this patriarchal trade of privileges versus losses for the sake of creating alliances (hooks, 2005). This research aimed to explore the area of sexual-affective relationships in order to understand heterosexual men's relation to hegemonic masculinity, specifically in the context of a heterosexual configuration of social life and desire. It focuses on three aspects that partially emerged inductively:

- ***The way men position themselves within the discourses of masculinity***
- ***How they negotiate their desires in their relationships***
- ***How they communicate emotionally***

The research approach to these topics used two innovative methods: video diaries and narrative productions. The former is a tool that allows for high methodological malleability. It gives the participants a greater range of action and agency, whilst combining both place and time through the use of a video camera. Video diaries show an intimate space (Pink, 2007), where the camera becomes a third actor (Bates, 2013) that, while it does not substitute the researcher, it moves them from their pre-established position of having more control over the participants.

The intimate space that Pink (2007) talks about was also explored through the feedback that I, as the researcher, provided to the participants: after each video diary was submitted I recorded a video diary of my own, in which I talked about the participants' interests and the topics they were more engaged with. I did not ignore or hide my affective involvement in their stories discussing relevant aspects of my own lived

experience. The videos were shared with the participants to foster a relationship of horizontality and co-production, which is also a focus of narrative productions (Biglia & Bonet-Martí, 2009). The video diaries helped consolidate spaces of affect with each participant, through the creation of a new space framed by the audio-visual elements (Holliday, 2004).

Video diaries, however, can generate ambiguity in the recording moment, and lack the dialogue that an interview setting brings. Without care, there is also the risk that the absent researcher assumes that they have tapped into the "true essence" of the participant (Jones et al., 2014). These limitations were reconciled through the second methodological tool used in this research: Narrative productions, which create a dialogue of co-production of knowledge, blurring the line between the researcher and the subject of research (Balasch & Montenegro, 2003). The resulting narrative becomes a new collaborative product that makes the voice of the researcher and that of the participant indistinguishable. In my research, the raw material utilised for the narrative productions have been the video diaries of each participant. These seven narrative productions speak of affective processes and in-depth reflection within a situated position. Each one of them is in itself a form of analysis, an exploration of the intimate space of the sexual-affective relationships of each participant. Each one of them shows how every relationship is also a process, resulting from the merging of diverse trajectories that include each partner.

Analytically, the seven narrative productions were then placed into a dialogue with the researcher, through a Foucauldian lens, to better comprehend the contradictory character of masculinity. Specifically, the analysis tackled three categories: emotional communication, mediation of desire and masculine identity.

Outcomes

Feminist studies had to first separate the once naturalised relationship between sex, gender and sexuality to later comprehend the multiple technologies that are put into action to maintain them together (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1998). This thesis shows seven men in the process of asking themselves how that connection operates in their own experience. The effects of being nurtured within patriarchal heteronormativity cannot be reduced to a simple analysis of privileges, for the patriarchal trade also implies losses (hooks, 2005). bell hooks continuously uses the concept of patriarchal men, and she counterposes it with her proposal of cultivating a feminist masculinity. However, as the men in my study show, there is no categorical change from dominating to feminist masculinity only as a result of awareness, because individual actions cannot be homologised to systemic components. Rather, by nurturing a feminist masculinity, men gradually learn to recognise the patriarchal elements that are deeply ingrained in their subjectivity and the world around them.

Another affirmation of this thesis is that masculinity is both a system of domination and organisation of sexed bodies, and a performative gender identity, which expresses itself in everyday practices and attitudes. This thesis shows how these two elements unfold in a specific situation: by analysing the discourse of these male participants, who are historically, socially and geographically situated, it is possible to understand the contradictions and opportunities that this double character of masculinity creates in men and the relationships they cultivate.

In the case of Mexico, although it cannot be said that there is a unified masculine identity (Machillot, 2013), the historical and geopolitical context becomes relevant when studying men and masculinities. The evolution of the *macho* stereotype, which I talk about in the third section of chapter two, shows the weight that the Spanish conquest had in the creation of a racialised masculinity. However, the complexity of the Mexican (Montesinos, 2002) moves away from the stereotype and asks how a common context generates local and diverse masculinities.

Mexico's metropolitan cities have opened to globalisation, mainly through the influence of the United States. Thus, the metropolitan Mexican still perpetuates certain stereotypes of popular culture and remains rooted to some traditions (Machillot, 2013a), while moving in a global context, of American pop culture and consumption. At the same time, Mexico is living one of the most violent times in their modern history; the normalisation of death and violence, accompanied with a sentiment of injustice and corruption, also modify the way gender is performed, and in this case, masculinity (Valencia, 2016; Nuñez and Espinoza, 2017). Hence the relevance of studying Mexican men and masculinities in the intersection between tradition and change, in a political and economic turmoil in which masculine identities are in a constant process of construction.

It follows that a significant part of this thesis is informed by scholarship from Mexico that tackles men and masculinities studies. As shown by Nuñez (2016), men and masculinities studies in Mexico formally started in 1990, following what Amuchástegui and Szasz (2007) refer to as the ethnographic turn. These studies aim to understand a specific lived reality of men in a temporal and spatial context. Scholarship around men and masculinities in Mexico (and Latin America) is relatively young when compared to scholarship from the United States, Europe or Australia, but it contributes to the understanding of changes in gender relations, specifically in matters that relate to power, violence and the intersections between tradition and change. Scholarship from Spain also informs this thesis given its critical input into the destabilisation of the gender binary and the de-naturalisation of identity. Spanish authors like Preciado (2008), Coll-Planas (2012), and Azpiazu (2017) are central to the analysis of sexuality, privilege, and masculine identity in this thesis.

Studies of men and masculinities that originate in Mexico also situate privilege in a geopolitical context, much like Coston and Kimmel (2012), and avoid the unflinching polarisation that "one either has it or one does not" (Coston and Kimmel, 2012: 97). The

idealisation of a normative standard of masculinity cuts transversely, making the access to privileges a constant negotiation. In these lines, Echeverria (2013) has proposed studying "masculine vulnerability" as a response to the incompatibility of hegemonic masculinity as a working concept in a Latin-American context. This approach would question the possibility of achieving any form of "finished" masculinity (whether dominating or alternative) within neoliberalism. Rather than assuming stable identities, Echeverria (2013) aims towards the understanding of nomadic identities, particularly in Mexico.

Lastly, this thesis proposes a methodological research strategy for approaching topics that men do not usually talk about openly, for connecting through spaces of intimacy, letting emotions out and managing them collaboratively, for sharing, being critical and being open to critique. As men start to understand that vulnerability can be an asset for growth, something changes in the way they approach their relationships. Even though the hegemonic system of masculinity still spreads throughout their social fabric, men can acquire new tools to face it in their everyday interactions.

Thesis layout

The starting point of this thesis is the comprehension of gender from a socio-constructionist approach, which is the focus of the first section in chapter one. Gender (and extensively, sex) is thought of as performative and as a relational agreement, immersed in a symbolic system of social organisation. In this sense, the weight of language is overwhelming; still, it is important not to regard gender as a disembodied abstraction, but to think of individuals as semiotic-material subjects (Haraway, 1999). The body becomes intelligible through the discourses we attribute to it; at the same time, it is a body that feels, that desires and is affected by what comes near (Ahmed, 2004). The body is a psychosomatic drama.

One of the most important contributions from the studies of men and masculinities came from the pen of Raewyn Connell: the concept of hegemonic masculinity still is a useful tool to think about privileges that a power position promises to deliver, and it is developed in the second section of chapter one. Hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), is not an intrinsic property of the bodies it is associated with, but a position susceptible of being occupied within the sex-gender system, which is interconnected to multiple aspects like race, class and geopolitics. Hegemonic masculinity has an ideological component, as well as a deeply affective one, which Connell refers to as cathexis (1995).

In the last section of chapter one, (hetero)sexuality is understood as a technology of power. In the words of Paul Johnson (2005) it can be understood both as a sexual practice and identity, and as an institutionalised form for the organisation of social life. To comprehend heterosexuality as a raw desire and as a seemingly internal subjectivity, but also as an institutionalised technology of power that shapes desire and identity is the goal of this chapter and, more generally, of the thesis, as the parallels between masculinity and heterosexuality become apparent. An approach to better understand these complex relations is through the idea of affective practices (Wetherell, 2012), which is further developed.

Chapter two takes a broad look at the studies of men and masculinities. The first section focuses in the work that has come out of western countries, where the production of literature has been significant. One of the most important changes in most recent literature has been stepping out of the sex role theory towards a more politicised perspective, akin to feminist studies where the connection between men and masculinities is not assumed as obvious.

Men and masculinities studies in Mexico have also expanded their focus outside the study of the macho and machismo, as shown in the second section of chapter two. These

studies formally start in 1990 in Mexico (Nuñez, 2016), following the boom of the ethnographic turn (Amuchástegui and Szasz, 2007). The main contribution of these studies is the demystification of the idea that there is only one identity for the Mexican man (Hernandez, 2008), which for many years was trapped under the stereotype of the macho (Nuñez, 2016).

Section number three of this second chapter is dedicated to one of the most popular concepts of the Mexican man and its relation to masculinity: the macho. Through a historic analysis, it is possible to understand the links between the concept and the political interests of different times. In the 21st century, the concept has been redefined once more through feminism. However, the macho has also been used as a strategy, for the consolidation of a national identity at first, and for racial and economic stratification later on (Machillot, 2013). Mexican feminism has used the concept of machismo both as an issue for political struggle and as an object of study.

The methodological discussion in chapter three shows the decisions, difficulties and negotiations that were carried out throughout the research process. The relation between epistemology and methodology is clear and necessary, and the link that binds them is the feminist perspective. Hence, the way to generate knowledge has been through an affective methodology, which aimed to destabilise the divide between the researcher and the participants, towards greater horizontality. An affective and feminist methodology is even more necessary when conducting studies of men and masculinities, as it can give a more critical perspective, bringing to light many unconscious biases and preconceptions. One technique to accomplish the former is to make the researcher visible, in such a way that their influence is put in the forefront and it is managed accordingly. The methods used for this study follow such premises: both the video diaries and the narrative productions aimed to demystify the idea of an objective, rationalist and universal science.

The results of the methodological process are shown in chapter four. Three narratives appear in their full length, which represent three different positions of men within a discourse of feminism and equality. The four remaining narratives were shortened to show the process of these heterosexual men while they navigated their sexual-affective relationships, their own fears and worries, their desires and frustrations, and their self-knowledge. All narratives were a collaborative process, where the discourse of the participants and the decisions of the researcher intertwined to create a third voice, which is the narrative production. Each one of them is an analytical process, filled with reflection, theorisation and produced in a specific social, geographic and political context.

The analysis in chapter five is presented as a discussion between the theoretical framework of this thesis and the narratives. The categories of this analysis were emergent, combining the interests of the participants as they arose and the concerns of the researcher. The three sections that comprise this chapter are: Emotional communication, Mediation of desire and Masculine identity. In the end, it would seem that there is not a single way to perform masculinity, as several authors have already stated (Connell, 1995; Halberstam, 1998; Carabí and Segarra, 2000; Azpiazu, 2017). This affirmation, however, can be taken further as there is not only a single form masculinity is performed in a single body; in this specific case, the bio-male body can perform various masculinities as he moves through time and space. The way men perform masculinity can vary depending on the need to cope and adapt to diverse social requirements.

The former statement informs the reflections and conclusions of this thesis: that masculinity is contradictory in the sense that it is a system of social organisation of power, domination and privilege, and a performative expression, which is expressed in attitudes, aesthetic, desires and ways of being in the world.

> On the one hand, [masculinity] it is to do with the locally negotiated identities, always provisional, always in a state of flux. [...] On the other hand, masculinity is a social construct, a gender ideology, a society's way of associating certain practices with gender. (Galasinski, 2008: 11)

This tension between the field of representation and the field of performative practices is, for heterosexual men, a constant reminder of what they must be willing to lose in order to access the promised privileges of masculinity. The road towards more equal, fair and free gender relations is not a categorical individual choice, but a constant negotiation between the exigencies of a globalised neoliberal society, the technologies of gender established by a hegemonic system and the will to change and imagine other possible worlds.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this thesis covers three conceptual areas that reciprocally feed of each other; hence, its separation is merely for analytical ends. The first one is the starting point for the subsequent interpretative framework: gender understood as a social construction. This section addresses the importance of language in the construction of reality and the effects it has in the body as it interacts with the world around it. The second section focuses specifically in Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (1995; 2005). Understanding this model of masculinity as a system, gives a new light to institutional inequality and the maintenance of practices of domination, as well as the influence of hegemonic masculinity in the formation of a dominating masculinity. The third section centres on affect, particularly in the relationship between affect and (hetero)sexuality. This relationship is read from a critical comprehension of power.

The theoretical framework will give the interpretative guidelines that will inform the three pillars of the analysis to come: emotions, desire and identity. This theoretical journey is not meant to be exhaustive, nor a list of concepts in which lived experience would fit like puzzle pieces. Rather, this section aims to be a glimpse through ideas that provoke reactions, which become ground for further reflexion and continue a dialogue with the narrative of my participants.

The constructed nature of gender

Given the fluid quality of gender, social constructionism is a suitable epistemological perspective to understand the concept and its effects on human relations. Social constructionism is a way of seeing reality; it is an explanation of social dynamics that focuses on society's capacity to create such reality. There is nothing in the world that can

be in a position of exteriority from human experience[1]: Reality is a social construction; what has come to be understood as natural or objective is in fact a product of an ongoing historical process that creates the illusion of a reality independent from us (Ibáñez, 2005). This process is traversed by power and structured by language.

Social constructionism believes that knowledge not only informs but forms reality (Ibáñez, 2001). However, the problematisation of reality does not ontologically deny the nature of *being*. In other words, denying reality as a *supra*-human entity does not consequently deny the existence of being. It is not a debate about the *affirmation of existence* of being. Social constructionism would easily agree with a realist perspective in this regard. Nevertheless, social constructionism would differ in the sense that to talk about reality is to talk about a *mode of existence*, which is not in a relation of independence from human beings.

> Reality "is", of course, but it "is" also in a specific form, it has a determined content, it presents certain properties, certain structure, certain characteristics. The discourse about reality is not a discourse about being, it is a discourse about a determined mode of being, and it is that mode of existence that is called reality. (Ibáñez, 2001: 19)

In "Ammunitions for Dissidents", Ibáñez (2001) candidly exemplified that if he were to say in one of his lectures "cats don't exist" and then someone threw a cat at his face, that person would not have understood his point. In the same way, to affirm that gender does not exist because it is a social construction does not mean that it is not experienced in people's bodies and does not have material effects. Gender as a social construct determines a specific *mode of existence,* which cannot be separated from human experience, from history, from relations of power, and practices of resistance. That is why, instead of falling in a blind, aimless relativism, social constructionism becomes intrinsically political because, as Ibáñez (2005: 54) concludes: "if reality, the only reality that exists,

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[1] The complexity of this process is far greater than what I intend to explain in these pages. For further reading see: Berger & Luckmann (1966), Gergen (1994), and Ibáñez (2001).

ours, is the way it is because we are the way we are, then the possibility of constructing it in a different way is in our hands, and only in our hands."

Taking a performative approach, it would be more accurate to say that reality is *being* constructed; it is a constant becoming that includes individual contradictions as much as socio-historical developments. Therefore, Social Constructionism is useful for understanding the process through which something is established as true; a process that is profoundly discursive but has direct effects in the materiality of the bodies and the social world. The reality of gender, for example, is reified by medical and biological science, institutions like marriage and family, the sexual division of labour and mass media, amongst many other mechanisms.

The concept of gender as a category for defining and differentiating bodies first came into play with John Money (Fausto-Sterling, 2000) in 1955[2]. Money was concerned with the extent to which culture participated in a male/female divided world; he argued that the biological characteristics of our bodies could be separated from the cultural ones when defining a sexed body. Sex would be the physical attributes determined by physiology and anatomy, whereas gender would be a psychological transformation of the self, "an internal conviction that one is either male or female" (Fausto-Sterling, 2000: 18), and the behaviours that would come attached to that realisation. It was in the 1960s that Money made his infamous research on the differences between assigned and instilled sex, arguing that with the correct interventions a young infant could be re-oriented into the opposite sex. The "John/Joan case" was to prove that assumption. The opportunity for Money came when a male baby's penis was accidentally mutilated during a surgical procedure, Money proposed that if they changed the infant's genitals and body image and raised him as a girl, then the baby would grow up as such, and Money's hypothesis would be corroborated: that nurture is more important than nature and that gender identity can be malleable.

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[2] Eva Gil (2002) suggests that it was the psychiatrist Robert Stoller in 1964 that properly used the concept first, referring to the diagnostic of transexual individuals.

It could be thought that, in a way, this was what Simone de Beauvoir first stated when she said, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (de Beauvoir, 1949: 301). However, unlike de Beauvoir, what was lacking in Money's conclusion was a critical approach on the sex/gender order as a whole, an analysis of power relations, a questioning of the category of abnormality and of the Cartesian ideas of duality and opposition: that there can only be males and females, and everything else is a deviation that needs to be corrected. Furthermore, for Money and his colleagues, the main part of what made a person either male or female was found in the genitals. Currently, the definition of sex difference consists in the corroboration given by the relation between gonads, chromosomes, genitals and hormones (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). It is not surprising that, although nowadays gender is considered as a separate sphere from sex, it is still taken for granted that a woman's body has to correspond with the female gender and a man's body with the male gender (Gil, 2002).

This first approach to gender opened a whole new discussion by differentiating the cultural influences from the biological aspects of an individual; however, gender was still embedded within a deterministic view. Gender was thought as a role that could either be played accordingly, within a normative standard, or be labelled as a deviance. This approach failed to consider factors like oppression, power relations or ideology, and it could be used to sustain explanations of inequality, by reaffirming the idea of an idealised role that would maintain a static social structure. Furthermore "Sex role research could, and did, wobble from psychological arguments with biological assumptions, through accounts of interpersonal transactions, to explanations of a macro-sociological character, without ever having to resolve its boundaries" (Carrigan et al., 1985: 559).

Gayle Rubin was one of the first thinkers to address the matter of gender, primarily focusing on its relational aspect. Although her paradigmatic essay "The traffic in women" (1986) still conveyed hints of dualism between nature and culture, she argued that this

division would be overcome by the means of human activity: "A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations" (Rubin, 1986: 158). Social factors, Rubin acknowledged, were the ones that could ultimately say something about the systematic oppression that occurs between individuals. The challenge was to identify and comprehend the workings of the relations that turned a "female of the human species" into an oppressed woman.

After analysing kinship relations and the prohibition of incest, mainly from the writings of Lévi-Strauss, Rubin determined that women had been turned into raw material, and their domestication was the resulting product. Women had become sexual objects of exchange between families, whereas men (the exchangers) maintained their position of sexual subjects: "Kinship systems do not merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage names and ancestors, rights and people […] in concrete systems of social relationships" (Rubin, 1986: 177). For Rubin, these elements were the foundations of culture. However, the exchange of women, by itself, was not enough to define culture, it was a condensed part of a broader system of social and sexual relationships. Rubin's proposal was to consider gender, not as an element that could be analysed as a separate entity from the system that sustained it. Instead, gender was to be considered an intrinsic part of that same system that she called the "sex-gender system" and that she defined as: "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (Rubin, 1986: 159).

For this system to be sustained, it must function as a technology of power, as Foucault has argued (1976); that is, as a set of incarnated strategies aimed at the production of specific types of subjectivities, which consist of the:

1. Maintenance of a model of mandatory heterosexuality to the detriment of homosexuality and other specific forms of sexualities that do not align with the

hegemonic model (Connell, 1995; Wittig, 1992). The sex-gender system entails directing sexual desire toward the opposite sex.

2. Constraint of women's sexuality and of feminine traits that could be expressed by men. This produces a social organisation of sex based on gender as a counterposed dualism.

Thus, gender has been understood to be a social imposition, more than a biological fact. Furthermore, the material relations of society also intertwine with the disparity between the male subject and the female object, which has produced a specific set of cultural traits, economic developments and subjectivities[3]. Authors like Judith Butler (1990) and, in some way, Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000), have radically questioned the idea of the biological fact, given that even the definition of sex is part of the sex-gender system that is socially imposed and constructed.

Following the tradition of the "Linguistic Turn", feminist historian Joan Scott (1986), affirmed the necessity of studying words in use, as intrinsically relational and always historically situated. In her work, gender was conceived as: "a way of denoting 'cultural constructions' […] Gender is, in this definition, a social category imposed on a sexed body" (Scott, 1986: 1056). From a critical and post-structuralist perspective, it is possible to see in Scott a focus on power relations when talking about the construction of truths: "The use of gender emphasises an entire system of relationships that may include sex but is not directly determined by sex or directly determining of sexuality" (Scott, 1986: 1057). The study of gender only becomes possible when considered as intersectional, that is, in constant relation and interdependence with other factors, such as class, race, geography, physical and neurological abilities and so on.

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[3] For a deeper analysis on a feminist approach to Marxism and dialectic materialism, Silvia Federici is a must read: Federici, S. (1998), *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the body and primitive accumulation*. Spain: Traficantes de sueños. [2010].

Thus, to consider gender as a category of historical analysis implies looking at cultural symbols that work as catalysers of multiple representations; many of these are well founded in our collective imaginary (the princess, the hero and so on). The interpretation of such symbols passes through normative concepts that define and limit possibilities. Gender relations then become inseparable from the social institutions and organisations in which they operate: the labour market, education, policy and governance, and so on. Therefore, the study of subjective identity must be historically situated.

Even though the study of representation may not be a central focus of Scott's theory, she did point to the relation between forms of representation and the resulting oppression of certain subaltern groups, as well as the invisibilisation or eradication of alternative ways of life. Analysis of gender as representation, however, became central for Teresa de Lauretis, in her most recognised text, "Technologies of gender: Essays on theory, film and fiction" (1987). This book showed the influence of cinema in shaping how bodies and subjectivities are thought of and practised. A similar critique is made to the Institutional Mode of Representation in cinema, defined as the set of possibilities established by institutionalised cultural mechanisms that shape an idea of the world, which produce effects of truth in the spectator (Mulvey, 1975).

De Lauretis defined gender as the product of diverse technologies: "Both as representation and as self-representation, [gender] is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalised discourses, epistemologies and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life" (de Lauretis, 1987: 2). From this definition, the study of gender moved beyond the limited spectrum of sexual difference and became a product of a "technology of power", which had to consider the specificities of each individual as situated in a socio-historical context. There are huge implications in this way of thinking, for it regards gender as radically contingent on sexual difference, taking the latter only as one more of its characteristics, but in no way exclusive, universal

or essential to the constitution of sexed bodies. To accept gender as the product of diverse technologies implies that:

1. *Gender is representation*. Gender places an individual in a given position with respect to an established category; hence why it can only be thought of in relational terms. Gender is representation because it pre-exists individuals, it confers a series of symbolic and conceptual meanings that place them in a cultural matrix that Rubin (1986) had previously defined as the sex-gender system. To assume one's gender, or to be coercively placed in it, "implies the assumption of the whole of those meaning's effects" (de Lauretis, 1987: 5). Gender, as a result, also becomes a process of maintaining its own representation.

2. *The representation of gender is its construction*. Which is sustained by the production of the differences between men and women. This statement takes the concept of ideology and asks for the gender character of the individual immersed in such ideology. Gender ideology is a process, "a variable configuration of sexual-discursive positionalities" (de Lauretis, 1987: 7), which is not separated from social existence in general; but it is part of the sex-gender system that includes social relations as well as material means of production. This relational characteristic opens the doors for thinking of a subject with agency, capable of questioning and positioning with respect to the ideology.

3. *Gender is an ongoing construction*. Not only in the ideological apparatus of the State, but also in academia, artistic vanguards and even feminism. The exercise of power over sexuality is a productive force aimed to maximise life (Foucault, 1976); in that way, various technologies are implemented to achieve maximum productivity, many of which are found in the State, scientific disciplines such as medicine or psychology, but also in consumer goods and mass media, including cinema. Technologies of gender consider the ideological particularities of difference (de Lauretis, 1987).

4. *The construction of gender is also affected by its deconstruction.* However, from who and from where is this de(re)construction being made? To construct new discourses from a perspective that is positioned *elsewhere,* while maintaining a foot inside the ideological representation of gender, means to elaborate terms that have an effect and are grounded on "the micropolitical practices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering investments" (de Lauretis, 1987: 25).

De Lauretis' contribution became a starting point for the deconstruction of gender, both as practice and as representation. Considering the historic component that Joan Scott provided and the definition of the sex-gender system by Gayle Rubin, the work of Judith Butler then brought attention to the fluid and contingent qualities of the categories of sex and gender, by analysing the constant *doing* of gender.

A big part of Butler's work has been focused on the destabilisation of the category of the subject, the denial and subversion of identity as a form of resistance, and the possibility of agency within these postulations. For Butler, the self is not something that *is,* rather is something that is constantly *becoming*. The former statement implies a radical anti-essentialism: there is no unalterable, deep substance that defines the subject as such; it is society that has created the idea of a subject from discursive objectification, through acts and practices. Hence, sex and sexuality are discursive constructions that vary from time and culture (Salih, 2002).

Gender becomes solidified in such manner that it appears as if it had always been that way (Butler, 1990); however, de Beauvoir's famous statement: "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" can be rephrased in a way that one never fully becomes a woman (or a man for that matter). The process never stops because gender is just that: a process. Therefore, there is no subject prior to the act, no subject that would wake up every morning and actively decide to be a male or female or any other option (Salih,

2002); it is best to think about the subject as a fiction resulting from the immersion in the process of gender as performativity (Salih, 2002). One of the most forward-thinking statements in Butler's work has been to consider not only gender as a social construction, but also sex. The categories of men and women, masculine and feminine, are constructed discursively within a heterosexual matrix (Salih, 2002). In clearer words, gender would be the discursive means through which the "nature of sex" is produced and established as pre-discursive, as an *a priori* over which culture would be built (Gil, 2002). In this way, the category of sex is also culturally constructed (Butler, 1990) and in turn, once this contingent character is acknowledged, the apparent unity between sex, gender and sexuality can be deconstructed through the analysis of the heterosexual matrix (Johnson, 2005).

To affirm that gender is performative means that it is the effect of a series of repetitions, culturally situated in discourse, which prescribe that which they enunciate. It is through the iteration of practices that we create the fiction of our gender identity, however there is no subject prior to the act, no essential subject that would decide to perform gender. Even though there is room for decision, resistance and change, agency is inherent to the process, not prior. In the words of Eva Gil (2002: 36): "Butler is still faithful to Nietzsche and Foucault, and she is not capable of visualising islands of freedom beyond the categories that constitute us; however, for her, these categories are the ones that at the same time allow for spaces of subversion". The question of identity, therefore, is a complex and contested terrain, one that can be walked strategically, whether by subverting identity (Butler, 1990), by situating it in a specific moment and place (Benhabib, 1992) or by acknowledging that there is still a need for 'strategic essentialising' (Spivak in: Johnson, 2005).

Having understood gender as a system (Rubin, 1986), as representation (de Lauretis, 1986) and as performative (Butler, 1990) within a historically situated context (Scott, 1986), the next section will talk about how this conception of gender has translated into

an analysis of the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). To think of gender as a discursive construction, rooted in relations of power, and with semiotic-material effects, allows for the study of masculinity as a pattern of relational practices, where privileges, subjectivities and affect are constantly being negotiated.

The hegemonic system of masculinity

It is not easy to define masculinity without falling into generalisations or resorting to a mere list of traits. Masculinity is not a finished concept, rather, it is an ongoing construction, or as Careaga and Cruz put it (2006), a place in gender relations and the practices through which individuals occupy said place in gender relations, which has effects in the body, in the self and in culture. In this thesis, masculinity is understood as: "a position that is not fixed, but conditioned by other categories of social distinction, which transcends biological bodies and individualities, but that is referred to the collective of men" (Careaga and Cruz, 2006: 11).

Looking at masculinities as a configuration of practices that are simultaneously positioned in various structures and differ in their historical trajectories (Connell, 1995), opened a new field of study to address the sex-gender system, through its relational character and through its systemic character (Rubin, 1986). From this understanding, the sex-gender system has the characteristics of being: historically situated, internally differentiated, material, within a power structure, an organiser of affect and desire, and a producer of dominant and subordinated positionalities (within which women, queer folk and anti-normative forms of masculinities are often placed). This new take on the concept of gender implied admitting various forms of masculinities that are expressed through body-reflexive practices, in which multiple structures were interconnected. In particular, the studies of men and masculinities came to focus on: a) relations of power, b) relations of production, and c) cathexis, which can be defined as emotional attachment (Connell, 1995).

One of the most influential outcomes of the above-mentioned elements was the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which was popularised in the 1980s with Kessler et al. (1982, in: Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) and mainly through the work of Connell (1982; 1995; 2005). To understand the concept, a brief overview of the approach of Antonio Gramsci to hegemony is needed. The central point in Gramsci's work was to understand how a group expands its hegemony over another (Woolcock, 1985). Hegemony is not a synonym of domination but, from a Gramscian analysis, is about the predominance and extension of the ideological mechanisms of the dominant class into the social, economic and cultural spheres. This implies the acceptance of their norms and values by the dominated class; in other words, the moral sense of action (Woolcock, 1985). Hegemony comes from the ideas and system of values of the dominating class; however, the dominated class interiorises them through several mechanisms, which are closer to consensus than coercion. When de Beauvoir (1949) built her analysis from the Hegelian dialectics of the master and the slave, she was not too far from this same reflection.

According to Joseph Woolcock (1985), Gramsci advised that, for a group to acquire hegemony over another, three instances needed to be implemented over time and space. The first one is at the level of production, the second one occurs at the level of the state and the third one at the ideological level. Through these three levels, the dominating class creates a relationship with the dominated class, which is closer to an alliance than it is to an imposition. The hegemonic class cannot afford to sacrifice the interests of the dominated class, so instead it creates a relation of dependency (economic, political, cultural) where those in the hegemonic position write the rules of the game. During this process, a key element is the dissemination of the moral and intellectual values of the dominant class, in such a way that the traces of hegemony are invisibilised and the dominated class becomes blind to their own domination. "In Gramsci's view, once this class obtains the active consent of society, it becomes the hegemonic class" (Woolcock, 1985: 205).

One of the most successful strategies of hegemony is to absorb the dissident thought into its ideology, meaning, to include counter-hegemonic ideas into its own discourse, so that every nonconforming expression or practice of resistance is re-codified from the cultural codes of the hegemonic discourse. Acknowledging the former brings forward the questions of: how has the hegemonic model of masculinity readapted to keep being current in the specific socio-historic context in which it develops? How has it absorbed the discourses of gender equality, sexual diversity and feminism? These questions will reappear in the analysis chapter; however, first it is necessary to fully understand the scope of the concept of hegemonic masculinity and its implications in the study of men and masculinities.

Hegemonic masculinity presents a relational, historical and situated character. It implies that the practices of domination are not found in an individual body that would be intrinsically masculine and male, and that would have certain characteristics paired according to its so called "nature". On the contrary, said characteristics have been argued to be socially constructed through processes of domination, control and oppression as well as through practices of resistance, imagination and unadorned contingency. These characteristics mean that a man could exert certain hegemonic practices and also occupy subordinated positions, depending on the situated relations in which he takes part in a given place in time. Thus, the concept of hegemonic masculinity becomes inseparable from other structures such as class, race or physical and neuronal differences. Hegemonic masculinity can be regarded as an instituent and instituted ideology (Azpiazu, 2017; Fischer, 1992; Woolcock, 1985). It is not an object, but it produces materiality; it is not a characteristic, but it organises characteristics and grants them value.

Like the analysis of gender, the study of hegemonic masculinity focuses on relational aspects, which means looking at specific practices performed by sex-gendered bodies within a complex structure that would produce certain social relationships. Thus,

hegemonic masculinity explains, "a pattern of practices […] that allow[s] men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 832). Although this concept does not refer to a norm in a statistical sense, it is, however, normative. Hegemonic masculinity implies the capacity of a group to "legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate dominance" (Carrigan et al., 1985: 592).

Having reached this point, it is necessary to differentiate between two main concepts that appear throughout the rest of this thesis: Hegemonic masculinity and dominating masculinity. The first one, as stated before, suggests a systemic character, which means that it moves in the realm of super-structure, ideology and representation. Dominating masculinity, however, operates in the field of the relational, the everyday practices and the performative (Gil, 2002). In other words, it can be said that one of the effects of the hegemonic system of masculinity is the imposition of a dominating form of masculinity, which would bring the promise of privileges to those who strive to enact it.

In real life, these two concepts unfold as one single experience, but to comprehend just how an intimate identity of the self can be rooted in an institutionalised system of differentiation by domination, this separation should be acknowledged. The hegemonic system of masculinity imposes a dominating masculinity over other forms of masculinities, in a way that it constructs the male body from a specific representation of a normative identity (Carrigan et al., 1985). From this statement, it follows that a first step to analyse hegemonic masculinity is to address the matter of identity.

From a poststructuralist viewpoint, identity is thought of as a construction linked to power/knowledge relations (Guerra, 1997), which challenges the notion of an aprioristic subject; identity would become the product of a constitutive process, built through the reiteration of practices framed by discourse (Butler, 1990). Aligned with the epistemological strategies of deconstruction, Butler (1990) stated that the subject had been objectified in a way such that it had acquired a natural and psychological character

that became internal and irreducible. The task, then, would be to understand the practices and discourses that have made a series of behaviours and attitudes to be thought of as consequences of an immovable identity. The process of construction of identity simultaneously creates the truth about itself; however, there is nothing in it that would be irremediably fixed or determined, which is why subverting identity can be a strategy for carrying out practices of freedom. Paradoxically, trying to perfectly embody the normatively assigned identity is to be doomed to failure (Butler, 1990), as much as it is to assume that it can be denied completely (Guerra, 1997). Hegemonic masculinity, thus, must establish itself normatively, through the subordination of other masculinities and the imposition of mandatory heterosexuality, in order to maintain its place in the sex-gender system.

Hegemonic masculinity is sustained through the implementation of five interrelated processes, which I have identified in the work of Connell (2005), and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). These are: the maintenance of and correspondence between cultural ideals and institutional power; the establishment of mandatory heterosexuality; the use of persuasion; the division of labour; and the enforcement by the state.

1. *Maintenance of and correspondence between cultural ideals and institutional power.* The arguments of what masculinity ought to be do not come solely from psychiatry or medicine anymore. Following Preciado (2013), the neoliberal market logic also contributes to their production and is in charge of expanding them through every corner of daily life. In a way, this is comparable to what Foucault called the lines of indefinite penetration (Foucault, 1976), as an expansion, rather than limitation of sexuality. From Viagra, which perpetuates the "inseparable" relation between penis-coitus-masculinity, labour, which is still plagued with gendered institutions that privilege men's positions, to publicity and marketing, mass media and cinema, these lines of indefinite penetration come to fruition. To talk about institutional power within the frame of hegemonic masculinity necessarily implies admitting that institutions are themselves gendered (Connell, 1998), which is

observable on a global scale in specific ways, particularly in: a) The division of labour, with the public and productive realm left primarily to the male worker and the domestic and reproductive realm to the female counterpart; b) power relations exerted by the state and corporations that are mostly controlled by men; c) emotional relations shaped by the institutionalisation of romantic love, which is also a very lucrative commodity of consumption; and d) the imagery of gender that produces certain forms of representation, mostly paired with western cultural hegemony, or exotic marketisation of non-western cultures (hooks, 1992). All of these elements allow a certain body positioned within hegemonic masculinity to exert authority over other non-dominant manifestations of sexuality.

2. *Establishment of mandatory heterosexuality.* This is a cultural, political and economic imposition, which has been widely studied by authors such as Adrienne Rich (1980), Gayle Rubin (1986) and Monique Wittig (1992). Mandatory heterosexuality maintains gender binarism and establishes an indissoluble relationship between gender, sex and orientation of desire, from which the only result is one possible combination: the union of a heterosexual, masculine, bio-male with a heterosexual, feminine, bio-female. This, of course, is a performative fiction; however, it entails a cultural weight that cannot be easily denied, since reinforcements for mandatory heterosexuality are found everywhere. J. C. Pascoe (2007), for instance, through a field study in a Californian high school, showed how schools participated in the creation of a heterosexualising process. The organisation and teaching of sexuality in schools was, most of the times, heteronormative and homophobic (Pascoe, 2007): A process that is critical to the development of dominating masculine identities. Therefore, any practice that is in condition of exteriority from this representation will be considered as marginal and will carry either a series of corrective actions, its invisibilisation, or in extreme cases its eradication. Implicit in the installation of hegemonic masculinity is the control of affect, pleasure and desire. It is key to understand this argument as it links to previous ideas regarding the construction of identity: affect is typically characterised as an internal element of the psyche, almost essential and

constitutive of identity as subjects. While it could be admitted that other elements of everyday life are socially constructed, it would seem like the field of desires and affect belong to another realm. However, when talking about heterosexuality as the fundamental domain where gender difference is re-produced:

> Power is what motivates […] individuals' "investments" in discursive positions. […] What makes one to take a position in a certain discourse rather than another is an "investment" (*cathexis*), something between an emotional commitment and a vested interest, in the relative power (satisfaction, reward, pay off) which that position promises (but does not necessarily fulfils) (Hollway in: de Lauretis, 1987: 16).

Cathexis, following Connell (1985), would be the social organisation of sexuality and attraction that passes through the management of the emotional energy assigned to an object of desire. Hegemonic masculinity, in sexual-affective relations, is sustained by the idea of heterosexual romantic love.

3. *Persuasion.* Mostly implemented through the semiotic mechanisms of mass media (Carrigan et al., 1985). The construction of the representation of masculinity also has an economic utility: the verification of the sex-gender system passes through a market logic; advertising is not only made to sell a product -as object- for its usefulness or its inherent characteristics, but now the merchandise is, first and foremost, a lifestyle. The product is no longer the material object to possess; rather it is the body/*self* resulting from acquiring said product (Klein, 2000). Persuasion, as explained here, implies a form of consensus -in a Gramscian sense- between the producer and the consumer, in a way such that the latter actively accepts the semiotic package that it is given. Therefore, while society voluntarily cooperates to the maintenance of the mechanisms of representation, it is the state-market axis that operates and regulates said agreement. Persuasion as exerted by these mechanisms is a multiple and dispersed strategy. Carefully elaborated, it will not directly deny nor repress other forms of masculinities but define them from its position of power:

> An examination of advertising, for instance, shows a number of ways in which images of masculinity are constructed and put to work; amplifying the sense of virility, creating

anxiety and giving reassurance about being a father, playing games with stereotypes (men washing dishes), and so on (Carrigan et al, 1985: 594).

4. *The sexual division of labour.* Some of the justifications for this division are made on physiological grounds regarding body strength and neurological abilities. However, these arguments are easily discarded, as Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) concluded, after an extensive review on numerous researches about brain differences in men and women. Therefore, some scholars have looked for the understanding of this division elsewhere. Silvia Federici (2010), for example, has linked the rise of capitalism and primitive accumulation to the expansion of the witch-hunts in Europe, and later in the colonies of America. The domestication of women's bodies during this period related to their use as reproductive machines; although many feminist critics, Federici included, would argue that this is still one of the last battlegrounds of sexual domination. Around the 14th and 15th century an economic reordering occurred in Europe, mainly centred on the redefinition of property, the privatisation of land and the introduction of a salary as compensation for labour. These fundamental characteristics of the transition to capitalism were not smooth and free from conflicts. Women that previously had an active role in society, possessed medicinal knowledge, took part in the decision-making of public affairs and so on, were subjected to a process of alienation from their bodies, centered in biological reproduction and the domestic realm, while men started to take control of medicalisation and childbirth, with doctors replacing midwives. Women that refused this new normativisation were frequently categorised as witches and exposed to the most brutal tortures. Understanding the division of labour as a violent exercise of power over particular bodies throughout history is more useful for reflecting on the sex-gender system than an explanation based solely on the supposedly determined biology of the sexes. In the 21st century, neoliberalism has radically change men and women's engagement with work in a global scale. However, in many countries, including Mexico (as shown in following chapters), access to work is still greatly mediated by a sexist and normative understanding of sexual difference.

5. *Enforcement by the state.* In many cases, the State creates rules and public policies that align with the hegemonic model of masculinity (Carrigan et al., 1985). Clear examples are the criminalisation of homosexuality, welfare laws that privilege normative unions through heterosexual marriage, and multiple institutions that dismiss other forms of non-normative identities. This enforcement implies coercion -in a Gramscian sense- through the possession and use of knowledge in the form of science as well as the idea of a paternalistic state grounded in the rule of law. However, there is always a counterpart of resistance that aims to gain rights, public spaces and political positions, and by doing so, the hegemonic project is also modified accordingly.

These five interrelated processes show that maintaining hegemonic masculinity is an arduous task; in other words, gender inequality is not a given condition of the social structure, but a system of domination that must be maintained throughout the social fabric. As such, it can also be contested.

There is also another way through which hegemonic masculinity is maintained, that is with the complicity of many men who "do not act in the way prescribed by the hegemonic model but still (passively) sustain it and thus realise the patriarchal dividend" (Demetriou, 2001: 342). The patriarchal dividend is a term used by Connell (1995) to refer to the advantages that certain men have for the position they occupy in patriarchal societies, such as higher incomes, and easier access to public and political roles and to education (Demetriou, 2001). Thus, it is of the interest of a great number of men to sustain the hegemonic model (Carrigan et al., 1985). To perform a complicit masculinity can be a strategic movement, in such a way that a man can receive "the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832). It can be especially advantageous for men that are in subordinated positions in other spheres of social life (ethnic, class, sexual preference) to enable a complicit masculinity, by supporting and striving to fulfil the hegemonic model of masculinity.

In the case of complicit masculinity, most of the privileges are not directly taken or negotiated but come with the package of 'being a man'. It is this form of masculinity that "embodies, organises, and legitimates men's domination in the gender order as a whole" (Connell, 1998: 12); and translates in "a patriarchal dividend of men arising from unequal wages, unequal labour force participation, and a highly unequal structure of ownership, as well as cultural and sexual privileging" (Connell, 1998: 11-12). These are men who support "hegemonic masculinity, though remaining 'without the tensions or risk of being the front-line troops of patriarchy'" (Connell, 1995: 79). It is deducible that most men are constantly entering and exiting this complicit position, without having to be "particularly powerful, nor do they influence the dominant cultural symbols of manhood" (Aboim, 2012: 3). However, this form of complicity is the most dangerous because it is not clearly distinguished as the central part of patriarchy, but it is what mostly sustains it, in a less explicit form.

An apparent contradiction of considering hegemonic masculinity as a contingent feature of an individual body is that the individuals are still immersed in the sex-gender system, from which it is not possible to be in a condition of exteriority, as was explained in the previous chapter (Gil, 2002). Foucault (1976) has stated that there is no space absent from power; practices of freedom are best thought of as negotiations and resistances *within* relations of power. In the same way, subversion of gender and sexuality is in constant dialogue with the hegemonic apparatus, even when rejecting it. This immersion also implies that real bodies are the ones that constantly actualise hegemonic masculinity, with body-reflexive practices, in which: "bodies are both objects and agents. The conditions of such practice include where one is and who is available for interaction" (Connell, 1998: 9). Central for the understanding of masculinity is to consider it not only as a manifestation of gender but also as a system that has historically shaped gender relations by having control of the mechanisms of representation. In this way, masculinity and femininity should not be thought of as binary opposites that are in a condition of horizontality. The sex-gender

system is not only descriptive but also hierarchic, as dominating masculinity establishes itself through the relations and representations it fosters.

However, to assume that men are always in a position of power in relation to women in every aspect of life, is to deny a complex analysis of intersectionality where race, class, geopolitics, sexual orientation and so on, are in constant tension. This assumption also overlooks the relation between experience and identity, and the constant struggle of each individual to make sense of their needs and desires (Seidler, 2000). As women have been able to regain agency within their subordinated position and to become empowered and transform their realities and identities, men too can detach from their position of power and their dominating attitudes and behaviours.

Without denying that men, as a social group, benefit from hegemonic masculinity, it is possible to admit that there can be room for contradiction within the individuals that experience these relations of power and oppression for "it is important to recognise that people don't manage to escape the contradictions of their own situation, but it is also a mistake failing to recognise that people can learn and change" (Seidler, 2000: 290). That is why bell hooks (2005) concluded that the only way to achieve equality is to admit that men are capable of changing the way in which they have been taught to love, to take care of the other and of the world, in short, of changing how men have been taught to "be a man".

In what follows, the links between hegemonic masculinity and the emotional structure that results from it will be addressed. Beyond the commonplace idea that "boys don't cry", it is important to understand the relationship between men, reason and affect, and the resulting notion of the rational individual. Additionally, the next section will tackle the implications of heterosexuality in the context of a critique to dominating masculinity and the heteronormative matrix that is put in place to maintain the connection between them.

In short, the following section will show how the hegemonic model of masculinity fosters heteronormative sexuality and the detachment from the body and the emotional realm.

Embodied contingencies: (Hetero)Sexuality and emotions

Heterosexuality, as masculinity, works at different structural levels, which are interrelated but have different connotations. Heterosexuality is a sexual practice, a sexual identity, an institutionalised social system and a set of norms for the organisation of familiar and kinship bonds (Johnson, 2005). In this way, to experience heterosexuality is to feel a sexual desire towards the opposite sex and to pair an identity with the representation that the semiotic package of heterosexuality entails. But it is also a way in which the social world is organised, through the establishment of cultural norms and traditions, the organisation of society through a normative arrangement of family relations and so on.

> Heterosexuality is presented as an acknowledgement of the self, usually in a relation of power used to normalise a particular set of sexual relations that oppress women, gay men and lesbians […] alongside with the compulsive character of heterosexuality as the norm (Seidler et al, 1995: 78).

A similar idea appears in Foucault's history of sexuality (1976), which describes the invention of sexuality as a discipline that originally intended to catalogue and control sexual perversions, "not to suppress perversions, but to give them 'an analytical, visible and permanent reality'; they were 'implanted in bodies, slipped in beneath modes of conduct'" (Giddens, 1992: 12). Similarly, to recognise oneself as heterosexual not only speaks of an affirmation of acknowledgement of the self, but also of the category "heterosexual" that is taken for granted and considered "non-problematic" insofar it poses as the norm. Beneath the idea of sexuality is the immanence of power as "an instrument that produces pleasure. […] Sexuality should not be understood only as a drive, which social forces have to contain. Rather, it is 'an especially dense transfer point

for relations of power'" (Giddens, 1992: 18). Hence, heterosexuality can be understood both as sexual preference and as a dominant institution of patriarchy (Seidler et al., 1995).

To "be straight" therefore implies to accept and immerse oneself into heterosexual culture, one that takes a huge amount of effort and labour to maintain (Ward, 2015). To affirm that heterosexuality is constructed in a cultural framework does not deny the bodily effects of that immersion; it means that, often, sexual impulses are directed and enclosed within the heterosexual matrix, which authors like Butler have defined as the assumed indivisibility between sex, gender and heterosexual desire. The heterosexual matrix strengthens the gender binary, while rendering abject all bodies that fall outside of it (Ward, 2015).

These assumptions make it even more difficult to critically engage with the necessary discussions about diversity: To question that which brings pleasure, to accept that heterosexuality as a norm has hindered other expressions of sexuality, many times in a violent manner. The straight mind, as Wittig has suggested (1992), has concrete effects in how individuals experience their sexuality and in the way the world is structured through the male-female binary opposition. So, what does heterosexuality entail? What is the extension of its domain? Does it start and end with the desire of sexual engagement with the opposite sex? Or does it permeate into fashion, verbal and physical expressions, leisure activities, imposed gender roles, career paths, discrimination, buried fantasies and so on?

For Sara Ahmed (2006), heterosexuality has an inherited quality, meaning, it is offered "as both obligation and 'gift' by parents to their children. Required to follow the family line, the child's entire social world is oriented toward heterosexuality" (Ward, 2015: 31). Much like Butler's (1990) idea of gender as performativity, heterosexuality is learned by the repetition of practices, sensations and meanings that orient a child towards it. Much like gender, this orientation is often experienced as an essential part of our selves.

Butler (1990) has argued that identity is a discursive construction, with no essential *a prioris* that would constitute what someone *is* prior to experience. The fiction of identity is stabilised as an abiding substance with the help of sex, gender and sexuality (Hekman, 2000). That is why, for instance, when trying to answer the question of "do you consider yourself heterosexual?" the men that participated in my study would constantly overlap the traits with which they defined men, masculinity and heterosexuality. Heteronormativity as an imposition is sustained by tightening the bonds of those three aspects. However, even though the links between sex, gender and sexuality are, for the most part, a product of social history, the materialisation of discursive identity is inescapable. In other words, the heteronormative structure is not only embedded but embodied: it has both semiotic and material effects in subjectivity (Haraway, 1999). Heteronormativity, then, would be the very drive that supports heterosexuality:

> I conceptualise heterosexual subjectivity as constituted not by a lack of homosexual sex or desire, but by an enduring investment in heteronormativity, or in the forces that construct heterosexuality as natural, normal, and right and that disavow association with abnormal, or queer, sexual expressions. This investment in heteronormativity is itself a *bodily desire* […] It is the desire to be sexually unmarked and normatively gendered (Ward, 2015: 35).

Heterosexuality, for Ward, is in part a "fetishisation of the normal" (Ward, 2015: 35) and a product of culture that materialises in the body. In her research, Ward argues that heterosexual white men use homosexual sex within particular codes to bolster their white masculine heterosexuality. These codes are invested in heteronormativity, as the possibility for sexual fluidity is more distant for men, who are more pressured to either demonstrate their heterosexuality or admit their homosexuality once and for all. The leverage for sexual undefined fluidity is significatively smaller for men than it is for women.

The straight mind (Wittig, 1992) and the gender binary are built upon a hierarchical system. In this system, men occupy a privileged position. However, such analysis would be

incomplete without an understanding of systems as dynamic and intersectional: gender cannot be thought of as a hermetic system, as it is intrinsically related with race, class, institutions, cultural representations and so on. The male subject is in dialogue with a hyper-masculine self that develops within the hegemonic apparatus of masculinity, but at the same time he is situated in a specific context: white man or ethnic minority, heterosexual or homosexual, middle class, macho, with disabilities, trans, etcetera. Each man is in an ongoing process of defining his masculinity or negating it, while being/doing in a globalised and local world (Connell, 1998). Trying to define sexual identity will usually lead to more questions than answers.

A poststructuralist perspective is useful to deconstruct multiple arguments about human beings and their interactions, as well as to break oppositional binaries strongly rooted in history: homosexuality and heterosexuality, men and women, nature and technology, masculine and feminine and so on (Derrida, 1997). From the tradition of authors such as Lacan, Deleuze and Foucault, contemporary philosophers like Beatriz Preciado, Donna Haraway or Judith Butler put issues of power relations, the importance of language in the creation of reality and the situated characteristic of the production of knowledge at the centre of their theories.

A recurring critique made to poststructuralist thinkers touches on the overwhelming weight of culture and the assumption of individualist change (Seidler et al., 1995). In a very accurate critique by Anu Koivunen (2010), this resulting tradition from the linguistic turn can derive in an excessive importance to language, in a way such that it would disregard, or even deny, the materiality of the bodies that, despite all, are biologically constituted. Koivunen's answer is to produce theory that takes affect as a starting point, considering the function that the body has as an inescapable materiality, biologically determined, traversed by experiences that generate answers that are not only psychological but also physiological. This is what has come to be known as the "affective turn" (Gibbs, 2002; Masumi, 2002; Sedwick, 2003; Clough and Halley, 2007; Gorton, 2008;

Koivunen, 2010; Liljeström and Paasonen, 2010) as a critique to the poststructuralist perspective but also a debate from within said perspective (Koivunen, 2010).

Language constructs realities; however, simultaneously, language comes loaded with emotional energy that produces affect. It is also true that, often, emotions cannot be contained by the words that describe them: "feeling, articulated *is* words and is also in the words" (Riley, 2000: 6); "which is why is impossible to distinguish between 'language as carrier of emotions' and 'language as emotion'" (Koivunen, 2010: 13). An object can be a 'feeling-cause' (Ahmed in: Koivunen, 2010), and in this sense, language can be considered as such. This debate does not deny the effect of power in the creation of subjectivities, which can be in a condition of dominance or subordination. On the contrary, affect and emotions can also be shaped by mechanisms of power. They have a political aspect and can be subverted through practices of resistance. But in this entire process the body must take a central part for it is the element that experiences affect. If desire is political and can be used or transformed as a tool for change, as Preciado has suggested (2002), then emotions in general can be thought of the same way. For Margaret Wetherell (2012) the semiotic and the discursive are inextricably connected to affect. To accept the previous means at least two things: on the one hand, it is possible to carry on a process of deconstruction, to analyse the affective practices *as products*, not as essences. On the other, these semiotic-discursive characteristics are never static, which creates the possibilities for some agency, and for the transformation of affect into more ethical relationships.

Within affect theory there are two tendencies; the first one acknowledges the differentiation between the concepts of 'emotion' and 'affect'. Rei Terada has explained the distinction in the following way: "emotion, thus, being 'a psychological, at least minimally interpretive experience whose physiological aspect is affect'" (Terada in: Liljeström and Paasonen, 2010: 13). Along these lines, Massumi (2002) agrees that the differentiation between emotion and affect is a key argument for research within "new

materialism". In this school of thought, a psychological component is admitted, which relates to the way in which emotions are interiorised and given account of, but it also recovers a gaze that places its attention in the biological and physiological aspects, meaning, how the body is affected by the experience of specific emotions. The physiological answers would then be considered as affect. Emotions surpass the individual; they are cultural and intersubjective productions integrated within the subject (Liljeström and Paasonen, 2010).

The second tendency uses the concepts of emotion and affect interchangeably. One of the authors of this approach is Sara Ahmed, who erases this distinction to highlight the fluidity of the concepts and the diffuse of its barriers. In her words:

> I would argue that this distinction between affects and emotions under-describes the work of emotions, which involve forms of intensity, bodily orientation and direction that are not simply about 'subjective content' or qualification of intensity […] Emotions are not 'after-thoughts', but shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit (Ahmed, in: Liljeström and Paasonen, 2010: 32).

In this way, Ahmed denies the supposed autonomy of affects from emotions; she argues that both are part of the same corporeal ground that is framed in the experiential and, therefore, they are completely contingent. This means they depend (and emerge) on the world that bodies inhabit and on the affective objects that they have in proximity. Ahmed has called this the 'drama of contingency': "how we are touched by what comes near" (Ahmed, 2007: 124).

Margaret Wetherell (2012) has acknowledged this distinction but she overcomes it by focusing in what she has called "affective practices": a methodological tool for analysis, that takes into consideration the body of work from social psychology, psychological studies and critical psychology but constantly framed in the Deleuzian concepts of 'becoming', 'assemblage' and 'desire'. The idea of practice conveys the conceptualisation of "social action as constantly in motion while yet recognising too that the past, and what

has been done before, constrains the present and the future" (Wetherell, 2012: 23). Affective practices touch on the idea of discourse by Foucault (1970), Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1992), and present meeting points with performativity theory. While there is room for improvisation (taking what is at hand) in our actions, there is also the notion that every practice is framed in an *order of discourse* (Foucault, 1970) that dictates the truth about things at any given time in history; notion that can also be paired with Randall Collins' (2004) interactional ritual chains. From Symbolic Interactionism theory, rituals are defined as formation of practices that are intertwined endlessly through the emotional energy that is injected into them and thus perpetuates them (Collins, 2004).

Emotions are a key factor for sociability. For Wetherell (2012), these affective practices can be seen as patterns of repetition, as well as places for improvisation. According to her, the study of affect and emotion needs to focus on these affective practices given its emphasis on embodiment, assemblages of desire (borrowing from Deleuze) and flow. There are three main arguments to take into consideration when approaching Wetherell's proposal for analysis, they are:

1. *Affect as flowing activity*. Affective practices emerge in a rhythm; the metaphor of flow speaks about the figurations of affect in a chronological patterning. This means to consider their different cycles and duration: "how these practices are situated and connected, whether that articulation and intermeshing is careful, repetitive and predictable or contingently thrown together in the moment with what else is to hand" (Wetherell, 2012: 12). Affective practices are not static, but continually dynamic.

2. *Patterns of affect*. Despite of its fluid character, affect does outline a pattern of practices; this is to say that it becomes organised within an assemblage of different components that can be economical, discursive, relational and so on. Affective practices not only happen in the realm of the individual but rather they are radically inter-

subjective. They only appear in a dynamic assemblage and it is there where they acquire meaning (Wetherell, 2012).

3. *Affect and power*. This is probably the most important argument of Wetherell, given that the question of power is inevitable when talking about affect. As Preciado (2002) has stated, after deconstructing the notion of sexuality, a dominant form of desire has been produced within a heterosexual matrix, which is framed into the dominant apparatus of verification that conveys certain truths about the body and its emotions. In other words, the individual responses are situated in an emotional regime, which "prescribe the dominant norms of emotional life" (Rosenwein, 2010: 22).

From these three arguments, it can be affirmed that emotions are inextricably intertwined with their context; they need to be addressed considering the spatial and temporal dimensions and all the social components that surround them. Emotions also have a reflexive characteristic: when put into the spotlight and through an exercise of critical deconstruction, affective practices can be modified and used to subvert the way gender relations are performed.

A clear example of the former is Preciado's "Countersexual Manifesto" (2002), where the body is put at the centre of resistance with pleasure as the main weapon of choice. Countersexuality is the analysis of the heterocentred sex-gender system that creates performativities based in the biological truth; it is also a proclamation for the equivalency of body-subjects[4] (not codified from the gender binary) committed to the search of pleasure-knowledge (Preciado, 2002). In this sense, countersexuality aims, not so much to deny the normative apparatus of sexuality, but to produce alternative forms of pleasure-knowledge, in which the new totem would be the dildo as a material-semiotic object

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[4] These bodies, for Preciado, would no longer be binded by the contract of Nature, instead a counter-sexual contract would make bodies "recognise themselves, not as males or females, but as talking bodies. They recognise themselves as subjects capable to access all significant practices, all the places of enunciation, that history has determined as masculine, feminine or perverse" (Preciado, 2002: 18).

(Haraway, 1999) that functions as a gender prosthesis. The dildo not only substitutes the penis, Preciado argues, it surpasses the biological mandate and "reveals the plasticity of the sexes, the artificiality of sexual organs and heteronormativity" (Medina-Vincent, 2016: 15). If desire, excitation and orgasms are the products of a sexual technology carefully implemented, and not -as common sense would dictate- the natural product of the sexualisation of the reproductive organs, then the possibility to invent new forms of experiencing sexuality reappears. The dildo, as an object that produces pleasure, turns into a technology of *degendered* sexual resistance that escapes the nature=heterosexuality matrix and places itself closer to the argumentative lines of Foucault (as technology), Butler (as performativity), Haraway (as cyborg) and Wittig (as critique of the political heterosexual regime) (Preciado, 2002).

For Preciado "the end of the body, as it has been defined by modernity" has arrived (Preciado, 2002: 20). However, this does not imply the denial of the body in its immanent materiality. Gerard Coll-Planas (2012) has built a strong critique against Preciado regarding this aspect. He shows how naïve it is to think that the power of agency is enough to completely deny or transform not only biology, but also the cultural meanings engrained in it. From Preciado's Manifesto, it could be assumed that "the idea of reproducing gender is a rational choice, one that can be taken individually" (Coll-Planas, 2012: 77). Affirmation that would not give enough importance to social factors that structure and actualise gender identity. To think of the body as a perpetual, limitless, piece of work could mean to fall in a voluntarist and politically impoverished conception.

However, according to my reading, Preciado's arguments follow a different course. The body of modernity is one that finishes in the limits of the skin, for it is constrained by it, and it is determined by a biological science that is assumed to "discover" the truth about nature and has no political agenda nor is historically, economically or geopolitically situated. On the contrary, to declare the end of the body is to affirm that human beings are material-semiotic subjects (Haraway, 1999), who extend upon their surroundings

while they are constituted by it, and that utilise diverse technologies while transforming the supposed nature they carry. Following Coll-Planas (2012), the drive to create a body that functions as an increasingly more efficient machine, starts in modernity. It is in this moment when the body is conceived as something that requires control to minimise its vulnerability.

In this way, the body as a natural entity starts to crumble in modernity. Moreover, modernity transforms the body into just another object of its industrialisation. However, it is still a body that is irremediably inhabited by a Cartesian individual, whose becoming would be guided by an individual will. If the end of the body of modernity has truly happened or not, is a question that remains.

One of the defining pillars of the subject of modernity is sexuality. A multiplicity of negotiations, struggles, norms and resistance merges in a body that desires in a specific way. There is no clear path through which a subject establishes their object of desire, and it is by walking the path that one incorporates sexuality to identity. For Preciado (2013), sexuality is the product of mechanisms of power that have been put into motion throughout history to produce specific sexed subjectivities, aimed to the normativisation of bodies, within a heterosexual matrix. An effect of this *technopolitic regime of sexuality* (Preciado, 2013) was the invention of the term homosexual, which appeared in medical science around the 1880s when referring to individuals thought to be pathologically perverse. Preciado explains how the technopolitic regime was institutionalised in Western Europe, over two moments of industrialisation of sexuality. The first one emerged in the 19th century, sustained in an apparatus of scientific verification that spoke 'the truth' about bodies, supported by evidence that was catalogued as anatomical. This first industrialisation was paired with the birth of biopolitics and had the characteristic of managing bodies for the production and reproduction of the social corpus, through the control, conservation and expansion of life (Foucault, 2007).

The second industrialisation of sexuality appeared in the second half of the 20th century and separated itself from the previous notion in such way that the apparatus of verification was no longer scientific (or at least not predominantly scientific) but mercantile and semiotic; in words of Preciado: "farmacopornographic" (Preciado, 2008). Both periods have in their centre the capacity for telling 'the truth' about bodies, specifically their sexuality. In doing so, at the same time a sexed body was created, a subjectivity that could be thought of as a machine for it was the product of various technologies put into motion to produce a specific objective. However, this machine has the peculiar capability of saying "I".

Preciado breaks from the classic comprehension of sexuality as a group of static categories that come paired with a set of behaviours and identity traits. On the contrary, sexual orientation of desire is thought of as a constant state of experimentation where nothing is completely defined. Preciado does take into consideration the socio-political factors that influence sexual identity by focusing on the possibilities of creating new ways of embodying sexuality. The affects that would derive from a conception of sexuality in *open source* would be radically different from those that, for example, result from mandatory heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. There is a clear junction between theories of affect and critical theories of sexuality. Affect is not only a physiological response, but it is also shaped by interaction and it is immersed in power relations. Desire, then, becomes political and it can be an essential component in the transformation of gender relations.

From the postulates of queer theory, sexual intercourse, the choice of the sexual object to which desire is directed, is not merely a pulsional or subconscious matter; it is, first and foremost, a technology of domination. However, as in any relation of power, there is also resistance, meaning, practices and discourses that counterpose the hegemonic system that, in this case, is referred to sexuality as a heteronormative matrix of control, production and reproduction. The countersexuality proposed by Preciado (2002) would aim to identify those spaces that escape or fall off the sex-gender system, in order to

reinforce the power of said deviations. Countersexuality tries to destabilise the structure of the sex-gender system, by modifying the positions of enunciation. Performativity theory (Salih, 2002) will give political strength to speech acts from decontextualised spaces of enunciation: *other* spaces outside the hegemonic position. However, the power of countersexuality is not only linguistical. Preciado makes a clear connexion between sexual identity and gender: sexual identity is the effect of the re-inscription of gender practices in the body. In such a way that:

> "Gender is not only performative […] Gender is, first and foremost, prosthetic, meaning, it only happens in the materiality of the bodies. It is purely constructed and at the same time entirely organic. […] Gender is like a dildo, because both go beyond imitation. Their carnal plasticity destabilises the distinction between the imitated and the imitator, between truth and representation of truth, between reference and referent, between nature and artifice, between sexual organs and sexual practices. Gender could turn out to be a sophisticated technology that fabricates sexual bodies" (Preciado, 2002: 25).

For René Girard (in: Livington, 1994) desire is mimetic, meaning, we desire in accordance to what we see the other desire; this 'other' acts as a mediator between the desiring agent and the desired object. Girard's model of mimetic desire is triangular, as it includes the desiring subject, the object of desire and the mediator or model, which provides a pattern for the desiring subject to imitate. "Mimetic desire, then, is a desire linked to a belief about another-desire." (Livingston, 1994:   292). Regardless if this imitation is accurate or not, it is nonetheless what impulses desire in the subject, in the "mimetic agent". In this sense, when Han (2012) proclaimed the agony or *Eros*, he said it in a neoliberal context, where everything has been turned into an object of consumption, including the "other", which has been eroded to give way to a narcissist self that moves in what Han called "the inferno of the same".

The Deleuzian conception of desire thinks of it as an activity that is fulfilled in practice (Gao, 2013). This notion steers away from the definition of desire as lack. For Deleuze and Guattari desire is productive, not necessarily something that has to be controlled and ruled by reason. Deleuzian desire is not aimed towards a specific object, meaning, it is no

lack of any object, neither it is the Freudian drive of libido: desire is the very constitution of humanity (Gao, 2013).

For Deleuze, social production and production of desire are the same thing; libido does not need any mediation, sublimation or any psychological operation to invest in relations of production. Desire maintains an immediate relation with the social. The mediations that Deleuze talks about are thought of as repressions that the psychic structure must place in the subconscious to maintain its homeostasis. However, the way the concept of mediation is used in my thesis differs from Deleuze's critique. Social mediations of desire are not found in a psychological structure; rather, they are a product of the relations of power that occur in the field of the social. Desire is productive, and it is so in the sense that it also produces its own mediations. The social mediations of desire described in my thesis are closer to the idea of Claire Colebrook (Gao, 2013) and her emphasis in connectivity (or intersubjectivity). For Colebrook, individuals are nothing more than the result of their connections and experiences. The fact that human beings are desiring bodies (or desiring machines, in words of Deleuze) is the result of said connections. In other words, subjectivity is produced within interconnectivity, which is to say: all subjectivity is *inter*subjectivity. From this stand, it is possible to think of social mediations of desire as that which is present material and discursively in the connections between desiring bodies.

> Desire has nothing to do with a natural or spontaneous determination; there is no desire but assembling, assembled, desire. The rationality, the efficiency, of the assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play, without the desires that constitute it as much as it constitutes them. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 399)

Romantic love is one of the social mediations of desire that the heteronormative matrix maintains as a cornerstone for its production and reproduction. Romantic love can be defined as "a cultural ideology that materialises in incarnated semiotic-material experiences. Meaning, that relates symbolic (discourses, narratives, images), material and affective aspects, which always pass through the body" (García and Montenegro, 2014:

67). For Johnson (2005), the heterosexual subject comes to be through the situated discourses of love; a specific *way-of-being* heterosexual results from a specific construction of love. Several feminist researches have studied the ways in which romantic love has helped to maintain the patriarchal system; from Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and Kate Millet (1970), to more current authors like Eva Illouz (2009), Mari Luz Esteban (2011) and Coral Herrera (2011).

Giddens (1992) differentiates between passionate love (as an urgency that irrupts in everyday life) and romantic love (which is inserted between the idea of freedom and self-realisation). Romantic love creates a narrative where the object of love is supposed to complete the individual who loves. It is also an individualistic narrative that fails to reach the wider social processes. Because romantic love is built as a myth of patriarchy, it is also profoundly heterosexual and hierarchical, which is why "the ideals of romantic love tend to fragment under the pressure of female sexual emancipation and autonomy" (Giddens, 1992: 61). In opposition to romantic love, Giddens proposes what he calls *confluent love*, which has the qualities of being more active and contingent, of focusing on the relationship that is being created and sustained. Confluent love strives for emotional equality and reciprocal sexual pleasure; it is not necessarily monogamous or exclusive, nor is it only heterosexual (Giddens, 1992). From those characteristics, confluent love appears as a set of affective practices that do not deny the social sphere in which they operate; romantic love, on the other hand, sells the illusion that the social world disappears, it is felt as a purely internal emotion, oblivious of the unavoidable influence that the political and economic sphere entail, because it supposes an immediate experience of the body: "Emotions occupy the threshold where that which is not cultural becomes codified within culture, where the body, cognition and culture converge and fuse together" (Illouz, 2009: 19). The former statement connects to Ward's cultural approach of heterosexuality (Ward, 2015).

Contrary to the definition stated above, from a traditional western view, there is a tendency to think within the reason-emotion binary. In this scheme, reason would be an ideal paired with sanity, humanity and progress, whereas emotion would be thought of as something uncontainable, animalistic and retrograde (Galasinski, 2008). Therefore, while it is not idyllic to be completely absent from emotions, there is nonetheless a willingness to control them through reason as much as possible. This metaphor is still current, framed in the context of hegemonic masculinity that pairs men with reason and women with emotions. It also feeds on gender stereotypes and completely fails to address the actual notion of gender, because it positions "men and women as two uniform groups of people" (Galasinski, 2008: 13).

To accept the reason-emotion binary as a foundational myth of the psychological structure of the individual carries irreconcilable complications, both in the epistemological and the political spheres. In the first one, the complication lies in assuming that experience can be divided into two components; however, the knowing subject cannot be separated from the material body with which they experience the world and that is affected by it. An individual's corporality also speaks about their vulnerability, their imperfections and limitations; which can only be enunciated and constituted in a concrete situation that congregates and intensifies diverse trajectories. The idea of a disembodied reason, impassive against the effects of the world, is unsustainable; rather, as individuals become affected by the world that is the object of their reasoning, reason too becomes affective.

In the political sphere, the complication lies in the effects that the cult of reason has in the shaping of the *other*, in which the one who knows can be represented by the western male subject, paired with reason, and the other acquires the shape of marginalisation and subordination: women, infants, indigenous communities and so on, whose only access to reason is conditioned by the notion that someone else makes of them. Rationality, scientific truth and objectivity are some of the tools of masculine domination, which are

perpetuated structurally (Bourdieu, 1998), through institutions, forms of representation and discourse. These tools have been used for the control of nature, its exploitation and its subsequent deterioration (Mancera-Valencia, 2009); in other words, the ideal of economic and scientific progress also feeds from the masculine logic of domination, from which both women and indigenous people have suffered its effects.

Within this logic of thought, there is the idea of the unemotional man as a composed figure that has left aside emotions in order to conquer reason, knowledge and power. Men have been taught to dissociate mind from body: "we learn that the body has to be subordinated to the mind and that we have to exert rigorous control over it" (Seidler et al., 1995: 8). This way of thinking about masculinity entails an epistemological positioning towards the world. In this line of analysis, men represent *dis*-incarnated reason, and from a position of exteriority dominate and tell the truth about the world. Women, on the other hand, are synonym of (mother) nature; an object of domestication and exploitation. Mancera-Valencia (2009) addressed what feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949), sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1998) or image critic John Berger (1972) had already put in the spotlight: the mainstream knowledge of the world is codified by a masculine logic. The unemotional man is a fiction that cannot be accomplished, that is implausible and that oversimplifies gender relations (Galasinski, 2008). Yet, the fiction of the unemotional man permeates our conception of the world. A figure that functions as a metonymic trope of how humanity has achieved progress: through reason -a virtue exalted as the centre of western civilisation. The cost of this *dis*-embodied fiction is that men do not fully accept responsibility of their own emotional lives and bestow that responsibility onto women; whether it is their partners, mothers or the like (Seidler et al., 1995).

For Ron Harré et al. (1985), emotions not only have a linguistic component, but even the experience of emotions depend on the subject's capacity to interpret, describe and give account of them via language. Emotions, in this instance, are also profoundly discursive. In this way, saying "I love you" is not only a performative speech act (Austin, 1962) in the

sense that those words inaugurate a new reality and a new society. But the phrase also functions as a trigger of affection. Love, as any other emotion, needs to be framed in stories, confessions or narratives so that it can emerge (Wetherell, 1996 in: Galasinski, 2008). It is useful to think about emotions from its discursive component; by focusing on the way men talk about their emotions "rather than as some internal states associated with physiological conditions of our bodies" (Galasinski, 2008: 6). Nonetheless, physiological responses put the body in the centre, as immanent materiality in the interaction. From a queer approximation to sexuality, the body and emotions, it is clear that "an importance to language is considered, but it does not overshadow. Language does not suffocate materiality" (Coll-Planas, 2012: 75). It becomes clear that the concepts of sexuality, gender and identity interconnect in multiple forms and trajectories, which are experienced by a concrete body that desires and is affected by its surroundings. In this turmoil, relations of power, normative institutions and practices of resistance are in constant flux.

In this section, the concept of heterosexuality was understood as sexual desire and mainly as cultural identity. Heterosexuality carries a semiotic-material package that is experienced in the body. Heterosexual identity is assumed as the norm and, in doing so, it occupies a position of power and privilege. By being placed as the norm, heterosexuality also becomes naturalised; however, contrary to this idea, my position in this thesis is that heterosexuality is learned, it is constructed, it is imposed and defined using and demarcating from homosexuality and other sexual practices characterised as deviations (Ward, 2015). To speak about heterosexuality is to talk about the heterosexual matrix and about heteronormativity as the result of said matrix. The participants of my research recognised the constructed character of their own sexuality, and by doing so, they tried to rethink themselves within and outside heteronormativity.

Emotions, much like sexuality, also have a cultural component in which language is pivotal. However, much like sexuality, their discursive character has effects in the body.

Language materialises in the body through desire, emotions and affective practices. The later are social actions in motion, they are embodied, situated and flowing practices, which have the elements of being: dynamic activities or actions, outlined by patterns through inter-subjectivity, and traversed by power (Wetherell, 2012).

In the face of the existing emotional regime (Rosenwein, 2010) and heteronormativity (Ward, 2015) there is the possibility to think and produce alternative forms of pleasure-knowledge, like Preciado's (2002) counter-sexual proposal. This change in the subject-body position is partly achieved by overcoming the biological mandate and recognising the plasticity of sex, gender and sexuality. In other words, by unravelling the heterosexual matrix. For Preciado (2002; 2008), sexual orientation is constant experimentation, where desire is an activity fulfilled in practice. Therefore, desire will always be productive (Gao, 2013). Desire has an indivisible relation with the social, specifically, with social mediations, which are a product of relations of power, domination, control and production. Romantic love is an example of these social mediations of desire.

For heterosexual men, it is a more arduous task to think outside the heteronormative culture of sexuality, one in which they have been socialised since early childhood (Ward, 2015). The assumed nature of heterosexuality renders it invisible; its institutionalised character establishes it as a norm, and the maintenance of the heterosexual matrix effects punishments and consequences for bodies that fall outside of it. To step outside of the regime of heterosexuality requires an immense amount of labour (Ward, 2015). In later chapters I will discuss the strategies that my participants had for demarcating from heterosexuality, while maintaining the benefits it brought to be read as such.

The next chapter focuses on the specific field of men and masculinities studies. I will briefly go through the most relevant debates and authors in the short history of this branch of social sciences. Then, I will concentrate in the Mexican context, how a particular way of studying men and masculinity has been produced and what does these studies give

account of. Mexican men and masculinities arise in a history of Mexico as a *mestizo* colonised country, with a violent history that still carries on to this day. Lastly, I will discuss one of the most famous Mexican stereotypes: the macho as a figure of Latin hyper-masculinity. This simplification has generated an image of the macho that does not correspond with the experienced lives of the Mexican man. Nonetheless, to speak up against the macho and machismo has been a powerful political tool for questioning gender inequality in Mexico and resisting the increasing numbers of gender violence.

CHAPTER 2. MEN AND MASCULINITIES STUDIES

Making it visible

As feminism gains strength in academia, pop culture and political debates, and gender equality is a concern in more and more policies, efforts to involve men with violence prevention and discussions around equality grow bigger (Flood, 2011). Discussions about diversity and equality are increasing in public and institutional spaces, but are led, understandably so, by the minority groups who are looking to change their subordinated positions. Granted, in the last decades the question of 'how do men participate in the road towards equality?' has come up in the form of scholarly discussions and men's groups, amongst other forms; however, in some cases those who ask themselves the question, focus more on matters relating to identity and individual behaviours than those which centre on power, hegemony and gender relations (Azpiazu, 2013). In other words, they fail to see how those behaviours are intrinsically related to the institutionalisation of masculinity, that is, masculinity as a system of domination and differentiation. However, since the 70s, feminists in the United States already knew that women's problem "wasn't just due to prejudice or misunderstanding, and so wasn't solved by re-educating the bigoted or misinformed. Woman trouble was built in socially, a culturally structured inequity" (Katz, 1996: 114). For second wave feminism, it was clear that the fight for equality was one that implied the radical transformation of the social institutions that structured the world; only then, gender relations would follow suit.

For heterosexual men, it has not been easy to understand the implications of the previous paragraph, because being -for the most part- in a position of institutionalised privilege, makes it harder to realise how the system fails those outside of said sphere of privilege. What is more, the cult of the individual, which has grown exponentially in modernity, has brought a sense of merit and entitlement, in such way that if one has had success throughout their life, it is thought of exclusively as a personal drive and effort, an

argument that social psychologists have defined as a "fundamental attribution error" (Feliu and Lajeneusse, 2004). It is not easy to accept that the condition of 'heterosexual men' brings certain advantages that have not been earned; it is even more difficult to accept that, to have gender equality, these advantages will have to be analysed, criticised and even discarded. Finally, to recognise that men need to radically transform what is thought of and experienced as an intrinsic element of their identity -their masculinity- is the hardest step towards an actual move to action. The recognition that masculine identity is directly related to privilege and power would imply the embodied affirmation of the necessity to deconstruct its symbolic and material subjectivity; in other words, the transformation of masculinity would mean to start a process of de-masculinisation, without a clear sight of where it would end. However, the efforts should not be directed towards an end goal where masculinity would be abolished, but towards grounded practices that would destabilise the links between masculinity and domination.

Unfortunately, the binary spectrum is still deeply ingrained, and it is not possible to *be* beyond the categories that constitute us (Gil, 2002). Therefore, the process of de-masculinisation would have to be a journey without a clear destination, guided by affect, ethics and acceptance more than by the unrelenting hierarchy of reason. It is not surprising, then, that the fight for equality has not come from the initiative of heterosexual men, but from the path paved by women, queer and LGBTQ+ activists, indigenous movements and all the other groups that organise from the margins.

A defining characteristic of feminism is that it arose simultaneously as theory and practice: as an urgent need to improve women's situation of subordinated subjects and as a corpus of knowledge to redefine the language and theories through which the social world was made intelligible. The study of masculinities, however, has followed a different path, such that it would be inaccurate to state that both feminist studies and masculinities studies have moved parallel to each other. Masculinities studies have not been a social and political movement or a form of resistance that traverse language, society, science and

everyday life. This section outlines the beginnings of the studies of men and masculinities, which fostered some of the most prominent figures of the area in the second half of the 20th century.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, there was an exponential growth of papers, articles and books that started to focus on the 'male question' from a gender perspective. At the same time, second wave feminism was stating: "The personal is political", and feminists like Betty Friedan (1963) and Kate Millet (1970) were problematising topics such as sexuality, family and work. Feminism had become global; it had entered the universities, the parliaments, the art world and the bedroom. Groups such as the Women's Liberation Movement, and the National Organisation for Women (NOW), started to emerge from collective organisation and political action. This socio-political context was the ideal scenario for a critique of masculinity to originate. By the 1980s, feminism had already taken on the task to, "critically exhibit the so-called *masculinity* as a particularised ontology, anchored to a normative interpretation of the masculine body" (Tena in: Blazquez, et al., 2010: 283). Specifically, the focus of the critiques was the assumption that men were the central part of *man*kind, through which an idea of the world was built, under false neutrality.

It was in this time that multiple groups of men started to form, mostly in the United States and England. Michael Messner has categorised men's groups in eight different tendencies, which seem to be the major political responses to the crisis of masculinity of the 20th century that consolidated from the 1970s in the United States to the turn of the 21st century: "men's liberationists, men's rights advocates, radical feminist men, socialist feminist men, men of colour, gay male liberationists, Promise Keepers, and the mythopoetic men's movement" (Messner, 1997: 11). Given the scope of this thesis, I will not stop in each of these tendencies, but only to support certain arguments.

Some of these groups were strongly pro-feminist, which resulted in more political material like Snodgrass' edited collection, entitled "For men against sexism" (1977). Their work questioned the idea of the male role, deeming it as something hurtful both for men and women. Another interesting attempt to tackle the problem of male domination was Tolson's (1977) "Limits of Masculinity" which was "able to make the first serious attempt to explore class differences in the construction and expression of masculinity" (Carrigan et. al., 1985: 576). Other authors focused on the restrictions attached to men's sex role and its disadvantages, and the penalties that came with being a man. Instead of challenging the problem of masculinity in terms of a gender relation that is based on oppression and mandatory heterosexuality, men's studies (primarily from the Men's Liberation Movement) focused in the disadvantages the male role could have for them, and the gains that men would have once they been "liberated" (Carrigan et al., 1985).

Despite the former, a lack of critical vision in most men's groups made it difficult to change men's gaze towards themselves in terms of questioning and eliminating their own privileges:

> "The positing of a false symmetry between the oppression of women and men by socially imposed sex roles, held the danger of defusing the radical potential of feminism and turning sensitive men into antifeminist advocates of men's rights" (Messner, 1998: 264).

The affirmation that men were oppressed by their role, overlooked their own oppression of women, as evident in Herb Goldberg's 1977 book "The Hazard of being a male: Surviving the myth of masculine privilege". In this widely read book, Goldberg claimed that men's privilege was a myth and that, in fact, men were more oppressed by the rigidness of the male role than women. These arguments set the base for the men's rights movement of the late 70s and early 80s, that shifted from a pro-feminist agenda to an open anti-feminist backlash where women were the ones in power over men; "men's lower life span, health problems, military conscription, and divorce and custody laws were used as evidence of men's oppression" (Messner, 1998: 266). Through the eyes of these groups, men's liberation "in the context of American liberal individualism, rapidly led to

the notion of 'men's rights'; and 'men's rights', logically [could] only be defined against women" (Carrigan et. al., 1985: 575). This reaction, however, had been growing since the turn of the 20th century in western countries like the United States, where the crisis of masculinity began to consolidate due to "a combination of changes brought on by modernisation of social life and by the rise of organised feminist movements" (Messner, 1997: 9).

The popular statement of men's liberation that men in general would gain from women's liberation turned out to be "naïve at best, and at worst dishonest" (Carrigan et. al., 1985: 580-581) because women's liberation was seen to come at a cost to men's power, personalities and pleasure. As Messner (1997) has pointed out, the groups of men in the United States that focused on the undermining of men's institutionalised privileges did not receive a wide acceptance by other men.

Part of the work about men and masculinity produced in the 70s was supported by 'sex role theory'. This theory provided tools to analyse the social positions of men and women, and to show the effects of such positions and the conflicts that arose from them (Carrigan et al., 1985). Talcott Parsons (1942), along with Ruth Hartley (1959), were central figures informing the development of sex role theory. While their work dated from two or three decades earlier, not much changed in terms of the theory and its application in subsequent works. This approach did not address the matter of unequal relations of power; rather, it focused primarily on familiar relationships, regarding men and women's roles as central features for the maintenance of social structure (Messner, 1998). Sex roles were often taken for granted and remained unquestioned.

This approach was problematic. Roles were prescriptive and presented an ideal standard that did not correspond with the actual reality of individuals' lives. Most of the sex role literature failed to explicitly address this differentiation. Thus, a normative form of representation (a singular masculinity and femininity) arose and what did not fit into the

norm was thought of as failure in socialisation. This was an important impediment for political action and social change (Carrigan et al., 1985). Additionally, the apparent symmetry between men and women's roles and the biological essentialism of sex, made it easy to forget the social factor of oppressive relations, as seen in the essentialist tendencies of the men's groups in the United States in the 80s and 90s, specifically: the mythopoetic men's movement and the Christian Promise Keepers, respectively (Messner, 1997). Defining sex roles as norms implied a certain degree of generalisation. The consequences of this were the uncritical use of stereotypes, the lack of a historic perspective and the focus on the differences between genders rather than their relations. By taking sex role theory into the agenda of these men's groups, a normative masculinity was perpetuated; failing to question male privileges, gender relations of power and the gender binary (Carrigan et al., 1985).

On the other hand, the pro-feminist fraction of the men's movement (like NOMAS[5]) moved away from the language of sex role theory and the idea of the symmetry of gender oppression and aligned with more radical movements, from feminism to gay liberation and black power. The focus shifted to "emphasising the ways that all men derive power and privilege within patriarchal society" (Messner, 1998: 271), and considered sexism as: "a system where one sex has power and privilege over another. In a society, such as ours, where men dominate women, this system can be called male supremacy" (Snodgrass, 1977: 137). One of the major shifts of this pro-feminist movement was a more sophisticated and theoretical writing that stopped focusing merely on attitudes and roles and started regarding oppression as a system where men tend to occupy the position of power and dominance.

Despite all the critiques stated above, early writings about "the male question" were important in a way that they opened the discussion for a topic that had not been addressed before. For the first time the dominant sex was being put into the spotlight by

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[5] National Organisation of Men Against Sexism: http://nomas.org/

the very individuals that recognised themselves as being part of that group. Whether the outcome was a reification of the "true male condition", a constant state of guilt for being a man or a profound questioning of gender relations, is another matter.

The cultural turn and post-structuralist perspectives of the 80s and 90s added even greater complexity. Judith Gardiner (2002), for instance, addressed the challenges found in the study of masculinities and in white feminism: it was not possible to keep using the same static binary categories anymore, following the arrival of Queer Theory, post-structuralism and situated feminisms (like *Chicano*, black, lesbian or indigenous feminism). To tackle this new emphasis on plurality became extremely complex. The difficulties were profoundly conceptual: How to refer to the object/subject of study? And political: Is it possible to think of forms of resistance and change that still talk in binary terms and use concepts that were created within a normative framework?

The political transformation of gender relations implied a more radical positioning, where men would recognise and change the practices and discourses that sustained hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, they would also dive into a "full on" critique of the gender binary and the actual concept of masculinity, the construction of specific forms of subjectivities and masculinity's role on knowledge-power relationships. To open the door for plurality meant to pass from writing about "Masculinity" to acknowledging various "masculinities" that could not necessarily be constrained to a specific biological body.

In this way, according to historians John Arnold and Sean Brady (2011), the new studies on masculinities, centred on three main aspects: First, prioritisation of representation over experience; second, admitting the relationship between gender and other markers of identity as a problematic and unstable one; and third, following Foucault, a focus on power relations that would traverse almost all future research. These three corollaries exhorted scholars to change the way they thought about identity, not as an unmovable, static characteristic of an individual but as multiple, blurred and contingent (Butler, 2004).

Masculinity, therefore, only acquires its meaning in relation to other parts of the system that produce subjectivity (Arnold and Brady, 2011). To study masculinity, as well as other elements of the social subject, it is necessary to situate any research historically, geographically, culturally and so on.

The focus of new studies of masculinities has also followed the ethnographic turn (Connell, 1995), situating the scope of their analysis to a more modest take on the plurality of masculinities. Prominent authors like Michael Kimmel (2013) or Susan Faludi (1999) have focused on the entitlement of privileges and their relation to male identity in the United States. There has also been significant research on the relationship between masculinity and sports (Messner, 1992; Kidd, 2013). The negotiations men undertake in their relationships, ideas around sexuality and the concept of love, have also been a main focus in recent studies (Seidler et al., 1995; hooks, 2005; Pascoe, 2007; Ward, 2015). Another central area of analysis is the relation between masculine identity and hegemony (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Azpiazu, 2017). Finally, Queer theory has also produced several important pieces of literature that collapsed the preconceived links between sex, gender and sexuality.

The importance of these studies is that they contribute to the relaxation of the heteronormative bounds of the patriarchal system, allowing for different voices to be heard and for diverse experiences to be welcomed into the diversity of bodies (Halberstam, 1998; Saez and Carrascosa, 2011). There is still a lot left to mention, particularly regarding indigenous masculinities, masculine subcultures and research out of non-English, non-European countries.

However, to think in terms of plurality and multiplicity of identities, by itself, does not destabilise the sex-gender system; as Carrigan et al. state (1985: 590): "the fissuring of the categories of 'men' and 'women' is one of the central facts about patriarchal power and the way it works. In the case of men, the crucial division is between hegemonic

masculinity and various subordinated masculinities". Rather, it is necessary to address and problematise the interplays of masculinities with labour, family, affections, race, class and overall to think of masculinities not only as an institutionalised representation but also, and equally important, as collective practice:

> Masculinities are constituted [...] within a structure of gender relations that has a historical dynamic as a whole. This is not to say it is a neatly defined and closely integrated system. [...] The dominion of men over women, and the supremacy of particular groups of men over others, is sought by constantly re-constituting gender relations as a system within which that dominance is generated (Carrigan et. al., 1985: 598).

What Carrigan, Connell and Lee wrote in 1985 still holds validity and it informs the current gender debates: to think about masculinities as something entirely constructed, multiple, relational and historic, traversed by power that can be challenged and transformed. At the same time, masculinity still stands as a firmly grounded form of hegemonic representation within the heteronormative standards.

The development of men and masculinities studies has taken more relevance in English speaking western societies; however, in Mexico and Latin America feminism was also irrupting and destabilising the status quo. This impulse has generated a growing area of studies focused on men and masculinities, which is strongly rooted in the ethnographic tradition, informed by feminist theory and that acknowledge Mexican culture and tradition. In the following section, I will talk about what has been the interest of these studies in the last thirty years and I will frame my own research within this tradition.

A short walk: men and masculinities studies in Mexico

Mexico is *mestizo*[6]. Since the Spanish conquest in the early 16th century, the country has been in a continuous search of its own identity while navigating the context in which it was born and the circumstances in which it has grown up to this day. Mexican gender

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[6] Mestizo means "mixed raced", particularly that between European Spanish and indigenous Americans.

identities are formed and informed by the concrete challenges of a conquered, mixed-race, highly catholic and developing country. Consequently, gender studies and specifically men and masculinities studies in Mexico are also framed within this history and hope to create a specific body of work that can dialogue with western theories from within their own place.

During the three centuries that Mexico was under the rule of Spain, from around 1510 to 1810, the colony adopted the norms and values from the old continent, which created a profoundly hierarchical social structure and adapted the juridical elements that ruled back in the Spanish empire, including those relating to conjugal and domestic living (Guevara, 2010). The imposition of European customs along with the massive genocide of indigenous population, made for a "New Spain" to rapidly grow and for a caste system to be put into place from an early stage. The social stratification placed Spanish on the top and Indigenous on the bottom. The caste system sets in the foundation of Mexico, and its effects extend to present days.

European love and seduction were also translated into the context of the "New Spain", where they became a practice of the privileged classes. Gender roles in marriage were clear and strict: based on honour for the man and fidelity and chastity for the woman. Catholic religion quickly took on the task of evangelising the mestizos and the natives; Catholicism would become the element that would unite all the different forms of domination (Guevara, 2010).

In the 19th century, after the Mexican independence, gender impositions became stronger. These impositions also extended to the legal sphere and weighted heavier on women; for instance, married women had no control over their personal assets, and could not sign legal documents or administer property without the consent of their husband. If a woman decided to escape from her husband, she was forced to come back or was held in "deposit houses". Husbands had full legal authority over their children and over the

employment and income of their wives. Physical violence was permitted and legitimated in case of adultery (Guevara, 2010). These actions and more show how early modernity in Mexico only benefited men and augmented their power by separating the private and public spheres even further.

One of the main effects of modernity was the creation of the individual. In sexual-affective relationships, this meant that the uncertainties that used to be managed in the familial or communal spheres were now tackled mostly individually. Compulsive sexuality, loneliness, lack of profound relationships, rise in divorce rates, and the diminishment of marriages and birth rates were also consequences that came with modernity. In México, this process of change was slower, and even though it followed the same pattern, the traditional family was and still is the predominant model (Guevara, 2010). This model has been maintained partially due to religious influence, but also due to economical precariousness and unequal gender relationships.

By the beginnings of the 20th century, the liberal reforms and the establishment of the lay state started to have positive legal consequences in policies that favoured gender equality. However, the overall gender structure remained in place (Guevara, 2010). Puritanism has always been a gender issue; in the 20th century, social norms still mandated that women should remain virgins until marriage, while for young men losing their virginity was a rite of passage for becoming a man. Women were valued for being virgins and mothers above all, so much that contraceptives and sexual education were banned for women until 1973 (Guevara, 2010). For men in early 20th century, "knowing a trade, having a career and being the head of a household marked the coordinates of entry to the adult stage" (Guevara, 2010: 87). This "becoming a man", however, was not equally accessible for all. As stated before, even though Mexico was funded as a mestizo country, since the time of the Conquest, the country has been divided by race and skin tone. In the 1930s, with the increasing influence of the United States and Europe, the separation between a clean westernised masculinity and a dirty indigenous masculinity became

clearer (Macias-Gonzalez & Rubenstein, 2012). Race and skin tone discrimination accentuated economical precariousness amongst indigenous and dark-skin mestizos.

In the 1970s, urban pop culture from Europe and the United States erupted in Mexico, mainly in big cities and universities. Sexual freedom, liberal thinking, anti-capitalism and feminism quickly became popular; ironically, while women adopted more open-minded positions about marriage and sexuality, men remained rooted to more traditional thinking insofar the normative values that defined women remained intact (Guevara, 2010). However, following Giddens' arguments (1992), in the 90s there was a bigger incline towards the "pure relationship", in which sexuality and love began to be practiced without having to pass through marriage and procreation, but having pleasure and intimacy as the main engine. This new form of intimacy was supported by the recent massive access to contraception, bigger income in young urban people, higher enrolment to university studies and more flexibility in sexual discourses and practices, supported by a more equal legal frame for women (Guevara, 2010). This is not to say that Mexico was under a liberal government. To counter the previously stated transformations, the government implemented policies in defence of the traditional family as a strategy to maintain its relationship with the Catholic Church and move away from the liberal feminists, while establishing population control policies (Guevara, 2010).

In 1982, the economic crisis radically worsened, mainly thanks to the devaluation of the price of petrol, which Mexico was highly dependent on, and the focus on internal politics rather than external trade. Since 1976 to date, the minimum wage has lost 75% of its purchasing power (Teruel, et al., 2017). By the end of the 20th century, neoliberal politics (mainly concentrated in the NAFTA treaty) brought a "progressive abandonment of social responsibilities from the government" (Guevara, 2010: 120). The economic crisis reached its worst point in this time, with poorer living conditions, spike in unemployment and massive migration to the United States: by 2010, according to the National Ministry of Population (in Guevara, 2010), there were 12 million Mexican immigrants residing in the

United States. Economic precariousness, even more than the liberal vanguards, became the main reason for women's entry into the work force (Guevara, 2010). The economic crisis also brought an increase of domestic and social violence, and psychological consequences like depression, alcoholism and drug addiction (Szasz, 1993). It is at this time that HIV/AIDS became a public health concern in Mexico and in this context the conservative wing began to push for a return to the traditional family and its values. The new right reinforced the values of the Catholic Church, the patriarchal family and puritan morals (Guevara, 2010).

In this turmoil, the need to talk about men and the masculine condition became a necessity. In the 90s, groups of men and studies of masculinity appeared, such as the Collective of Men for Equal Relationships and the Laboratory of Exploration of Masculinities. Most of these groups were influenced by feminism. Slowly, groups of men and women started to push for a change in masculine identity, transforming public discourses of sexism and creating new symbols and referents from which to perform other masculinities. However, it would be naïve to affirm that the jump towards gender equality and diversity has been truly significative. For example, by the turn of the 21st century, only 7.3% of men used contraceptives, against 70.8% of women, partly because men's sexuality was still more detached from marriage and fatherhood (Guevara, 2010). The rates of femicides and domestic violence have been increasing over the past two decades (Navarro, Narro and Orozco, 2014) and the wage gap sits at a staggering 34% (Solis, 2017).

The changes in social structure in the 21st century, the diminishment of social wellbeing policies, the lack of jobs and the spike of violence have created a feeling of insecurity in Mexican young adults, especially in marginalised groups, which in Mexico are many and diverse. Indigenous people are the most vulnerable, with 55.5% living in districts of high poverty and 87.5% of indigenous municipalities being in conditions of extreme poverty. The indigenous population represents 10% of the Mexican population, with 12 million people as of 2015 (CDI, 2015). In the country, 53.4 million people live in poverty, and 9.4

million in extreme poverty (CONEVAL, 2016). However, according to a recent study from the IBERO University (Teruel et al., 2017), the number of people in poverty is closer to 73 million (63% of Mexicans) in a country where the minimum wage is of 80 pesos a day (just short of four US dollars).

The participants of my study situated themselves as middle-class, which is a problematic and contested term. However, according to the World Bank's parameters for the middle-class in Latin America, in Mexico they represent 27% of the population, earning between 10 and 50 dollars a day (Teruel, et al., 2017). Given such a broad spectrum, other factors to consider are social mobility, access to decent health and housing services and overall indicators of wellbeing. In Mexico, the middle-class moves amid vulnerability and fragility, as the threat of poverty, job loss and economic crisis is constant. An indicator of the former is the fact that the average wage has dropped about 30% from 2005 to 2016 (Teruel, et al. 2017).

These features permeate into the creation of intimate relationships and family projects, but also into the particular way masculinity is performed. For Guevara (2010), hegemonic masculinity does not mean total domination, or statistical majority; it is, like Connell and Messerschmidt advise (2005), a position; in this case a position of cultural leadership and authority, socially visible and accepted as a given. This definition means that, the power of Mexican men does not always translate to violence and domination in its most radical forms; rather, their power comes from a privileged position that grants more possibilities of action, usually in detriment to others. However, the maintenance of the social structure of male privileges,

> "Happens without [necessarily] having a conscious interest from the individuals to obtain that result, and without having an intrinsic evil in it; it is a process that derives from the exigencies created by their own position and from the needs of the social organisations in which they are immersed (Guevara, 2010: 260).

This is an important nuance that will be addressed in the analysis chapter of this thesis, as it shows how the seven men that participated in this study negotiated the privileges granted by their masculine condition, in a social and economic structure that also demanded obedience from them and placed them in a vulnerable position. The experience of these men, like Guevara's argument, is a constant in-between of accessing privileges and being part of a precarious structure. Like Guevara, many other researchers in Mexico, have understood that the study of men and masculinities must be situated, considering the social structures and acknowledging relations of power.

Even though during the entire 20th century there was literature produced about the Mexican man and his place in the world, most of these studies did not have a gender perspective. For this perspective to be gained, studies of men and masculinities had to stop assuming that the category 'men' was the generic representative of humanity; and placed it instead within a socio-historical frame, where men's gender identity was also constructed: "product and producers of gender through history" (Hernández, 2008: 231).

Men and masculinities studies in Mexico, according to Guillermo Nuñez (2016) formally started in 1990. The more rigorous and critical ones have taken feminism and feminist theory as reference and support, both socially and politically, and as an epistemological framework. However, as the studies of men and masculinities evolved, men recognised themselves as subjects of study, which meant that their human condition became more complex and relevant. This, for Olivia Tena (in Blazquez, 2010), brought the risk of forgetting the original motives that originated men and masculinities studies, which were tightly linked with feminism and social equality.

In his postdoctoral project, Nuñez (2016) analysed all the 555 studies that had been written of men and masculinities in Mexico from 1990 to 2010. Given the enormity of the task, it feels suitable to put emphasis on his work to better understand the trajectory. Nuñez is candid when he affirms that the academic production around these studies is

scarce, unoriginal, marginal and ahistorical. Likewise, Hernández (2008) denoted two central issues in Mexican studies: the first one was the displacement of the study of the relations of power in favour of the study about the problems of identity between men. By focusing only on the analysis of identity, the relations of domination between men and women get lost. The second issue was the undifferentiated use of the terms of masculine identity, masculinity and masculinities. Careaga and Cruz (2006) clarified the difference between the singular and the plural by referring to *masculinities* as the plurality of ways of being masculine, and *masculinity* as the logic that maintains, produces and reproduces the disparities in gender relations of power.

It is in this context that the field of men and masculinities studies in Mexico was created, studies that have arrived 20 years after their prominence in the United States, the United Kingdom or Australia (Nuñez, 2016). In the 90s, most of the studies in Mexico revolved around topics of reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, violence and machismo. According to Minello (2002) the focus of these studies was more in correspondence to governmental or interventionist interests, than theoretical or academic ones. This was partly due to the lack of clarity of the concept "masculinity" and specifically "hegemonic masculinity", a concept that some authors have used as a mere way to refer to a stereotype, while others think of it as a way to describe an ethnic social group (Minello, 2002). Both approaches certainly fall short of grasping the complexity of the concept.

However, there have been interesting studies from a gender perspective about the conditions of men. Matthew Gutmann (1996) started an important tradition of ethnographic studies that fought against the limited stereotype of the Mexican macho and showed the diversity of men and masculinities found in one country (Nuñez, 2016). On an international scale, these studies coincided with what Connell called the ethnographic period, which has contributed to the pluralisation of the term and usage of masculinities (Amuchástegui and Szasz, 2007). There have been several efforts to bring more complexity to the concepts of macho and machismo and to contextualise them in an academic

tradition, such as Eloy Rivas (2004) who brought the ideological tradition of the Mexican man into the context of gender studies and the current global paradigms (Nuñez, 2016). Since the 90s, most Mexican studies have been characterised by their regional tendency, which is counterpoised with the idea that there is a masculine national identity that is homogenous to all Mexican men (Hernández, 2008).

The studies about homosexuality, as well as the LGBTQ+ movement and the fight against homophobia, have also been pivotal elements for the demystification of the Mexican macho (Nuñez, 2016). Marginalised and queer masculinities have been overlooked in Mexican studies, apart from some authors like Carlos Monsivais (2004), Guillermo Nuñez (2001; 2010) and Victor Macias-Gonzalez (2012). Even so, since the 70s, studies about homosexuality were already setting the basis for the comprehension of Mexican men's sexuality and masculinity (Nuñez, 2016). One of the most important contributions from the studies about homosexuality and the LGBTQ+ movement has been:

> To take heterosexuality out of the closet, meaning, to understand it as a social construction that participates, fundamentally, as much as homophobia does, in the construction of "men" and "masculinities" (Nuñez, 2016:50).

Heterosexuality is defined in contrast to what it isn't and in relation to what it should be. In Mexico, gay men represent the abject; the more radical the symbolic violence is towards them, the more exaggerated the image of the heterosexual man becomes (Machillot, 2013). However, much like in Ward's thesis about straight men in the United States that engage in homosexual activities (2015), homosexual desire is often used to strengthen a heterosexual masculinity, often by means of mockery or play through the use of heteronormative codes.

In 2010, around 84% of Mexicans professed adherence to the catholic religion (INEGI, 2017); catholic tradition repudiates and rejects homosexuality, while creating a set of everyday norms and practices through methods of symbolic violence that speak of how men and women should behave morally (Nuñez, 2001). These effects become clearer in

rural Mexico and economically marginalised populations, where Catholicism has historically been more present.

On a different topic, María Lucero Jiménez, Laura Collin Harguindeguy and Ana Amuchástegui are some authors that have underlined the importance of feminist theory in men and masculinities studies in Mexico (in Nuñez, 2016). All of them have pointed out the difficulty of trying to solve the problems of gender inequality by focusing only on women.

In the current system of global capitalism, in which the so called 'crisis of masculinity' occurs, women regain spaces in the public sphere while the ripples of neoliberalism create core ruptures with men and their social representations, specifically those referring to their sexual-affective relationships and fatherhood. These ruptures are supported by growing unemployment numbers and limited access to the commodities of previous generations (Collin, 2007). If a man's sense of worth is directly linked to his job (Hernandez, 2016), then facing economic insecurity or prolonged unemployment will affect men on multiple levels; from their sense of responsibility to provide, to their perceived virility.

The Mexican northern border has also produced important research around men and masculinities (Hernandez, 2016). Research in the north has revolved mostly around the relationship between paid work and masculinity. Work culture contributes to masculine socialisation and the maintenance of established roles between heterosexual couples. A study of elder men in the north of Sonora (Nuñez, 2007) observed that there was an agreement in which the woman cared for the man in exchange of financial security, which was directly connected to the man's sense of 'manliness'. It is clear that work legitimises men's manhood, which is why the economic crisis that Mexico has been facing since the 1980s has also translated into a crisis of masculinity (Hernandez, 2016).

The studies of men and masculinities, the masculine condition and the ways of being a man, all acquire a specific form within the frame of modernity, both in Mexico and in the western world. Victor Seidler (2000) has come to the same conclusion, stating that it is the privatisation of reason and its apparent separation from the field of emotions, which has placed men in contradictory and unsustainable positions. In Mexico, this is reflected in the *porfirist* positivism of the 19th century (a period of 34 years in which the country was under the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz), when intellectuals and scientists of the time studied Mexican masculinity from psychoanalytical theories. These scientists focused mainly on the poor, marginal *mestizo* and turned him into a public concern, leaving the rest of men outside of the cultural and political construction of gender, including themselves (Nuñez, 2016). The *Porfiriato* lasted from 1876 to 1911; in this time the expansion of modernity erupted in Mexico, modifying the image of men and masculinity towards a clean, elegant, refined, educated and hard-working family man. The elite groups of the *Porfiriato* took France as their model in terms of culture, intellect and modernisation, while pushing an idea of a progressive and cosmopolitan nation (Alvizo, 2017). This further accentuated the division between the clean westernised conception of masculinity and the dirty indigenous masculinity.

Amuchástegui and Szasz (2007) have presented one of the most complete compilations about men and masculinities studies in Mexico. In the first chapter of their compilation, they reaffirmed what Minello (2002), Hernandez (2006) and others have already stated: the concept of masculinity is still in construction, it is erratic and not entirely clear. For Amuchástegui and Szasz (2007), the aforementioned ethnographic period contributed to the pluralisation of the term. Despite the diversity of the term, the authors have stated that many studies mistakenly conflate the concepts of men and masculinities:

> Masculinity is not a synonym of men but of social process, structure, culture and subjectivity. It is not about the more or less spontaneous expression of masculine bodies, but about how such bodies incarnate gender practices that are present in the social fabric […] It is about the history that builds possibilities of subjects, marginalises desires and

defines identities, which are not inherent to masculine bodies (Amuchástegui and Szasz, 2007: 16).

In her research, Amuchástegui (2007) tackled the democratic ethics of sexuality in terms of differentiated reproductive rights between men and women in rural contexts, showing a relational element of women who rise as desiring subjects in a context where the sexual division of labour is strongly defined, and the ideals of romantic love predominate. In the same compilation, Nuñez observed how work, manliness and sexuality were tightly linked, by studying three generations of men in the north of the country. Similarly, Jimenez research of middle and upper class men in the country's capital, showed a generational change. Younger men displayed a more open masculinity, which could be more accepting of discourses of equality and diversity; however, a discrepancy between discourse and practice was still present. Keijzer and Rodriguez worked with a rural community in the central region, whose conditions of poverty became the ground where the process of "becoming a man" was built. For this community, the figure of the successful man was linked to risk: whether it was an immigrant who risked his life to get to the United States or a drug dealer who risked his life to get luxury and power. In the southeast, Ayús and Tuñón analysed the experiences of sexual initiation between adolescents and its relation with becoming a man. Once again, a contradiction between the hegemonic discourses and the personal sexual identities was observed.

In a country like Mexico, where national identity and moral values are tightly bound with religion, specifically Catholicism as discussed before, Victor Seidler studied the experiences of men that grow up in a more secular Mexico, and how this translated to their relationships with women and their own sexuality. Matthew Gutmann explored the meanings of vasectomy in the city of Oaxaca; the relation between this form of reproductive health and the cultural constructions of men as governed by uncontrollable sexual desires. In his research, Mauricio List showed sexual identities as dynamic, unstable and non-exclusive; yet, in Mexico the dominant forms of masculinities have been constructed in opposition to women, children and "effeminate" men.

The aforementioned compilation that Amuchástegui and Szazs (2007) have put together has many more voices; the ones presented in this chapter have shown the broad panorama that exists in the studies of men and masculinities in Mexico, as well as the spaces for further research in a vast and pluralistic country. Looking towards the future, the most recent studies are starting to show a clearer preoccupation with relations of power, social trajectories in a neoliberal context, and the diversity of gender and sexualities. Future studies in the field of men and masculinities studies in Mexico must consider the relation of the category of men and their bodies, the geopolitical relations of global and local significance and the deployment of masculinity in the cybernetic space. Future research should also point to affective approaches to men and masculinities, the emotional realm of men in their relationships with their partners and with other men and women.

In the next section, I will focus in a key aspect of Mexican masculine identity: the macho. Even though this concept has been widely contested, it is still an important element in the definition of the Mexican, both for its continuous use in popular language and for its history and evolution in the creation of a national identity. Even in the 21st century, to talk about macho and machismo in Mexico is still relevant, as shown in feminist critique and everyday discourse, including those of the men in my research: each one of them positioned themselves in relation to that reference point that is the macho and machismo.

A performative macho

One of the main topics of study of Mexican masculinities has been the macho identity, which has undergone a historical process of transformation and resignification. The macho is a perfect example of how gender identity is performative (Butler, 1990) in the sense that its constant reification creates an idea that is imprinted in bodies and relationships. The macho category functions as a technology of gender (de Lauretis, 1987), as it arises

like a representation made up by a series of symbolic and conceptual meanings that are constantly being updated by different institutions. The macho was originally forged by the political interests of a nation in crisis, through colonisation, war and popular culture.

After Mexico´s independence from Spain in 1821, the connection between masculinity, nation and honour became tied to a sense of resilience, of building from the ground up. Nevertheless, a few decades later the Mexican nation lost part of its territory to the United States in 1848, and endured a French occupation from 1862 to 1867, events that created a sense of humbleness and contributed to reaffirm the collective thought of being a conquered nation. To regain the ideals of honour entailed the hyper-masculinisation of the Mexican man and, consequently, to make "the newly invented figure of the homosexual man as a central political problem" (Macias-Gonzales y Rubenstein, 2012 p. 18). The Mexican homosexual man was called "frenchified", meaning, with gestures like those of a French person. Other people's homosexuality represented a menace to heterosexual men´s own masculinity and, more importantly, to their own heterosexuality, just like the French represented a menace to the nation. Menace was coded as aggression, framed by the collective memory of being conquered. Taken as a symbol of moral and sexual degradation, the Mexican homosexual from early 20th century was associated with the traitor to the nation (Machillot, 2013). Counterpoised to this image of the patricide homosexual was the macho; Machillot (2013) questions if the exaggeration of the characteristics of one exacerbates the characteristics of the other.

The term macho acquired its popular meaning specifically between 1910 and 1915, in the midst of the Mexican Revolution, to refer to the revolutionary man: brave, fearless and manly (Machillot, 2013). Since the Spanish conquest, the ideals of honour, sacrifice and death have been fundamental for the formation of the Mexican masculine identity. The idea that war makes true men is one that was used in Mexico to push a project of national unification, predominantly after the Mexican Independence in 1810 (Macias-Gonzales y Rubenstein, 2012).

In a similar way, in the United States, an image of the G.I. Joe whose sense of duty and service to his nation overshadowed his personal desires was nurtured (Faludi, 1999). Both images of what it meant to be a man would become a cornerstone of their national projects of the first half of the 20th century. The connection between phallus and nation, or more accurately, the phallus of the nation was represented clearly:

> A post-war prescription for aggression. The price for failing to flex the national muscle […] would be a terrifying loss of virility: "the virus of isolationist sterility" would infect America. […] We must dominate the world "or else, confess a pitiful impotence." (Faludi, 1999:22).

Hegemonic masculinity is found in the figure of the revolutionary macho, as an ideal representation of a nation in process of consolidating. Through a masculinist biopolitics, the sexed body became both the tool and the goal of a nascent nation. Mexico was built upon representations of virility and heterosexuality, which inscribed in the binary and dichotomic gender discourse, where femininity is belittled (Machillot, 2013).

However, a drastic change in the conception of the macho started to appear in the post-revolutionary turmoil. In 1934, Samuel Ramos would publish "*El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México*" where he would criticise the Mexican macho, deeming it as marginal, vulgar and self-conscious. For the first time, the macho would be equated with the working class mestizo, who, as shown before, had already started to be depicted as a lesser man, performing a dirty, less polished, masculinity (Guevara, 2010). Ramos' macho had a profound inferiority complex, which is why he compensated with aggressive exaggeration of virility and power. Two machos lived simultaneously in the years after the revolution. On one side, the revolutionary macho, honourable, virile and represented in popular culture as an archetype of the nation's ideal; on the other, there was the vulgar macho, heavily criticised by writers such as Ramos (1934) or Octavio Paz (1950) and

characterised as a mestizo with low self-esteem, son of a raped mother: the *Malinche*[7] (Machillot, 2013). This stereotyped image of the poor mestizo had been in the making since the time of the Spanish colony that lasted for 300 years, an image which related to the vulgar, the humiliated and the inferior. That is why, even though the concept of machismo is a complaint against an attitude of sexist superiority and domination, it is important to contextualise it in terms of race and class.

It was from the 70s onwards that the main feature of machismo became a social criticism. As feminism became increasingly more popular, mainly in universities, machismo began to take shape as those attitudes and behaviours that perpetuated sexist practices, gender violence and men dominance over women. For Fromm and Maccoby (1970), "machismo indicates an attitude of masculine superiority, a desire to control women and keep them in an inferior position" (in: Machillot, 2013: 155). A definition provided by Aramoni (1971) attempted to tackle the psychological complexities of the behaviour: "the man has to dominate the woman […] In every *machista*[8], there is a profound doubt, rooted, about his authentic manliness in relation to women and to other men; attitude of submission towards his mother and great despise towards everyone else's" (in: Machillot, 2013: 156). Matthew Gutmann (1996) crafted one of the most famous ethnographies about the Mexican macho. In it, he dissected the meanings embedded onto men and masculinity in a neighbourhood in Mexico City, from the relationship with alcohol and sex, to the maternal representations and emotional attachment. Gutmann differed from the representations of the macho, popularised by Paz and Ramos, because he saw them as obstacles to comprehend the diversity of expressions of Mexican masculinities (Nuñez, 2016).

There was an observable difference between the depictions of machismo before and after the feminist movement erupted in Mexico in the 1970s. In the 50s, conceptions of

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[7] The Malinche was an indigenous woman that was enslaved by conqueror Hernán Cortéz and would help him as an interpreter. She also gave birth to many of Cortéz' children.
[8] Machista is the adjective form of the noun machismo.

machismo, referred to it as an expression of "an inferiority complex, a compensation that the Mexican or the Hispano American has forged onto himself, whether natural or artificially, in order to avoid the criticisms of those who consider him inferior" (Machillot, 2013: 151). Machismo was thought of as a scream of masculinity that would protect men against any doubt of their manliness, which would be considered a terrible offense. Oscar Lewis's 1961 anthropological study about a family living in the neighbourhood of *Tepito* has become an important influence in the studies of *the Mexican*. In his writings, Lewis not only portrayed the culture of poverty in a neighbourhood that is its own living organism that creates its own symbols, but also showed a construction of a specific form of masculinity: a man does not back down, even if it costs him his life. Machillot (2013) questioned Lewis's generalised and homogenised concept of machismo, common practice in many anthropologists of the time: once more, it was inferred that machismo was a practice mostly enacted by mestizo, poor and vulgar men.

However, when feminism entered the public discussions, mainly thanks to young university women, that machismo acquired definite negative connotations. In the 70s, machismo stopped being an effect of the trauma produced by the symbolic rape of the mother by the conquistador and became a cause of the everyday violence inflicted towards women (Machillot, 2013). It passed from being an object of psychological or literary study, to be an object of condemnation and a demand for change. Carmen Lugo (1985) defined machismo as:

> The exaltation of the masculine condition through behaviours that exalt virility, violence, the ostentation of sexual violence, the capacity to ingest alcohol or to respond violently to the aggression of the other; in sum, machismo is the expression of masculine magnification in detriment of feminine constitution, personality and essence [*sic*]; the exaltation of physical superiority, brute force and legitimation of a stereotype that recreates and reproduces unjust relations of power (in: Machillot, 2013:160-161).

By the 70s, the caricaturised image of the macho started to be criticised, as it did not correspond with the lived experiences of actual Mexican men; also, it invisibilised the experiences of the gay community (Macías-Gonzales and Rubenstein, 2012). Studies about

the Mexican macho and machismo also began to steer away from the ideas of a static national identity and focused on the everyday performative practices of Mexican men.

The context in which the conception of machismo changed to cover a more political agenda was also the moment when sexist violence became more visible. In the last 30 years, machista violence has risen considerably in Mexico. Since 1993, a wave of violent killings has taken the lives of more than 1,500 women in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua (El Heraldo de México, 2018; BBC, 2010); the murders of women, for which the main motive is the fact that they are women, has ascended to seven deaths per day in the country (La Jornada, 2017). These conditions are so alarming that feminist anthropologist Marcela Lagarde has reinterpreted and popularised the term 'femicides' (originally proposed by Diane Russell in 1976) to study the events in Mexico. Domestic violence has also risen: from 2005 to 2011, the number of women that had reported a family violence incident went from 24,375 to 152,875; moreover, 41.2% percent of all women from 15 years of age or more have said to have suffered some form of violence from their partners (Navarro, Narro and Orozco, 2014). Two thirds of Mexican women have said they have suffered at least one act of violence in their life and 41.3% percent some form of sexual aggression (Proceso, 2017).

"Machismo kills" is a phrase popularly used in feminist protests today. However, the ripples of machismo extend throughout the entire social fabric; femicides are its most brutal expression, but not its only one. For example, according to the OECD, in 2014, for every 1,000 adolescents aged 15-19, there were 77 pregnancies, and this number drastically varies with education, geography and social class (OECD, 2017). Furthermore, even though in 2012, 49.6% of tertiary education enrolments were women, 57% of all women over 16 years of age do not have employment, according to INEGI (Navarro, et al., 2014). In Mexico, the wage gap between men and women is 34% (Solis, 2017). All these numbers become more drastic when looking at indigenous and poor communities.

Cultural representations of women in Mexico still cling to a very limited spectrum, which maintains the dichotomy of the Mother (symbolised in the Virgin of Guadalupe: mestizo woman, saint and immaculate) and the Whore (incarnated in the *Malinche*: woman raped by the conquistadors, traitor) (Machillot, 2013). In a patriarchal state, women's bodies are placed at the service of men, as caregivers, lovers and mothers. In Mexico, women are the recipients of violence, by being turned into an object of consumption and stripped of humanity; and at the same time, they are venerated by being turned into an unreachable virgin, the most fragile and innocent of objects.

To tackle the multiple nuances in which machismo behaviours can manifest, Luis Bonino's has proposed the term *micromachismos* (in Fallarás: 2018). This analytical concept does not focus on the more visible and easily identifiable violent practices, but rather categorises a series of masculine practices of power and domination that generally pass unnoticed, despite the fact they contribute to the maintenance of unequal gender relations. An example of a micromachismo would be the infantilisation of women, where a woman is made to feel that she does not possess true knowledge and therefore the man has to take care of things for her. This 'not knowing' also entails that she be blamed for multiple everyday events. Infantilisation is sometimes disguised with tender, condescending words, as if one were speaking to a child who does not know better.

Undoubtedly, Mexican history has had a particular collective memory: as a nation born from being conquered and remaining under the Spanish empire for 300 years, and as a nation that developed in a hybrid modernity with the United States as a neighbour. However, this collective memory is neither determinant nor totalising. Each region's experience of how they situate gender identity in a country so vast and unequal varies greatly. But it is in the meeting point between the culture of machismo, built over the span of 500 years, and the everyday local practices of contemporary Mexican men, where the new studies of men and masculinities can be situated. These studies acknowledge that

the Mexican man moves within a machismo culture, however they do not assume that it is still that caricature from 1934.

In the 21st century, political life has been transformed once more thanks to the Internet and social media. The multiplicity of networks of intercommunication and the excess of information intertwine with all of our everyday activities, in such a way that the figure of the cyborg (Haraway, 1999) is more real than ever before. The symbiosis between technology and organism is represented, not only in the bodies, but also in the connections that are deployed around the globe. The *technobody* (Preciado, 2008), whose limits are not just the flesh, cannot be understood without the techno-science that surrounds it. "The individual body functions as an extension of the global technologies of communication" (Preciado, 2008: 39). In this context, the feminist movements have acquired tools to act faster, more efficiently and in a more organised manner, while entering a territory of cybernetic, reactionary violence.

The Mexican man of the 21st century is also situated in a new context, where the voices of women and the LGBTQ+ community are heard louder. The grievances against machismo are exposed for the first time in a forum that is considered to be "global". Mexico has seen an uprising of the feminist fight as collective organisation, both in the cyberspace and in the streets. Machismo continues to be a valid concept for analysis and criticism, as it becomes more diverse and enters the discussion of intersectionality. Machismo is not only a male characteristic anymore, but it describes a set of practices and attitudes that maintain a relation of domination between men and women, while also trapping men in a limited representation. Both for the feminist movement and the studies of men and masculinities in Mexico, the fight against machismo still is of the upmost importance, and the responsibility to keep thinking about the concept and its implications is more present than ever.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This research explores the phenomenon of heterosexual sexual-affective relationships, from the perspective of Mexican men who define themselves as heterosexual, to better understand the links and breaks of these men with the hegemonic system of masculinity. The interpretative framework uses the notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Azpiazu, 2017), performativity theory (Butler, 1990) and affect theory (Seidler, 1995; Ahmed, 2004; Wetherell, 2012). It is also informed by feminist epistemologies that tackle relations of power, identity, privilege and resistance (Rubin, 1986; hooks, 2005; Preciado, 2008; Hernando, 2012). Although this research did have three specific objectives, (the relation of these men with emotions, desire and identity), it developed closer to an exploratory study, which does not necessarily respond to a specific question, rather it aims to delve further into the complexity of a phenomenon (Biglia in: Mendia, Luxal et. al (eds.), 2014). In other words, the delineation of the object of study does not come from a hypothesis but from a series of interpretative formulations resulting from the social network as it continuously unfolds.

Feminist methodology has built strong connections with research methods that promote and allow the development of a situated subject position. The participants in this research occupy a position of privilege given by their sex-gender identity (both the researcher and the participants). Video diaries were used as a data gathering tool, which were in consonance with an exploratory study that relaxed the researcher's control and gave a broader field of action to the participants whom, even though they expressed themselves within a frame created by the researcher, contributed to the creation of a space where they could talk more intimately and personally (Holliday, 2004) about their own sexual affective-relationships. Coming from a re-interpretation of the method of narrative productions (Balasch and Montenegro, 2003), seven narratives were co-written, which can be taken as an analytical product in themselves; each of them speaks of a personal

process and a life story, as much as of a particular relationship between each participant and the researcher.

The recording space of the video diaries was a space charged with affect, through which the entire discursive material that shaped the research was built. These spaces of affect became such, given the material elements that were present at each participant's recording moment (the camera, the empty room, the glass of tequila, the background music), and through the reflexive process they experienced, mainly by means of their recollections, but also by thinking about themselves in a critical manner, imagining possible worlds and navigating through their desires.

In what follows, I first explain the epistemological framework in which my methodology is built upon, namely, feminist epistemology and methodology. Then I show the importance of acknowledging the presence of affect in the research process and how a specific outcome results from a specific affective relationship between researcher and their participants. Once the former statement is assumed, I talk about the characteristics and challenges of the video-diaries as a methodological tool for research, especially when dealing with deeply reflexive and affective topics in the context of hegemonic masculinity. Then I talk about the selection process of my participants. Being a deeply qualitative research, this process was not straightforward and was very connected with my personal position in the world (as a heterosexual Mexican man as well). Finally, I discuss the analytical approach for the treatment of the narrative productions and the ethical considerations that arose throughout the research process.

Methodology is epistemology

The relation between feminist knowledge and the most recent methods of research in non-positivist social sciences has become tighter in the last fifty years (Guthrie, 2010), in such a way that the feminist approach has gained a legitimate space in science and

academia as a quest for valid knowledge (Ramazanoglu, 2002). My own research is located in the juncture between feminism and sociology, and the way I approach my topic of study is influenced by some of the suggestions of an affective methodology (Knudsen and Stage, 2015) which, in the case of the studies of men and masculinities, can generate other points of view that will enrich the debate of the complex relationships between gendered bodies. This new scientific paradigm emphasises the methodological processes: "research is what researchers do rather than a set of scientific rules" (Guthrie, 2010: 43). To avoid the problem of lax theory and methodology, "it is necessary to strongly bet on the assumption of responsibility by the researchers. To recognise that producing knowledge is always a political act and that we must do it consciously and responsibly" (Biglia in: Mendia, Luxal et. al (eds.), 2014: 25). Methodology is ultimately an epistemology, which relates to a series of concrete and conscious decisions regarding the implications of pondering about a specific aspect of reality and showing the outcomes in a specific manner.

Feminist epistemologies have paved the road for the type of research presented in this thesis, for example, by questioning the androcentric bias and its relationship with the epistemological implications of favouring reason as the ultimate vehicle for knowledge (Curry, 1990). Feminist epistemologies "raise fundamental questions about the nature of truth, objectivity, observation, empiricism, verification and rationality" (Curry, 1990: 236); they also put power in the forefront, as an element that traverses the production of knowledge. "Democratisation of research has been identified as one of the key methodological challenges in the 21st century" (Edwards and Brannelly, 2017: 271); this challenge poses the question of who can play the game of the production of knowledge via legitimised research? And which voices are heard louder when it comes to defining *the other* and with which *the other* defines itself? (Biglia in: Mendia, Luxal et. al (eds.), 2014).

Following these reflections, an important part of my process was to ask myself whether I was implementing a methodology that could be regarded as feminist. What does it mean

that research is labelled feminist? How does one *do* feminist research? Social scientists like Sandra Harding delved into these issues back in the eighties (García and Montenegro, 2014), in such a way that the questions were directed towards the characteristics that made a methodology feminist, and not so much towards the affirmation that there was such thing as a specific feminist methodology. Nagore García and Marisela Montenegro (2014) are two researchers at the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* who reflect on their research process in a very provocative way, regarding the 'feminist matter':

> We asked ourselves; is research feminist because we are (we identify as) feminists? Because we quote feminist authors? Because our participants are (they identify as) feminists? Because our research is about feminism? In conclusion, and going back to the question that Sandra Harding asked (1987/1988): what makes feminist research, feminist? (García and Montenegro, 2014: 5).

Even though feminist studies are diverse and sometime differ greatly, they have at least two common grounds, the first is that they consider gender as an organiser of social life (Kelly, et al., 1992), always in relation with other categories such as race, class, ethnicity and so on. The second is that it is not enough to study the functioning of that "social life", we have to create the possibilities that direct us towards social equality. In feminist studies, particularly, there is a commitment to change the life experience of women; however, that doesn't exclude the panorama of social change in general (Blazquez, 2010). Feminist research also focuses in the way the researcher approaches the topic of research, which plays a central role, even more important than the topic itself (Ramazanoglu, 2002).

There are four elements that have become key when talking about feminist epistemologies: "1) reflexivity, 2) linkage with the participants, 3) relations of power and 4) social transformation" (García and Montenegro (2014: 66). Feminist research turns strongly political when it addresses these four elements, given the questions it poses and the transformative effects it aims towards. In the case of men and masculinities studies, these elements are also valid, but they must be redirected towards an emphasis on, "the ways that all men derive power and privilege within patriarchal society" (Messner, 1998:

271). In other words, conducting feminist research of men and masculinities implies a constant and critical observation of the power positions from which one enunciates, and the effects that enunciation has in everyday practices and the construction of identity. From this, it is inferred that there is a plurality in the being/doing masculine, in the sense that: *a)* masculine performances are diverse, complex and not bound to the penis; *b)* not every man has the same access to the privileges that the system of masculinity grants; and c) there is a spatial dimension that links to broader geopolitical processes in which, for example, performing a white western straight masculinity will grant access to privileges that are denied to other masculine identities (Ward, 2015). In a heavily racialised country like Mexico, the elements of hegemonic masculinity include both the disdain for brown skin and the exaltation of a conservative culture of male superiority, product of colonisation.

Spaces of Affect

Affective methodology is a strategy for asking research questions that relate to affective processes, for collecting or producing embodied data, and for making sense of that data to produce knowledge (Knudsen and Stage, 2015). An affective methodology also creates spaces where emotions can develop, instead of creating sterile spaces where the promise of objectivity is still sought. Said spaces promote the emergence of "affective practices" (Wetherell, 2012), defined as social actions that are constantly in motion, recognising that the elements of the past constrain the present and future moments. Identifying affective practices, however, is not an easy challenge given that affect is, "bodily, fleeting and immaterial and always in between entities or nods" (Knudsen and Stage, 2015: 2). One of the answers to this difficulty is that, if we assume the social world is relational, contingent, sensuous and ongoing, then we should rethink the methods of research that could give account of that *happening* (Knudsen and Stage, 2015). In this way, an affective methodology considers the affective processes that are its focus of study, as much as the affective elements that arise in the research process itself. One of the ways to implement

these ideas is through collaborative methods, in which I as a researcher assume my partial objectivity and include the participants into the making of knowledge. Through these methods, researchers assume that emotions help shape ideas of the world and that individuals are constantly being affected by what comes near, which is what Sara Ahmed (2007) has called 'The drama of contingency'.

The resulting product of research thus becomes inextricably linked with the emotional transference that occurs between researcher and participants. Particularly, in my research, language in the form of life stories was heavily charged with emotions; each question placed the participants in a specific emotional state from which they answered and built interpretative connections. In other words, the participants made sense of their experiences through affective processes, which developed during the 'recording moment', and the camera lens. This intimate space they created each time, allowed them to connect more deeply with a sense of 'self within their narrative arch', meaning, they positioned themselves consciously as the main actors in their stories, in a highly reflexive fashion. Kenneth Gergen (1994) has conceived the self, not as a cognitive entity, but as a relational *becoming*, product of discourses and narratives that speak about the 'self' construct. Unsurprisingly, those recording moments -or 'becoming moments'- had an emotional effect in me as well. Hearing, for instance:

> I don't know what I'm going to do with my life. I worry about fucking up the relationship with my partner and hurting her. I'm not doing anything to have healthier relationships, I'm going through shit, everything's wrong, there's so much to be done. I'm at a point of no return and it's not because of bad intentions or bad will, but a lot of clumsiness. […] Clumsiness is not justification; I could have been more respectful; cleverer. Now is time to do damage control, to ask myself what to do for everyone to end up less hurt.
>
> *(Tonatiuh, 30)[9]*

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[9] All participants have been given randomly assigned pseudonyms. In this quote, Tonatiuh acknowledged an impass between addressing the issues of the relationship and the consequences that would bring. Tonatiuh's narrative focused on the difficulties of managing two relationships at the same time, in which he recognised himself deeply emotionally invested.

At that moment, there was a clear conflict that Tonatiuh (one of my participants) was going through. It was a conflict that hurt him and had effects in his daily life and that of his partner; however, it was also a conflict that he recognised being responsible for, which placed him in an ethically questionable position. Tonatiuh's narrative also created a conflict in me as a researcher, which was also heavily emotionally charged, in the sense that his narrative forced me to think how to present his discourse in dialogue with my interpretative framework in a way that he felt was accurate, while giving him appropriate feedback on that specific video, which would acknowledge his and my own affective processes. There was no simple resolution to these issues; however, a constant process of reflexivity was needed to recognise these points of conflict. Also, clear communication with the participants was key, to enable them to be willing to deepen into specific topics, clarify information, answer follow-up questions and so on.

The most adequate way to approach the discourses and practices being communicated was through oral methods of data collection. Oral methods are the most common tool of qualitative research, as they allow deepening into the participant's thoughts, attitudes and testimonials (Winchester and Rofe; in: Hay, 2016). Hence, the technique implemented followed an oral history approach, which is, "a powerful source of situated learning that can facilitate enhanced understandings of space, place, region, landscape and environment" (George and Stratford; in: Hay, 2016, p. 190). The technique used in my research cannot be regarded as semi-structured interviews *per se*, given that the 'question-answer' interaction did not happen at the same time and space; rather, a series of topics and questions were sent to the participants, who then recorded themselves in video addressing some or all of the inquiries. Although George and Stratford (in: Hay, 2016) still refer to oral history as being interview-based, I believe the 'video diary approach' also tapped into its virtues. The participants of my research talked about their former partners, the influences and experiences through which they developed an idea of love and relationships, their perception of their parents' relationships and, of course, the evolution of their own sexual-affective relationships. In this way, the method of data

gathering also related to oral history in the sense that it moved along with the changes the participants were experiencing in their lives, acknowledging that change is constant, and it plays a part in the perception of themselves and their environment (George and Stratford; in: Hay, 2016). This was clear for all my participants, given that the data gathering process lasted for approximately ten months, since the first approach until the last feedback. For example, in his third video diary, Yumil shared his experience of going through a breakup, after almost three years of relationship. This is an excerpt from the video diary that he recorded two weeks after the breakup:

> So, I'm going through fucking hell. I broke up with my partner and I don't know, I'm going through fucking hell. When we broke up, I was falling down a dark hole and I didn't realise it until it was too late. I couldn't handle that conflict positively and now I'm living the consequences. It's all about expressing what you feel, because conflicts come more from the emotions than from reason.
>
> *(Yumil, 32)*

Affective practices don't happen in a void (Wetherell, 2012); as social actions, they need a relational field from which to emerge and from which to hold on. In this example, Yumil found himself in a moment charged with emotional energy, resulting from the events that developed in his everyday life and that were restructured in the recording moment. In that video diary, Yumil tried to make sense of his breakup, however he didn't do it by negating his emotions, but by integrating them into his story, in such a way that his breakup process merged with his video diary as a single, but distinct, narrative. Collaborative methods are a way to generate or facilitate these processes, because they happen in the real world and they push for the participants to get more actively involved, becoming co-researchers in their own right, as they start having more control over the content and the outcome of the information.

…through the purple lens

One of the elements of my research was that my participants were not part of what would typically constitute an oppressed or marginalised group, subordinated positionalities or subaltern identities. They were, in a general sense, part of the group that exerts and benefits from power. To put it more simply, they were light-skin mestizos, heterosexual, middleclass, college educated, *cis*, city men. At the same time, in a global geopolitical panorama, they lived in a developing, non-Anglo-European country, with a history of colonisation and historical violence. I also share these characteristics; hence, there was an unexpected sense of mirroring I got while working with them. Under this light, I had to remain critical with the masculine discourse they (and I) embodied, while respecting their own (and my own) complex and contradictory humanity.

The criteria and selection of my participants derived from the junction of three trajectories:

1. Since my masters' degree at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in 2009, I've been immersing myself into feminist epistemologies and practice; in terms of collegiate learning, but also by participating in feminist collectives in Mexico and surrounding myself with people for which feminism is vital, personally and collectively.[10] At the beginning however, I was not critical of my position as a heterosexual man, both in the feminist circles I was involved and in society in general. Therefore, the decision to critically focus my research on heterosexual men would also reflect my own problematic identity.

2. Oftentimes, when there are discussions about men who exert gender violence, there is a point into the conversation where the description of those men becomes pathological; they become monsters (Fallarás, 2018). This is a strategy that, from a social psychology perspective, is useful for the maintenance of the dominant group's credibility (Feliu y Lajeunesse, 2004). These men become deranged, mentally ill; sociopaths. The efforts of

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[10] I refer mainly to my involvement in the feminist collective "Cuerpos Parlantes" since 2013. Cuerpos Parlantes has meant a revolution in how I approach academia and profesional life. Most of all, it has been a school of life that has pushed me to great self-reflection and has showed me other ways of living. Their work can be followed here: https://cuerpospespacios.wordpress.com/

the media and the institutions involved revolve around finding causes to the effects, showing how the individuals already had traces of their crimes, even before they had committed them. The institutions at play have the endeavour of finding individualistic explanations to what they deem as abnormal conduct, which, in turn, sustains the legitimacy of said institutions (Foucault, 1999). There is a clear and strategic separation from those violent men and the rest of *us*: we don't want to be put in the same category or to find any connections between those deplorable behaviours and our everyday masculine practices. Most men would deny that those behaviours have anything to do with the performances derived from the dominating model of masculinity that, in turn, sustains our access to a wide range of privileges. In Mexico, there are seven femicides per day; and two thirds of women have experienced some form of sexual violence, which are around 30 million women (Olivares, 2017). These numbers imply that there are millions of men exerting different forms of sexual violence, from catcalling, to harassment, to femicides, daily. It is clear then, that those behaviours and attitudes are not abnormalities of an otherwise healthy system; rather they are part of the system, which not only allows for inequalities to continue, but sustains itself with those inequalities. Hence, there is not a firm separation between the more violent forms of sexism and the more quotidian ones (Bonino in: Fallarás, 2018).

3. The third trajectory is the result of the previous two and it relates to the way individuals learn to perform gender, which in the case of masculinity is highly contradictory. This was reflected with the participants of my research: in the way they pursued equality and better relationships and, at the same time, tended to reproduce unequal relations of power. This contradictory character of masculinity comes partly from the fact that masculinity and femininity are not in the same categorical order, in line with Monique Wittig's statement (1992) that there is only one gender: feminine; because the sex-gender system is a creation of difference through opposition. Although the image of gender as a spectrum has allowed for more diversity and freedom of expression, it can, however, be problematic because it implicitly equates masculinity and femininity in the same

categorical order, in other words, as characteristics of the same kind. However, as it has been stated before, masculinity is not only an expression of gender but also a system of control; masculinity has instituted itself through the use of violence and the shaping of the other and, in consequence, it does not only create itself but also affects the representation of the *other*, specifically what is considered feminine. In this way, it is not possible to clearly separate our understanding of masculinity as a gender performance and of masculinity as a system of power and producer of dominant and subordinated positionalities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Destabilising the status quo becomes harder when the agents at play are thought of as being part of a horizontal relationship, as in the figure of the spectrum. I would propose another figure, the bi-dimensional plane, where the closest one individual is to the ideology presented by the hegemonic apparatus of masculinity, the more they can access certain privileges, which in turn will feed back to the hegemonic system. It is not possible to think of identity as separated from the power relations in which it is inserted. The dominant discourse also gives shape to subordinated identities, which fight to detach themselves from that discourse and create one of their own.

Standing in the junction of these three trajectories, I studied men that could be regarded as being part of the dominant group and their relationships with women. The research was loosely based in the methodological proposal of Laura Nader of 'studying up' (1972), which, broadly speaking, questions why certain groups remain in power. In Gramsci and Foucault's language, this would be the study of the mechanisms by which a hegemonic model is maintained. Studying sex-gender bodies that occupy power and privilege positions is a fundamental step towards the search for freer and more equal relationships between individuals. However, the main challenge of conducting 'studying up' research was to implement methods that were originally thought to empower the oppressed and those who don't have a reclaimed space of enunciation. This research showed that it is possible to utilise, for example, a feminist methodological approach to implement collaborative methods with people who occupy privileged positions; still, there was the

constant need to recognise that these methods will not have the same outcomes as they would with different groups. This approach was also a tool to avoid the villainisation of the participants, common risk in the studies of the power majority.

Specifically, I worked with seven individuals who identified themselves as heterosexual men, even though they often put those categories into question. All of them were middle-class, college educated Mexicans. Their age ranged from 25 to 35 years; they were all mestizos and, when the research began, six of them were in on-going relationships. The video diaries were pertinent tools that facilitated the work with these seven participants, given that one challenge was managing the distance between us (Five of the participants resided in Mexico, and two of them overseas). Two of the participants were actively involved in several feminist collectives in Mexico; four of them had a good understanding of what feminism entails and they agreed with it, and one of them distanced himself from it, while acknowledging some traces of machismo in him. Their relationship with feminism became relevant in the analysis, because the understanding that the participants had about their own masculinity had gone through deeper reflection.

Affective links: navigating the "participant-researcher" relationship

The last characteristic that binds the seven participants is that all of them shared an affective connection with me. To consider affective links in research is another element of an affective methodology, as the ties with the participants are also, and primarily, affective; there is a previous emotional energy that is brought to the research moment.

The selection criteria for my research participants is founded on the affirmation that an affective link, product of friendship, can generate a more horizontal relationship in the production of knowledge. The intention of this research was to understand the process of these seven men as they navigated through their emotions, desires and masculine identities, in the context of their sexual-affective relationships. Each participant was

undergoing a personal process. They had doubts, questions, and concerns regarding their place as men in gender relations, specifically with their partners. Each of them, in their own way, had an intention to change certain aspects of their relationship with women. At the same time, these men occupied positions of privilege (middle-class, masculine, and heterosexual) and agreed to talk about their privileges and their relationships in a critical and open way. By doing so, they put themselves in a vulnerable position. Bringing friendship into the research eased them into this place of vulnerability, through understanding and rapport.

This is an underexplored field; however, some scholars have focused on the friendship that exists between researchers, in which the professional bond develops into long-distance friendships (Lund, Kusakabe, Mishra and Wang, 2016). Through a feminist and post-colonial perspective, collaboration between scholars can strive for more horizontality, considering elements such as friendship, support and trust.

Friendship can create mutual support and comfort, but it can also restrict the other person's liberties, becoming a relationship of control. To avoid this, constant emotional work is required, which includes trust, reciprocal care and fondness (Lund et al., 2016). The common denominator in studies where friendship is a factor, is that it contributes to the decrease of hierarchies, the maintenance of dialogical relationships and an ethics of caring (Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014).

Daniela Sthelik and Leslie Chenoweth (2005) have also talked about their experience of collaboration and friendship in research. They, however, add another element that is not clearly seen with Lund et al. (2016): the element of joy counterposed to the anxiety of moving away from the objectivist postulates of 'hard' science. Sthelik and Chenoweth also use a feminist perspective as a particular research 'praxis', which entails "the seamless integration of methodology/discipline/friendship" (2005: 42). Feminist research emerges

as a more innovative, humane and hopeful perspective, specifically when the element of reflexivity is considered.

In my own research the relation of friendship was not with other researchers but with the participants of my study. The distance that is supposed to exist between researcher and object of research, has traditionally been established from a positivist idea that comes from the Cartesian dualism, where reason is erected as a hierarchical quality, separated from the object being looked at (Sthelik and Chenoweth, 2005). This tradition assumes that there is such thing as the subject-object separation, that reality is objective and ontologically real (Ibáñez and Íñiguez, 1997) and that the researcher can access said reality, as they become an objective subject through reason (Seidler, 2000). From a critique of positivism, these theorems are unsustainable, because what is encountered in reality are complex subjects, traversed by a web of emotions, ideas, memories and so on, which constitute them in a way that is more rhizomatic than structural.

Working from a place of friendship with my participants did not make the results any less valid; however, it did force me to constantly reflect on the effects I experienced from those interactions. The resulting knowledge from this research has been an affective, collaborative and friendly co-construction. Owton and Allen-Collinson (2014) also focused on the relation of friendship between researcher and the participants of the research. They centred on the implications of using "friendship as method" specifically on their interviews and fieldwork, more than on the effect that friendship has on the production of knowledge. Friendship does not substitute research; both intertwine creating a stronger bond and deeper commitment, which can also make negotiations regarding loyalty and confidence more difficult (Ellis, 2007, in: Owton and Allen-Colinson, 2014), as well as negotiations around the management of intimate space when the testimony of the participant changes the previous conceptions the researcher had of them. In this way:

Friendship as method, we argue, demands that as researchers we engage in acute and sustained reflexivity and self-scrutiny, contextually shifting between "studying them to studying us" (Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014: 287).

An example of this reflexivity is what Owton and Allen-Collinson (2014) have called interactional "game-play", in which the interviewee distances themselves from their role "as part of a perceived attempt to engage in a meta-analysis of the interview process itself, frequently highlighting the friend element of the researcher-friend role and critiquing the researcher role" (Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014: 301). This power struggle was also present in my research, particularly in Yumil's case with which sharing a more intimate space was a hard and sometimes awkward process:

> "Fucking questions you're asking man! How do I think of myself? I don't. What the fuck? 'Oh, I think of myself like this and like that' Fuck off, I'm just living, and I do what I can, alright?"
>
> (*Yumil, 32*)

However, it later became evident that, more than an attempt to defy the legitimacy of the research, Yumil's outbursts functioned as a filter to make the emotional work more bearable.

Working from a place of friendship brought particular benefits to the research. All except for one of the participants stated they wouldn't have shared as much if there had been another person asking the questions. Friendship also helped to destabilise the objective/researcher – subjective/participant binary, specifically with the video feedbacks that I returned to each of them. Further, as the scope of the research expanded, it became easier to maintain open channels of communication between each other. Friendship as method can also facilitate the exploration of difficult situations, it can help fill in the gaps in the participants' stories, it can nurture a more interiorised sense of collaboration, and it can generate research relationships from an ethics of care, which come from the joy of sharing one's life experiences with a person hold dear. Finally, it made the engagement of

the participants with the research stronger, which was especially productive given that I asked for their participation for a period of more than eight months.

There are challenges when conducting this kind of research. The main one was to be aware of my emotions during the analysis of their discourse. Using a process of emotional reflexivity, I could negotiate and situate my emotional responses, return to my research objectives and my theoretical framework so I could move forward and, finally, allow for my participants to be part of the process of analysis. Bringing friendship into research can create a feeling of greater responsibility towards the participants; it can also make navigating within issues of attachment and detachment more difficult for the researcher (Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014). A further challenge is the risk of lax research, and the affective link translating to a *laissez-faire* approach. To counter this, clarity and research management is essential. Clear objectives were set for the data collection process. Each participant understood the requirements of their involvement and how to accomplish the tasks being asked. In this way, bringing friendship into research did not undermine the methodological processes. Equal and ethical procedures of data gathering and profound analysis were used throughout the research.

The recording moment

Even though the use of video recording has been a key tool in Anthropology studies, and to a lesser extent in Sociology, Psychology and Human Geography, the use of video diaries, specifically, has been an underexplored tool, until recently (Holliday, 2004). If, for traditional anthropology, hiding the camera and collecting the data as discretely as possible brought the researcher closer to the promise of objectivity, the technique of video diaries does just the opposite; it places the camera radically in front of the participant, in such a way that a kind of diffraction happens to the looking subject: the participant speaks directly to a lens, which becomes a third agent in the study (Bates, 2013), and at the same time, speaks to the researcher that will later look at the recording.

Participatory video research proposes a more direct way of engaging with the participants, and new ways of interpreting and analysing data. However, "like other data, personal video accounts are socially located constructions that are produced in response to a specific research context" (Gibson, 2005: 34), so it would be a mistake to assume that video diaries represent a direct passage to the understanding of the personal experience of the subject in front of the lens. This is a strong critique that Jones et al. (2014) make to the assumptions that video diaries could automatically achieve a democratic approach by clearing a path to the participants' perceptions and worldview without any influence from the researcher, as if they were absent from the scene (Jones et al. 2014). Even though I agree with such critique, I also acknowledge that video diaries strive for a more horizontal way of engaging with participants, recognising that the image is not reality, but another way of showing a narrative of symbols and interpretations (Merlino, 2009). The key concept is collaboration between researcher and participant; the result of which would be a co-production.

According to Alan Latham (2003), the increasing interest for the study of everyday life and everyday culture faces important methodological issues. Latham speaks from a Human Geography perspective and asks whether its research methods are too narrow for the study of the unspoken, the intuitive, the everyday practices in constant motion. Latham's answer comes from his choice of research tool, participant diaries, as they provide structure to the reflections of the participants about their everyday practices, specifically in circumstances where social action is particularly diffuse (Latham, 2003). By using an interpretation of the social world as a set of performances and enactments (Goffman, 1956; Garfinkel, 1967; Butler, 1990), the diary itself turns into a sort of performance and the diary-interviews a *reperformance* (Latham, 2003: 2002). In a similar vein, Sarah Pink has stated that video products are not to be thought as objective representations of an environment, but as "expressive performances of the everyday" (Bates, 2013: 30). Video diaries give an account of temporality, of a transformation of personal experience through

time. For example, in the span of eight months, one of my participants' relationships ended, while another participant's relationship evolved from the 'hook-up stage' to an established and *extensive* relationship.

Video diaries have become part of a paradigm shift that questions and separates from the ideals of positivist objectivity (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992). Ruth Holliday's research (2004) showed the queer performances that her participants developed in front of the camera during their video diaries, which is a brilliant example of how changing the way researchers think about the gaze and the observer-observed relationship can generate other forms of representation from which participants can exert more control. For Holliday, video diaries also become useful tools for, "capturing the *performativities* of identity in ways that are qualitatively different from other sociological research methods" (2004: 1602). In my own research, however, I did not focus my analysis in the performance of gender, even though it was present in the spaces created by the recording moments, which differed greatly from the typical spaces of the participants, an observation also made by Sarah Pink (2007).

These intimate spaces, from a perspective of masculinity studies, were rare, given that men usually have less access to intimate and emotionally-charged spaces, because they can result in reprimands from other men or represent a threat to their masculinity. In this way, video diaries are useful tools for facilitating, "the intertextual relationships between cultural representations (that we can consider as objects or texts), and our different participating senses -the affectivity of these representations in other words" (Craine and Gardner; in: Hay, 2016: 275). The topics I suggested to my participants served only as guidelines; if they wanted to speak about something else, they could; if they wanted to ignore one or all the questions, they could; the video diary was also theirs to modify. Interventions by the participants could be observed in various ways: from their aesthetic choices (the camera filter selected, the background in the shot, the placement of the camera), the way they presented themselves (for instance, two of them on one occasion

decided to appear shirtless), to the fact that sometimes they decided to begin their videos with news from Mexico or unrelated stories. It could also be observed through more reflexive matters, like choosing to spend more time talking about their parents' relationship instead of their own or explaining a particularly emotional issue.

After finishing their first recording, each of my participants uploaded their videos into a shared private folder I had set up for them. I would watch each video while taking notes of the most relevant elements, write follow-up questions, impressions or comments I wanted to share with them and so on. One of the challenges was that video diaries did not allow for real-time conversation, like Holliday has recognised as well (2004). The solution was to engage with several follow-up questions, which had to be rethought in order of relevance in the feedback videos that I sent back to them. In a way, I was carrying out a video diary myself, in which I not only commented about their videos and asked them relevant questions, but also shared aspects of my own situated subjectivity, traversed by my own experiences, events and concerns. During the video diaries process, I too broke-up with my partner, which meant moving out of the house, living in my brother's couch for a month, experiencing strong emotions like sadness and regret, all while continuing with the process of listening to the participants' own stories and complexities of their relationships, while still working on my PhD. In a compelling paper, Isabella Ng (2017) showed her own process of managing her divorce and a new romance while conducting her PhD research. Much like my own process, she realised the relationship between researchers and researched cannot be one devoid of emotions, as they traverse it.

The audiovisual methodologies shown here, all share a feminist approach to research, particularly regarding the idea of intersubjectivity; this implies that the influence between the researcher and the participant is unavoidable, and thus, makes the relationship between observer and observed explicit. In a meta-reflexive sense, they show the relations of power brought to context using the camera (Kindon, 2003). The ethics behind using audiovisual methodology is to acknowledge this co-construction and to make it as

reciprocal and balanced as possible (Stassart, Mathieu and Mélard, 2011). Taking this into consideration, reflexivity becomes a central part of the creation of knowledge: the researchers must become more aware of their own subjectivities in the research process (Milne et al, 2012).

Still, there are challenges that come with video diary research, like the assumption of democratisation and empowerment, the idea of clear untainted voice of the participants, the claim of indisputable representation that the image would bring and so on (Jones et al., 2014). These, from my perspective are all valid critiques, which I share as well; however, I would argue that most of these issues are placed in the claims attached to video diaries (Rich et al., 2000; Noyes, 2004; Holliday, 2004; Pink, 2007), which might be a result of it being a new audiovisual technique in social sciences. Thus, video diaries are not exempt from the power relations that a research context brings. In my own research I do not claim that video diaries allow for a clear and distinguished subject's voice to arise, but I acknowledge the heteroglossic component of a discursive product that could be regarded as "us" (researcher-participant). In this sense, video diaries share the same virtues and problems that other oral methods face, like interviews, focus groups and even ethnographic methods.

Researchers cannot assume that any type of method or technique will finally achieve complete horizontality, unbiased representation, or a clear space for the voice of the participants to be heard uninfluenced. Those claims would bring us back to the positivist ideals of objectivity, where the researcher would become invisible in the process (Haraway, 1988), allowing for unidirectional assumptions to be made. Video diaries, as any other research technique, will not be the answer for such issues; they can, however, in relation with other tools -such as narrative productions- allow for a more conscious and reflexive co-construction of knowledge that would be situated, partial and open.

From lens to paper

Researchers must adapt their methodologies to the specific reality being researched (Chamberlain, 2012, in: García & Montenegro, 2014) and not the other way around. Hence, my research method for data gathering and analysis was a reinterpretation of "Narrative Productions" (Balasch & Montenegro, 2003), in which the control of the research is shared with the interviewee, who can edit, erase, add and modify their own narratives until they are comfortable with the result. This process is a form of analysis, where the voice of the researcher is not put in a higher position than that of the participant; it is a joint intellectual creation that is not aimed at solving a hypothesis, but to explore a topic further and to make it more complex (Biglia in: Mendia, Luxan et. al (eds.), 2014).

Narrative productions is a method elaborated mainly by Marcel Balasch and Marisela Montenegro (2003) at the *Universitat Autónoma de Barcelona*. Following their elaboration, the UAB has stimulated other research using this methodology; notably that by Gandarias and Pujol (2013), who focused on the possible relations between collectives of migrant women and feminist collectives in the Basque country. By conducting narrative productions, they showed the experiences, difficulties and challenges of weaving alliances between these collectives. Another example of narrative productions worth noting is the study about 'Barebacking', practices of resistance and biopolitics, by Ávila and Montenegro (2011), which utilised the advantages of Internet to retrieve data from chat rooms and web forums; creating what they call "virtual narratives". Finally, the work by Barbara Biglia and Jordi Bonet-Martí (2009) who talked about the different shapes narrative productions can take, and the challenges that come from doing collaborative research from a situated position. In every case, the final product is a co-production resulting from a close collaboration between the researcher and the participants (Balasch & Montenegro 2003). As such, narrative productions can be questioned, knowing that the result is a shared story, but not the only story possible given that, "the construction of

narratives as a process of research wants to be realised from -and to be the product of-the encounter between different subjectivities" (Biglia & Bonet-Martí, 2009: 7).

The method of narrative productions implies a socio-constructionist gaze, which affirms that linguistic relations (meaning, language in use) create reality (Santana and Cordeiro, 2007). Narrative productions assume a heteroglossic and intertextual dimension: "language is understood as an active relational process in which the one who speaks is located within a network of relationships and speech genres. Language would be thought of as an activity, a flux of discursive actions, intertwined and interdependent" (Balasch & Montenegro, 2003: 46). Nagore García and Marisela Montenegro (2014) have stated that narrative productions allow for the diffraction of localised knowledge as well as for the study of dominant narratives. This approach became relevant in their research about love from a feminist perspective (becoming woman and becoming feminist), which centred on the articulation between *Narratives* (the big stories of cultural representation) and *narratives* (situated biographical experiences of love). They concluded that it is not possible to "interpret narratives as a personal product. It is a voice that constitutes an heteroglossia of multiple, culturally situated, voices that come together in a subject position on a given moment" (García and Montenegro, 2014: 70).

In practical terms, the procedure for conducting narrative productions is as follows: the researcher guides several sessions with the participants, which would revolve around the specific topic of study. In the next step, a text is created taking into consideration a certain narrative tone. The resulting text is then shared with the participants, giving them the option to transform it as much as they want until they believe it represents their view of the phenomenon of study (García & Montenegro, 2014). The final narrative product is a shared collaboration between the transformations made by the participants and the linguistic resources the researcher brings to the table (Balasch & Montenegro, 2003); thus, it becomes a hybrid text, where the authorship is shared, and the individual subject makes way to the relational self.

Specifically, in my research, the sharing of videos happened seven times; that is, each of the participants shared four videos with me and I sent them three of myself giving them feedback. There were a total of 27 videos (as one of them failed to send one) with an average length of each video being 35-40 minutes. These were sent from September 2016 to April 2017. Once the participants had sent me all their videos, I started to work on constructing the narratives from them, which, according to my reinterpretation of the method, had already begun with the feedback videos I sent to each of them. It is worth noting that, during the process of data collection, three participants decided to withdraw from the study; their video diaries have not been considered in this thesis.

During the writing process, I went through each participant's transcribed video and categorised the text into topics of relevance or *emergent categories* (Vazquez, 1996), for instance: "open relationship", "change", "intimacy", "love", "jealousy" and "frustration". Then I grouped those topics into *second order categories* that could explain a discursive connection between all of them, such as "Affective practices", "Domestic negotiations", "Patriarchal Dividends" or "Oscillations of Masculinity". Finally, I took all the textual phrases that related to an emergent category and re-arranged them into a new form of narrative that could show the discourse at play in the second order category. The new arrangement did not necessarily follow the timeline of the videos, but the logic of the discourse. When this new text was done, I sent it back to the participants and asked them to read it, modify it, further explain a topic, or write follow-up comments regarding their present state.

The result of the previous process became the final narrative of each participant. Each narrative is therefore a product that is in itself a reflexive, analytical and collaborative process. Each one demonstrates the enormous complexity of heterosexual relationships and has become the data for the subsequent discourse analysis from a Foucauldian

perspective. A simple example of this process is found in Tonatiuh's narrative. Tonatiuh mentioned in one of his video diaries:

> What do I like about women? The vagina. Their body, which is different from men's bodies, I don't like figures that are more masculine. I like the vagina, to eat it, to be inside it.
>
> *(Tonatiuh, 30)*

About eight months later, he read the previous quote in the final product of his narrative and he showed surprise for his tone and the choice of words he used. However, he decided to leave it as shown because, he said, in that moment it represented what he wanted to express. He added a footnote in his narrative:

> Fuck! Did I really say that? I sound like a fucking caveman!
>
> *(Tonatiuh, 30)*

Even though he was surprised by his choice of words, he still agreed with the statement of the narrative but wanted to demarcate himself from the "caveman male" by acknowledging, in a joking fashion, his use of words. Hence, narrative productions are a methodological product in and of themselves. They take influence from:

> […] the dialogic perspective of language by Bhaktin and the epistemological proposal of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991). This starting point aims to move away from positivism and its non-critical position, as much as from extreme relativism. The proposal of situated knowledges of Donna Haraway (1991) stresses how knowledge is generated from a localised gaze and how, through partial connections, it is possible to achieve comprehensions of the phenomena we want to study (García & Montenegro, 2014: 70).

This localised knowledge can lead to a strong critique of the legacies of epistemological traditions generated by white, heterosexual, men; and the marginalised knowledge that has had to challenge them (Kong, Mahoney and Plummer, 2002). Coming to terms with the situated knowledge approach implies a great deal of self-reflexivity, in the recognition of both researcher and participants' own intersectional embodied positionalities, and how they interact with the space created for a specific research objective.

Ethical considerations

The main ethical guideline of this research was to enable as much congruence as possible between the theoretical perspective, the methodology and the results, aiming towards a politics of social transformation in hopes of a better way of life. Doing research from a gender perspective implies "an ethical view of development and democracy in order to face inequality, inequity and oppression, it is a critical stand and a proposal of alternatives for change" (Fernández in: Blázquez, et al., 2010: 93).

The intention of a feminist methodology is that it fosters an ethics of care. This process "is personal, interactional and emotional. It is embodied work that can have implications for the researcher as well as the researched" (Kong et al., 2002: 250). In ethical terms, the task of the researcher is to be in constant communication with the participants as the personal, the interactional and the emotional develop. This is particularly important given that the participants of my research shared their memories, personal reflections, stories of intimacy, fears and secrets all charged with emotions. More clearly, I asked seven men to show themselves as vulnerable in front of a camera, to share their lives with me and to answer difficult and confrontational questions, and they agreed, they took it seriously and they finished an intellectual and affective process, which was far from easy.

For Kong et al. (2000), the way to address the ethical implications of these specific contexts of research is by: a) managing the researcher's identity, centring on self-presentation; b) constructing an empathic bond throughout the research process and; c) setting borders and boundaries on the researcher-participant relationship. Kong et al. (2002) used their research, which focused on queer people, as an example from which to elaborate their previous statements. That is why, in my own research, I went through a critical and reflexive process that situated my participants and myself within our own epistemological limitations, and as subjects positioned in a privileged place of enunciation.

From the beginning, the participants were told that this was a study with a feminist perspective of masculinity; they were explained that it would have a critical view and that the topics of the video diaries would revolve around their sexual-affective relationships. All the participants knew my research inclinations. At no time there was an intention to trick or deceive the participants, for instance, by denying the critical perspective of the research. The participants were handed an information sheet, which explained the goals of the project and what was expected of them. This sheet mentioned, amongst other things, that the research was about: "finding how we as men, including myself, sometimes take a position of privilege that can account for unbalanced relationships, but it is also about looking at masculinity as something that can be detrimental for more equal, free and pleasurable ways of relating between each other".

Participants were informed of the rights they had by taking part of the research: choose not to answer any question, stop recording at any time, withdraw from the study at any point, ask any questions, get copies of any and every material of them, have a pseudonym and protect their identities. They were also given the chance to read their final narrative of their video diaries and edit it, in such a way that if there were elements that they did not want to be shown, the participants could ask to remove them. They were also given the contact of an impartial third party, the Victoria University HEC Convener, in case they considered that the research was not being conducted in an ethical manner. Finally, this research was only conducted after the approval of the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee (No.22663).

A Foucauldian discourse analysis approach

An important guideline for the subsequent analysis of the narratives was the proposal of Connell (1995) on tackling masculinities as a configuration of practices that are simultaneously positioned in various structures and differ in their historical trajectories. In

other words, there isn't only one form of masculinity, but different ways in which body-reflexive practices are expressed. As explained by Connell:

> With bodies both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined, we face a pattern beyond the formulae of current social theory. This pattern might be termed body-reflexive practice (Connell, 1995: 61).

Connell's model to analyse the structure of gender distinguishes between relations of: *a)* power, *b)* production and *c)* emotional attachment (or cathexis). This model considers masculinities as intertwined in a network of correlated structures.

Additionally, in performative terms and considering Symbolic Interactionism theory (Brickell, 2005), my analysis focused on the way masculinities are *done* and how these practices are received in the social interaction; it focused as well in the spatial and temporal frames, specificities of the culture and historical conditions, ideas of masculine authenticity, their reproduction and solidification.

The analysis recognised language as a central tool for the construction of reality. People make sense of their word through language; it is an action that creates things (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). However, there is a difference between the concepts of language and discourse. Following Íñiguez (1999), I understand discourse as language in use; in other words, language is polysemic and it can only be understood by the context in which it arises and by its effects, as "utilised by real users in real situations and through real forms of interaction" (Íñiguez, 2003: 12). Through discourse, not only we represent reality, but we also construct it (van Dijk, 2002). The previous idea connects with a Foucauldian approach to discourse, as not solely linguistic but as a means of organisation of the truth; as the material and discursive conditions that allow knowledge to emerge in a historically situated system (Kendall & Wickham, 2000).

Discourses "not only structure the way we think about things but also allow us to make specific assertions of knowledge in the first place" (Craine and Gardner in: Hay, 2016: 279), which makes for a strong connection with power and knowledge production. In this way, doing discourse analysis presupposes a reading of the context that surrounds a specific text (as an element capable of being read). Through this *discursive complex* (Kendall & Wickham, 2000), different associations of discourses interconnect in a systematic articulation, creating a ground for possible statements, that is, what can be said. In 'The Archaeology of Knowledge' (1969), Foucault defined discourse as a set of statements that derive from a single formation system, in such a way that it is possible to talk about the psychiatric discourse, the discourse of sexuality and so on. Following this tread, Kendall & Wickham (2000) proposed four measures to carry out a Foucauldian discourse analysis, measures that speak of a discursive, interrelational and intertextual complexity; recognising discourse as an organised and delimited system of 'statements'. Once this is clear, it is possible to identify the rules through which discourse is articulated.

For Foucault, discourse is an element that tells how a specific society thinks itself in a determined moment in history. Discourse is thought of as an episteme, which produces and restricts the frames of what can be known. In 'The order of discourse' (1970), Foucault shows three of these procedures, which explain who can contribute to the production of discourse and from where: The first one revolves around the selection of what can be said or not and it operates from the logic of prohibition. The second one centres on what it is rejected, not necessarily prohibited: the monster, the outcast, the mad or the deviated are rejected subjects from the frame of discourse production but, at the same time, are part of a double movement from which the discourse also defines them: "Through its words, one could recognise the madness of the madman" (Foucault, 1970: 16). Scientific reason has taken the language of the mad to incorporate it in the discourse of madness, however that has not necessarily meant the voice of the mad had a productive space in the construction of discourse, on the contrary, it was the place from where separation was wielded. The third procedure of discourse production relates to

what is considered true and false; this element is key in the knowledge-power relation and refers to who has the right to speak from the space of truth, supported by the institutions that exert power over other discourses.

Discourses are a constitutive act of social relations and at the same time a crucial element in the "(re) production of social cognitions, like knowledge, ideologies, norms and values we share as group members, which regulates and controls acts and interactions" (van Dijk, 2002: 2). The relation between discourse and society is the fieldwork of critical discourse analysis and can be divided in three areas: Number one, the role that social structures have in the construction, production and comprehension of discourse. Number two, the role that discourse has in the construction, comprehension and transformation of social structures. Number three, how discourse represents or speaks about a specific part of society (Van Dijk, 2002).

Critical discourse analysis is based in the relationships between discourse and society but focuses on the power relations and the forms of domination exerted by the groups that occupy privileged positions. Critical discourse analysis "looks specifically at the social consequences of difference through power in tangent with the construction of identity" (Craine and Gardner; in: Hay, 2016: 279). It would be a mistake to equate discourse with reality, as if the totality of reality was irreducibly discursive; to fall into this simplification would minimise material issues like poverty, sickness or gender violence; however, the comprehension of these issues is articulated by discourse, by how people refer to them, how they understand them, from which positions they are expressed and reproduced and so on (van Dijk; in: Íñiguez, 2003). The semiotic packages through which people interpret reality come from discourse.

Foucault does not provide a method of analysis, a 'Foucauldian formula', but it does give a structure of thought, a toolbox without instructions with which it is possible to ask certain questions about the 'power-knowledge-truth' relations and its effect on subjectivities.

Qualitative data is dense in meanings and unique; therefore, the analysis must maintain a meticulous connection with the data. In this way, the analysis is linked to the manipulation and transformation of data through concrete operations, with the purpose of extracting relevant meanings in line with the research. The analysis is a process of construction of meaning that starts with the data and culminates in novel knowledge about the problem being investigated. As Antaki et al. have argued: "the analysis implies a close commitment with the texts or the transcriptions, and with the necessary knowledge to see the meanings in these through a reflexive and technically sophisticated work" (2003: 18). To analyse, as it is understood here, is to create a new form of knowledge from the data given.

In the next chapter, the narrative productions are presented. It is important that the reader comprehends the value of the methodological product as a form of new knowledge. These narratives are a reflexive, analytical and affective collaboration between participant and researcher and as such they represent a valid and unique insight into the topic of masculinities and heterosexual relationships. Even though these men were involved in a feminist reflection, to different extents, they still bared the weight of an ingrained masculinity, which played parallel to the practices of equality they intended to enact. The contradictions resulting from this interplay made for an increasingly complex analysis of masculinity as a relational system.

CHAPTER 4. NARRATIVES

As mentioned before, this study was carried out with seven Mexican men. The resulting products are seven narratives that were co-produced between them and I. The narratives were based on their experiences recorded in their video diaries. However, for practical reasons, regarding the word count limit imposed to this thesis, only three narratives are shown in full here. These were chosen because they communicated the spectrum of the positioning of the seven participants, in such a way that: Quetzal represented a more radical and incarnated position of the feminist discourse and the critique of masculinity. Tizoc represented a neutral position, where he recognised and accepted the discourse of gender equality and was critic of his own masculinity; however, he was still trying to figure out how to put that into actions in his everyday life. Lastly, Yumil represents dominating masculinity more clearly, even though he does not consider himself a conservative man and he does try to better his relationships. Following these three narratives, the remaining four narratives are presented in a shorter form. These are also pivotal to understanding how the discourse of masculinity is displayed in the 21st century along with the contradictions it brings. All these seven men strived for change, but they found themselves within the structures of masculinity that brought them privileges and power to the detriment of subordinated others.

Five out of the seven narratives contain footnotes added by the participants, reflecting on the conversations that continued once the narratives were written. The footnotes are commentaries, clarifications or corrections that occurred approximately three to four months after their final video diaries were recorded. All these narratives share intimate spaces created by the video diaries, where the participants opened their more vulnerable, emotional sides, and pushed themselves to reflect on bigger issues regarding their masculinity and the social system of privileges and inequality of which they are a part. I am immensely grateful to each of them for agreeing to take part in this study and trusting in the methodological process and the ultimate goals of this research.

Quetzal, 35: *"Having a feminist partner is a necessary mess"*

Separation from Masculinity

A few years ago, I was in a very bad situation with my partner. I stopped talking with my friends about my problems. It came with a lot of pain and punches, but now that it's over I can say I've learned a lot about how we relate with each other; how I relate from a male position with other men and with other women[11]. The things you ask me are topics that I talk about and discuss every day, with a lot of people, including my partner.

I'm part of a men's group where we reflect about masculinity and our practices from our position as men. I feel very motivated because there are other colleagues that are also very motivated to work on the topic of masculinity. It's something that creates a lot of noise. In the group we've discussed the fear that comes with not being masculine and not being a man. For instance, there are some advertisements that say, "a real man is such and such" or "real men don't hit women". There is a constant reaffirmation that you must be a man, be a good man, and have a healthy masculinity. Because we're perfectly aware that if we move from that place [of masculinity] we become more vulnerable; that is, if we are feminine or feminised, if we don't show ourselves as man enough. That's why it comes so handy to be an anti-patriarchal man or feminist man, as long as you don't stop being a man.

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[11] However, there are still ongoing issues and I have new doubts concerning how to relate with other people, especially women. I continuously wonder if I'm an obstacle in the relationships my partner has with other women; it brings me conflict. I know the problem is not just me, but I can clearly see (I think) how the desire that my partner has for me (which we call love), makes it difficult for her to cultivate those other relationships. Those relationships frequently give her satisfaction. I try to respect her feelings but sometimes I get frustrated when I see her pulling away from those friends (who are usually my friends too), because I think they could do really cool things together and overcome differences. But we tend to keep our attention in the monogamous heterosexual relationship, as if it were infinitely more important than the rest. I'm talking about our own experience, but I think it's very common, in Mexico as well as in New Zealand (this is my deduction from what you've told me). I spend a lot of my time thinking about these things, and I feel at a dead end… with lots of fears, actually.

I think ceasing to be a man is a discursive matter, as well as aesthetical, practical and so on. However, I don't go around saying that I want to stop being a man. What am I committing to? What am I transforming in myself? Everything they teach us regarding what it is to be a man is fucked up. What we understand about how to be a man from masculinity in general is not cool. You could say, "Well, but men are protective". Yes, but in exchange of what? Of having power and control over other bodies, over the group or the herd. So, I don't think it's cool to say that we are protective. Same thing with being a breadwinner, it is always in exchange for something else, something that, on top of everything, is less valued.

I do define myself as a man, but I just recently understood that defining myself as such obviously has to do with a comfortable position of being in the world. However, that comfort consists in a series of privileges that deny rights to other people, which put them in disadvantageous positions. Men take huge advantages of women and other bodies because of that. What makes me feel like a man? The fact there are other people that confirm it to me, and that that confirmation is positive. For instance, there are people that like the way I talk, the things I say and how I express myself; that has to do with a sense of confidence that is given, in good measure, by masculinity. I feel good playing this role of a man, I feel confident, loved, sometimes admired. However, I think it's a little dangerous because that admiration is directed to someone that speaks from a privileged position.[12]

The question of how men should participate in a feminist space is a very important one for me. Right now, in the space in which I participate, there are many men involved. I remember an event that was organised a few months ago, in which the men were sitting and listening to the conference, while the women were in the kitchen taking care of food

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[12] Lately, this issue has started to bother me more. The desire for admiration, the male ego, is something that I sometimes crave. I show off the positions I take regarding certain political issues; I confront people but sometimes demanding reciprocity in their position in regards to the debates. This leads me to express myself in a challenging and aggressive way, even in social media, which is a space that easily captures those egos. Then, the backlash comes when people push me away and then it gets complicated to regain friendships. Currently, to be aware of my privilege demands that I keep silent, to take things more calmy and to be sensitive to other people's ways of thinking: to be respectful, of course.

sales and other details. It's unacceptable that the members of a feminist space reproduce traditional gender roles. If we want to modify those roles, we must constantly practice other ways of doing. It can't be that in a feminist event, within a feminist space, there are men listening and participating, while women can't because they're in the kitchen. Us, as men participating in a feminist space, which tasks do we assume? Who grabs the microphone? I don't think it should be us. A feminist space must have, as a priority, to work in the interest of women. It has been cool to be with and to learn from our female colleagues, and to deconstruct our relations as a result, but we have to be more radical. Gender inequality is mainly economic inequality. This means tasks are distributed in a certain way to sustain power for some while impoverishing others. Domination is generated from that inequality. If women oversee the domestic, they don't take part of the economic realm, which in a capitalistic society, the benefits of money matter a lot. To break away from those cycles of economic imparity implies a process of communication. That's why I question what we communicate from our feminist space.

There must be equality in every relationship, that's something I take very seriously.[13] For example, the time I spend doing domestic work I don't see it as something secondary in order of importance. It's about caring and emotional work; caring to maintain this relational identity, as Almudena Hernando would say. For me, the most interesting process has been to reflect on my privileges in concrete situations. For instance, with my partner, each of us has taken very different paths. I've been able to do an academic career and she hasn't, because she has encountered a lot of obstacles that have to do with gender difference, which for me would have been different if I had been in that same situation. Also, I have more credibility as a man when I encourage a feminist discourse. People even listen to me more than they do to many feminist women. At university, I'm more empowered with feminism than some feminist female teachers for whom it's harder to climb up the ladder. I've also been in situations where a pact between men benefits me

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[13] I would rather say it's something that I think is fundamental, and not that I take it too seriously.

to the detriment of a woman. On the other hand, I realise it's sometimes hard for me to be questioned by a woman, even by the women closest to me, when we work together.

For a while now, I've been reflecting about why we value young, feminine, slim bodies. Not just when it comes to picking a partner or a sexual encounter, but even when it comes to friendship we look for certain constants of skin colour, physique and so on. In this way, part of the reflection I've been having regarding my own masculinity, is increasingly more traversed by the value I have of other people and the ways we relate. For example, why do I approach certain women that I care about? And what do I look for in them? That's precisely why I get less and less influenced by this whole thing regarding physique and shape. This has also made me change friendships and I think it's a good thing; however, they're very interiorised, very unconscious elements. Men and women are valued in different ways. For instance, men can age and be valued by a certain pose of maturity, protection or intellectuality, more than for having a beautiful body. With women, though, a body that grows old is less valued. To shine you have to be both smart and good looking.

I understand heterosexuality as the construction of gender identity [14], not just embodiment. It's something we can always improve, and I think there's a historical debt regarding our privileges and our life. For example, regarding domestic work, I have an immense debt to my mother. I think there has to be a strong commitment from men to domestic work and caring. When I talk about heterosexuality, I don't see it only as a man-woman couple's relationship, but as a political regime. Heterosexual relations are not only reproduced with your partner, but also according to gender positions. If you live with your mother, for instance, you're going to reproduce components of a heterosexual relation. The other day, a friend told me that there couldn't be full consent in an asymmetrical relationship, where there are differentiated power positions; so, if we understand gender as a hierarchy, then a man-woman relationship in itself is not a balanced relationship. I do believe that we can achieve balance, but it's something you work for, talk about and

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[14] As a political regime.

analyse together. It's something that my partner and I have done a lot. If you accept this definition of heterosexuality, then, a very significative problem is inequality and the way each heterosexual relationship appropriates this inequality.[15]

If today I started a new relationship with someone, I would be very clear about what agreements I would take and which ones I wouldn't. More accurately, I wouldn't want to have a romantic, traditional and exclusive relationship, in which there would be too many promises from masculinity. I don't think this generation has changed considerably. I know of just a few groups of people that are proposing other ways of relating. In general, people's ideals are very clear: get married and have children. Maybe there's a kind of vanguard of people that do have new practices, but most don't. Even if we think about gender violence within couples, now we hear many more cases and gut-wrenching stories; so, what has changed, really? In another time of my life I would have believed that men today question themselves about feminism, gender relations and all that; and it might be so, but at a very superficial level. We don't want to reach the point where it speaks to us directly and it makes us move from the place we're at. There's still a lot of resistance: resistance to talk about emotions and the problems we're having. I try to move away from that, spend more time working on these issues and talking about them.

I always saw my parents' relationship as idyllic, in fact I grew up thinking that was *the* couple's relationship and I aspired to it. For my parents, the partner was always first, they gave each other total support. I used to want that before, but now I'm very confused. When I started my marriage, I tried to put my partner first, but it's so conflicting because I didn't always achieve it. Now I realise that my parents' relationship wasn't all that cool. I mean, they're still together and they provide each other company, but there's wear and tear. My dad works all day; my mom works as well, but she does have free time, which has allowed her to make friends and that has been good for her. However, they still maintain

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[15] But it is still heterosexuality that prevents us (me and my partner) from making the relationship more equal. Heterosexuality as desire.

traditional roles. My mom was always more present in our upbringing, so she dealt with all our problems; I always thought my mom was the bad one and my dad was the coolest, which is logical if she was the one dealing with all the children's problems. I notice that in myself, when I don't deal with certain tasks that have to do with my daughter. As a man, you can stop being a father, you can rest from the activities of fatherhood, but women usually don't. To tell you the truth, I do take it upon myself to recommend to people that if they're not completely convinced about wanting children, they shouldn't. There are men that say, "I'm not particularly interested in having children, but if the woman I'm in love with wants them, then I wouldn't mind having them". It's like saying "I do it for her", and that's just it, I do it for her because at the end of the day she's going to take care of them. I do agree that having children changes you and makes you learn a lot and see beautiful things in the world you didn't see before, I agree. But then, they grow up and what? That's why you must really take responsibility.

One, as a man, can suffer a lot in a heterosexual relationship, but the resources that one has to recover because one's gender, are infinitely greater than the ones women have. A man, and especially a man that is read as white, middle-class, college-educated and so on, can hardly say that he's vulnerable to gender violence or violence coming from a woman. In that sense, we have a lot of resources in our favour. A common thing regarding male privilege, for instance, is to believe that there are no consequences to sleeping with someone, and it turns out that there are. With my partner, I was very persistent for her to be my girlfriend. Then, the consequences are that you have promised a lot and so you are demanded to comply with it; and I think it's fair. That's where it becomes conflicting: these forms of control given by patriarchy turn on us, and it's very easy to complain about the jealous girlfriend or wife, but if we have created a phallic patriarchal world in which men hold the keys, then of course women are going to hold on to their men.

Norms and Desire

A very complicated moment in my relationship had to do with jealousy. Jealousy and insecurity, but at the end it became a learning. It's not just a matter of thinking about jealousy as apprehension and possession, but to ask yourself, why do we apprehend? Why do we have these dependencies and why are these dependencies different, generally speaking, for men and women? That was the worst moment of our relationship; we have grown past it, but the issue of jealousy still appears[16]. Jealousy is shit but feels so strong because it's a patriarchal mechanism that we have implanted for the surveillance and maintenance of a model of society. Jealousy is made to maintain the heterosexual monogamous cell. You want to control the other because you're acting as a soldier of the system, which is also capitalist, and requires this private property to sustain itself.

I've tried to leave these jealous feelings behind. If I feel jealous I'm not going to say it; I don't feel I have the right to block anyone from their relationships with other people, nor do I have rights over other people's bodies. It's something I've worked on. The weird thing is that my partner sometimes interprets it as a lack of love, like "you're not jealous because I don't interest you". But I'm not interested in being jealous or provoking jealousy. There was a very tough moment with how I lived my friendships, mostly with women. There were certain boundaries established, and there were issues that allowed me to think, for instance, about how I related to women and what power relations were at play.

As a man, I cultivate a lot of dependency towards my partner, because I need someone to fix my life, to help me achieve my goals so I can move forward in life. On the other hand, what happens with my partner is the same thing that happens with a lot of women; it has to do with dependency towards a figure of protection, a masculine voice, of security. That combination makes for frequent violent dependencies in monogamous relationships. With so many conflicts, you keep encountering many obstacles and sometimes I just don't know how to approach her anymore. But despite that, there are still a lot of good

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[16] No, we actually didn't overcome it. It appears to be more complicated than we thought.

moments in the relationship. They are not as frequent as the first months where everything seemed focused on that, but they still appear and they're very pleasurable. The truth is I don't feel in a moment where I can frequently look for that; but also, this situation has helped me to rethink my desire. My desire for other bodies in general. Why do I come to desire other bodies?

In my relationship we talk about what we like, what we don't and what things we would like; however, there are still taboos. For instance, I struggle with saying that I would like to be with someone else, and more so with saying specifically with whom. For my partner it's easier. It would seem that I'm the one that's limited, but we have different things at stake. We know the answer but we're not willing to do what it needs to be done: We know that something good for the both of us would be to have experiences with other people. Maybe I'm just in a comfortable space where I depend on her and the steps she wants to take.

Closest to my reality, there are things I would like to change. I have a very strong link with my partner, but there are also many mismatches, many problems, which is normal in most monogamous relationships. Despite all that, it is a very powerful relationship in the sense that it enriches us, it gives us pleasure, it makes us create and experiment. But there are other things with which you find a wall, because that whole 'find your other half' doesn't exist. There are things that don't fit, no matter how hard you work. You shouldn't have to be completely complementary with the other person and give all your time and actions to them. That's why, coming from this very strong link, I see it as being more viable to move towards polyamory. We have talked about it and I think at some point the relationship could open.

I think male sexuality is very limited. We are taught that the ways you give and receive pleasure consist of taking, and that's it. It's surprising to see other couples that I believed were more open having the same problems as me. There's a certain desire to free

themselves and make agreements that respect individual dynamics, but it's not easy at all. Me and my partner handle monogamous agreements as most of the world do: you start assuming things until the thing you assume doesn't fit with what the other person is willing to accept, so you negotiate. In theory, I think monogamy doesn't make any sense. If you think of it as an imposed model, one that swallows you, then it's not the best way. For my partner, this is something pivotal as well, she reflects on it from feminist readings and discussions.

I'm against using the word 'relationship' to refer particularly to the 'amorous relationship'. Because we are promoting with language that there is just *one way* of having a relationship, and that's not true. That's why I really like the idea of 'agamy', which I read in a blog called "Against love". In this blog, the author questions why we give higher status to sexual-affective relationships, while we relegate other types of relationships to the background, like friendship, maternity, paternity and so on. We give such a high value to sexual-affective relationships, that we surrender the rest under its reign. That critique makes a lot of sense to me, but at the same time I don't want to miss out on the cool things that a monogamous relationship has, or gamic, as this dude would say. With agamy, it's not about putting the amorous relationship at the top, but to distribute oneself in relationships that are closer to friendship. For instance, I would have a lot of friendships, and with some of them I would surely experience cool stuff, from listening to music to having sexual relations. I don't fantasise with being with other people anymore, rather with the idea of having agamic relationships, like friendships in which you eventually enjoy with the body and so on. It's not just fucking, that's what I'm saying. To transit to other forms of relationships is also a matter of equality. If I want to get pass the defects of a gamic relationship, I can't do it without considering the feelings of the others involved. It's not enough just to say: "This is what I want".

Why do we flirt and hook-up? Why don't we just get to know people, and from there see if it can evolve in different directions? Whether it be love, sex or to eliminate the gamic

component. Hooking-up ends up being a relation of power in which men enter with a lot of advantages. With my partner, this translates to the fact that I was very persistent. Sometimes I wonder, if monogamy and infidelity weren't a barrier, how would I feel right now? Would I hook-up? Would I fall in the same logic of conquest? And what would I expect from that sexual relation? That it pleases me because she is young and pretty? What would I expect to generate there? So, right now I don't know what to expect. Novelty is exciting, but there's a big problem in believing that only that excitement can please you. I get very pleased by being with my partner sexually, and even though that excitement is gone, there are other things, for example, a deep emotional rapport and more knowledge of our bodies. But it seems that if that excitement is gone, then the relationship would suck, or it would die out, but of course it wouldn't!

I've had very painful experiences but also very important ones regarding how I relate with other people from a position of power. Another topic I'm constantly thinking about is physical valuation: why do we desire certain bodies and what are the implications of this? It's very easy to say, "I like whom I like, and I can't change that". But it's about realising that desire requires a strong questioning on a political level; there are bodies that are discriminated and excluded by other bodies, which are legitimated to maintain relations of domination. I ponder about what it means to be heterosexual. I believe on an unconscious level, it's always a matter of power. It is very easy to affirm oneself as heterosexual, contrary to what a homosexual person might have to face to be able to live their desire. For heterosexuals, it's just a matter of flowing with the current and that's it, that's what one must do. I like women because I get something from them; it's not just that I like their bodies, with their obvious characteristics: ass, tits, face and so on. For a while now, I've asked myself what does one get from being with someone attractive? Why do we want to be with someone attractive? The only thing I can think of is that there's a matter of showing off, like a trophy or something prestigious. I'm not foreign to that, but by constantly questioning it, things change. Also, I think I like women for the element of

emotional support, which you can hardly find in a man. Heterosexuality, from the point of view of men, has to do with someone taking care of us.

Sex is very problematic; it tends to be. Shouldn't have to be like that, but it is because sex is power. Just look at everything that's going on with sexual harassment. It is not only about how someone enjoys their body, but also about how power plays a part in it, that's why it's problematic. Also, there are other emotions involved: whom do you fall in love with? Why? Who can you have by your side?

For me, entering a couple's relationship meant maturity. It's the time in which I started taking care of myself; but the way I managed to take care of myself was by taking care of other people as well. I jumped from being looked after to looking after others and myself, without passing through a stage of just taking care of myself. That jump is very assumed in our country's culture. From a young age, I took care of a family and myself. We take care of each other really, the three of us. In that way, I entered a couple's relationship that was a family relationship at the same time, because my partner's daughter was involved. People think of family as the only form of collective organisation that we can aspire to, within the heterosexual, monogamous framework. That also entails the issue of private property, of owning a house; which is understandable considering an economic system and a state in which you have no health or education guaranteed. I believe having a partner is just that: to live for someone else, all the time, permanently. Maybe nowadays there are couples that reach more flexible agreements, but at the end of the day you must answer to somebody.

Family Project

I've been in a monogamous sexual-affective relationship for so long, that it has become my norm. A few years ago, we had a very complicated period, filled with jealousy and

insecurity. Our response was to direct common efforts towards common, collective projects, where sometimes more people participated. That for me is very healthy and rich.

I'm scared of proposing certain things to my partner, because talking about them presupposes other stuff, like the assumption that I just want to fuck other people and that's it. I'm afraid of my partner's reaction. So, I have put myself in a comfortable position and I let her take the initiative, because I know she also wants something similar. We have made progress on the matter, but very slowly. Now the question is how to make it happen. For me it's easier to build affective networks. I think I'm emotionally more protected, stable or armoured, I don't know how to say it. It doesn't mean I'm not vulnerable, but given my life trajectory, which has to do with gender, I have more resources to be okay. I see gender roles very clearly in a lot of situations. For example, in the way men and women are positioned regarding jealousy and other type of feelings that have to do with security or lack thereof.

Having a feminist partner is a necessary mess. Look at the things we're always talking about, all the time I'm contesting everything, every day. I don't want to play the martyr, but it has made me understand a lot of things that I would have never understood if it wasn't for her. At the same time, it's a permanent confrontation of how I do things, how I move in life and in my relationships. It's about confronting privileges, the way I practice sexuality, how I relate with other people. To counter my privileges, what I try and support every project my partner has, and they're good projects, it's not just because it's her. For me, her ideas always go first, and I try to make my work align to what she's generating in the feminist space. I feel great admiration for her. She stimulates me a lot, sexually, intellectually, and creatively. It is very stimulating to be together and produce things together, even though sometimes it's hard to be on the same page. I try to be attentive and to listen, to ask her about her projects and how she's going. Our projects give meaning to my life. It might sound silly but, in this moment, I assume my mission in life is

to support the projects she is generating. Because I like them, I have a good time and I trust her, a lot.

I would define the relationship as bipolar, like being in a seesaw. We have a lot of very good moments and all of the sudden a moment of distrust, insecurity, jealousy or conflict. But I've been learning to solve them. If at any point I feel attacked in any fight or discussion, I end the conversation and walk away until things cool down. But I don't cling to that. I try to handle conflicts by taking time and distance, and there have been positive changes in that aspect.

When we started the relationship, I didn't think I was coming into a parent dynamic with my partner's child. It was more like we were coming into a relationship the three of us, and I would commit to take care of them, not as my child but as someone that had certain needs given their age. I wonder why it was so easy for me to insert myself in this fatherly dynamic of adoption, friendship and care. Maybe because I was so in love with my partner, maybe I also had a fatherly desire, which is ingrained in the culture and it has to do with power or narcissism, who knows. Being a father has radically changed my life, because taking care of someone is a very heavy experience. Of course, it was way more relaxed for me, since I wasn't part of their early upbringing; most of the work was already done.

I think the relationship with my [partner's] child drifts away from the traditionally paternal, because we have a closeness that is not authoritarian at all. We want to be coherent with generating other types of relationships that are more horizontal. I just enjoy my time with them. I almost never give them orders; I haven't done it in ages because I feel it's not my place to do so. I really like this kind of fatherhood where our ages are closer together. Now I need to keep supporting them and have their mother take less care of them because she already did it for so long. The coolest thing that has happened in my life is to spend time with my child and laugh together. These are precisely

the nice stuff that makes people want to have kids: caring for a person with whom you learn so much. However, the father-child relationship is very conflictive, it's something that I'm just learning to solve now, and I don't know which way to go. I used to think that I had to take sides, and in my own family I learnt that it meant taking the side of my partner. I haven't always done it and it has been conflictive, because I either betray one alliance or I betray the other. You learn a lot, although it can be excruciating. Fatherhood didn't mean relinquishing my personal time, given the age of my child. However, my personal time changed completely with my partner. I do all the things I like; it's just that a lot of the times, those things I like are mediated by our agreements. Our leisure activities at home are always together, so my personal time is shaped by our shared time.

Tizoc, 26: "*We are three in the relationship*"

Structure and Agency

My parents expected their kids would form traditional families. Although they didn't say anything when I moved out of their house to go live with my partner, for my sister it was more difficult; she has had more pressure to get married. There is a clear clash between the traditional and the new family. My mom saw my dad's mother as someone very submissive in her marriage. My mother is not as submissive[17]; however, my dad has a very explosive temper. My dad used to work all day and he's always been proud of it. My mom has always done all the housework; she is also a jack-of-all-trades, like me. Deep inside, my dad is very emotional but, on the outside, he is a robot. That's why he explodes: he doesn't know how to deal with it. As a result, my mom developed an "*I don't care*" attitude, which in turn creates a lot of doubts and conflicts in me, for I've realised I also reproduce that "*I don't care*" attitude because of the explosive character of my partner. However, the difference is that we do talk about it afterwards.

We have been living together for some years now. She has a kid[18]. At the beginning, neither she nor me saw each other as a potential partner; rather, we just got together to keep each other company, because neither of us could go out partying. But at some point, it became something else and now we are a family. We've convinced ourselves that it has come to be something. We have a normal relationship in terms of it being heterosexual and us having a kid; but come on, we're not married, we don't intend to get married[19] and we don't want another kid. We've struggled with all the criticisms about whether we are a family or not, just because we're not married[20]. We have had a lot of doubts regarding if

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[17] Having read this, now I would say she does seem more submissive to me.

[18] *We* have a kid.

[19] As time progresses, the idea of getting married becomes more and more tangible. Maybe it's just because we want to have the party.

[20] This still happens a lot.

this was going somewhere or when should we put titles to our relationship. However, the kid is who has taken the lead on how to go about it and it is the kid who has had the final say. The kid also has a lot of influence in the decision of staying together; we have always put him first, even before us. At the beginning of our relationship, we tried to give each other space, so that the kid wouldn't become attached with me or with the idea of the three of us, but now it's a done deal.

We don't need to get married; why do we need a paper for this to be serious? If we have a stable relationship and we have built a lot of things. It's a hassle to keep explaining our posture to people. Because when someone questions your relationship, they also unfold the idea of "*This is how it should be. Why are you not doing it as it should be?*" From these questions, I have shaped what I want and don't want in relationships. Right now, we think that if there isn't a practical and economic benefit, it doesn't make sense to legalise our practices of love. We already live like we're married anyway: we share expenses, we live together, share a kid and responsibilities. *We are married*. There is also the issue of why we don't want another kid; because I'm thinking of having a vasectomy and when we talk about it with others, they question us a lot. As if that means we're selfish and we don't love my partner's kid. It would seem like everyone has a problem with it, except us.

My role with my partner's kid is very complicated. My partner's parents have been defensive about whether our relationship is going to work. I feel that I'm constantly being judged. My partner tells me that they're afraid the kid will be a fatherless kid. But I'm like: "*I'm here. Why are they still thinking he's a fatherless kid? What else do they want?*" On the other hand, we have started to see this relationship as adults; we watch what we say in front of the kid. He once asked her mom: "*I don't have a father, right?*" and she answered that his father could be whomever he wants it to be, so he concluded that I am his father. Not long ago, I wrote him a letter that was for a school assignment. It was very hard for me, to be honest. In the letter I told him that, even though parents are taken for granted in the sense that you don't pick them, at least he and I did have the chance to

choose and we keep choosing each other. At the end of the letter I say that, as long as he wants me to be here, I will remain here. It's difficult to find the middle ground when defining to what extent I'm a father and to what extent I'm still myself; or even to think if those two can be mixed but separated. From that position, I consider myself as an authority figure and responsible for his upbringing. I still cannot position myself as someone right beside my partner, but I'm also not right beside the kid. I play just in the middle. Sometimes it seems like we are more friends than father and son but, of course, I have to educate him, and I do feel responsibility. Even though it's very time consuming, I do want to share my time and space, not because I must.[21]

My partner and I have started to see this as a long-term relationship. Thanks to the conflicts we've had, we realised that, although the door is always open, now it's not so easy to say, "*I'm out*". It has helped us to think of ourselves as a family, even more so for the kid, because we can't be playing around with his feelings. The responsibility has grown as we have realised that we are three in the relationship. I struggle, because we still can't succeed in having an economic safety net, in case the kid gets sick or something.

Money plays a very important role. Her parents still send her money and the house in which we live in is theirs as well. That's why, before I got a steady job, I was a jack-of-all-trades. I tried to compensate that economic part with domestic work. Now that I have a steady and demanding job, I have noticed changes in my partner. For instance, we used to divide taking care of the kid by half, and now she does it more. She has started to appropriate the tasks that were shared before. Given that I'm outside the house so much, I don't do much housework, and the few times I do, I get rewarded. We're now in a moment of economic stability. I tell her that she shouldn't ask her parents for money, so we can start to become more independent. I don't like that she does that, because then I

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[21] It's important to add that both her family and mine have struggled to understand and to get on board with the dynamic that we as a couple are building little by little. I mean, sometimes we don't even know what lines to draw and which to erase. And on top of that, our families have to adapt to it. For instance, who are the grandparents? How do we judge the level of acceptance? How do we judge certain actions? And so on.

feel we're not doing it right. I also don't like that they tell her that I'm not providing enough money for her.

Right now it would seem that we're reproducing traditional roles: I go out to work and she stays home. At least in the economic system that we live in, you cannot have an egalitarian relationship where you divide everything fifty-fifty; I mean, if we both worked six hours a day it would be very complicated, and we would earn less. On the contrary, I do think we can have an equitable relationship, in the sense that we negotiate the things we want to do. However, if I wanted to spend more time with the kid, we would need to find another form of economic support, someone would have to compensate; in this case, she would have to work and I think she's not ready yet, because she says she doesn't have work experience, she wouldn't be good at it and so on. As time passes, I'm focusing more on my professional work and she is falling behind. She doesn't want her kid to be a day-care child either, and I understand that. The relation of time and money is very tricky. Currently, I'm the one that works, but if at one point she would like to, that's fine by me. I could easily stay home with the kid. Of course, I say this without knowing, because I've never dedicated myself fully to the house.

My partner says I have a big problem with expectations, and she's right. Regarding family, partner, money, future; everything functions based on expectations and imaginary. I don't think expectations are avoidable, but I do realise the more aware I become of the expectations I try to fulfil or that I want her to fulfil, the more I can try to push them away. For instance, I wanted for my partner to get along with my family, and the fact that she's had issues with some of my relatives was a conflict for me. I was taught that your partner was supposed to accompany you to family reunions. It's been a little difficult for me to break away from that paradigm, because sometimes she doesn't want to go to reunions or she feels uncomfortable, but now I take it more lightly. I come from a big family and she comes from a small one. The notion that you also marry your partner's family is a huge issue, because they bring with them their traditions, which are not always the same.

In that way, trying to find common grounds becomes one of the biggest challenges in a relationship.

I've learnt a lot about relationships by listening and observing my friend's relationships. The telly was also a big influence. I hate *Friends*, because of the expectations it set. I was always impressed in the series, how the characters had conflicts and were mature enough to keep having a relationship nonetheless. Then you realise life is not like that at all. If every heterosexual relationship followed the "*manual*" word by word, they would explode. There are so many discourses that construct the truth of how a relationship should be, that it becomes impossible to follow them all; they even contradict themselves! I still fall into the idea of what a relationship should be; I know it's a problem, but I can't help it because it's very hard to change such rooted behaviours. By being in a long-term relationship, I understood that this 'truth' about relationships doesn't exist, nor am I going to have a movie-like relationship. We both bring different expectations of how things should be, but at the end of the day, we are creating a new one.

There are certain expectations that can be destroyed, because it is not desirable to fulfil them. Some of them are very interiorised and bring me a lot of conflict; within masculinity, for instance, the fact that I must be the economic support for the family. It frightens me to think a scenario where we won't have enough money, because I think that I should be able to provide. That's one of the reasons why my schedule is full and I have tons of jobs. On the other hand, [working hard] gives me a lot of tranquillity. In this sense, expectations around fatherhood have to do with being the economic support, a jack-of-all-trades and on top of that, spending time with the kid. It's very tiring, trying to do it all at once, like we were superheroes. Because of the role I play, coming into a life and trying to be someone's non-biological father, there is even a bigger expectation of having to do a little extra, to convince everyone that I really love this kid. The fact that he's not mine is always a matter of judgement.

We have talked about what would happen if we split up. I would have to carry the prejudices of people saying I abandoned them. She says it would be the other way around, that people would say she didn't appreciate me. Some people see my role as if I were helping her, until someone else says, "*no way, that's his obligation*". I think that's another privilege, the fact that I get applause while she gets condemned. One time, a guy even told me that I shouldn't say the kid is my son because that would be enough for her to demand child support, which is of course a stupid thing to say.

I do define myself as a man, even though I don't love it. I realise it's not cool, but right now I define myself this way because I haven't found another category that I like. It brings many expectations and it creates a bubble that, when someone makes it visible, it's horrible and makes you realise it's not what you thought it was. That reality punch is not cool, because it worries me to think that some of the things I've done have seriously affected other people and I haven't realised it, because I'm a man. Before, I was in a little world where we talked about feminism and gender and everyone thought alike, but when you get out of those spaces it becomes difficult. For instance, the first thing men talk about is women's bodies, always. Therefore, when you arrive in those circles but you're already in another frequency, it makes it hard to build relationships. With my friends, at the beginning there were a lot of clashes and discussions. They got tired of me because nobody wants to admit they are sexists. Later, we reached a period of stability in which there were certain things they knew made me uncomfortable, and others that I had to let slide.

A very male thing to say is: "*whatever*" "*I don't care*" "*let it flow*". Being a man gives you the possibility not to care, to be passive, to have the capacity of saying, "*fuck this*". It might sound weird but, the more I think about my masculinity, the less comfortable I feel in groups of men, because I struggle to coincide with certain ideas. However, there are things I cannot get rid of, like the notion of the superman that revolves around the "*me, me, me*". Also, when we don't manage to be okay economically, I question my masculinity.

The Achilles heel of my masculinity would be if my partner questioned my masculinity in front of other people.

Sometimes, at university, I noticed that my voice was worth more, and not because I'd read more or was smarter; people listened to me, even if I talked rubbish. My word is stronger. Also, I don't get questioned about the way I do things, or at least I don't feel questioned, which allows me to do whatever I want. The clearest gesture through which I can see gender roles is helpfulness. Men are inconsiderate, we don't care for the other; it doesn't come naturally to us. Someone has to explicitly ask for our help for us to do it, whereas women take initiative themselves. There is also a lack of caring for the other; sometimes I just think of myself, while my partner thinks of herself, her son and me.

Groups of men always glorify themselves; until a woman comes near, then all of them go after her like wolves. From my experience, in a group of men, there will never be a female friend; there is always someone that wants to have sex with her. Even mixed groups are divided, even though they coincide in certain events. I came to a point in which I got tired of always listening to men talk about how much alcohol they drank at parties. Also, every party was about talking shit of past relationships; talking about women like, "*are you fucking that?*" all in the context of drunkenness. We are taught that in the heterosexual hook-up, the first contact must always come from the man and the woman is who decides whether to continue or not. I don't like it, nor I fully understand these terms of war and conquest. How do you know when you have 'gotten' someone? It even sounds as if you are deceiving the other person, as if you played your cards right and knew how to manipulate them.

Different Worlds

The moments that fulfil me the most are when my partner and I manage to find that complicity of laughing together, of things working out and the day flows. Because we are

very much alike, we share a lot of things, but we also come from different worlds. One of the main problems of these different worlds has to do with the fact that she is very obsessive with punctuality and schedules, and I am too flexible. Now I realise that if that is important to her, I should make it important to me. We have learned a lot from each other. Another difference is that she's used to a higher economic status; in that sense, she struggles with house chores, and sometimes I feel that I do more. That has brought some conflicts. In my whole family, the male figure always calls the shots. With us is not like that, she carries the baton in terms of relations of power, and I think it has to do with her stronger character. Same with my friend's relationships, women usually have the last word.

Sometimes it seems that her kid plays a flatmate role in the house. The one who reprimands the kid is the mom. I tell the kid: "*do you want me to tell mom?*" because I don't like to reprimand, it tires me a lot. If she likes to reprimand, go for it, but I'm not going to do it. Talking about hierarchy with the kid, she is the boss. Sometimes I just flow and go with it because it's easier; I let her decide and yes, it's more comfortable. It's a good relationship for both of us; because the kid is happy and he's doing well with us. Besides, she has become a little more relaxed. It's a fun relationship and I feel comfortable in it. Of course, we still have a lot of problems and I think it's because we come from different worlds, which incidentally is also one of the things that keeps us together.

I like that I've found a critical person with a strong character. Sometimes I do suffer though, if the critiques are too rough and I was expecting something demurer; however, it has helped me a lot. The three of us have adapted well to walking together. I'm more of the passive type, and she doesn't love that I'm like that sometimes; however, she doesn't like to be the dominant either, as if by me being passive, she would have to be the bitch; but I don't think it's like that. She thinks I do a lot of things with premeditation, like analytically; but sometimes I see myself as more impulsive. The way she sees me is not the same way I see myself in the relationship. She has a more Americanised style of seeing the

world, which is a colder one; but I have the classic Mexican style, warmer, of having to be close to one's partner. I think we have found a middle ground. Sometimes I feel that there's an expectation to achieve the socioeconomic level to which she's used to; hence, I try to get jobs and be constantly moving. However, she doesn't like that I'm away from home all day because we see each other little. She's very jealous of that time. I try to clear my weekends to be with them, although she doesn't take that into account when she goes out with her friends. It seems that there is some coherence missing.

Whenever there's a social event with my friends, it would seem like there's this game to see who dominates whom within each couple. It's very difficult to socialise with other people as a couple because you end up playing this game of domination. For instance, at the beginning, my friends used to say to my partner: "*thanks for bringing him*" or "*thanks for letting him come*". Even though it wasn't our game, it came from all around us. So now, each one of us goes out with our friends and that's the agreement. It's very difficult to create agreements; it's a tug-of-war even though you don't want to do it, but it's necessary just for being in a relationship and living with someone else. Another discourse that people say is that you must match all your likes with your partner's likes, but that's impossible.

Given that the kid is also in the relationship, sometimes people tell her that it's so good I'm with her and so on; that makes her feel as if I'm the perfect one and she's the mean one. Several problems arise from that, and more so when other people point it out. It's a conflict for me because I tell her that she doesn't have to put herself in the role of the bad one. It would seem, nonetheless, that sometimes she provokes it herself.

Common Ground

There are many things that we have to negotiate constantly: about the things we're used to doing separately and what we're going to do as a couple, from the simplest decisions to

everyday aspects. The biggest challenge is to find common ground. If you don't have enough patience, or that day you're not in the mood to negotiate, it can evolve into a problem. At least now we're more stable, but the first six months were chaos, even more so when emotions were involved. Before, when we had any conflict, I used to be more present and tried to solve it, until I understood that she didn't work like that. On the contrary, it created more problems. Now I wait until she's not mad anymore, even though it's hard for me. However, she feels as if I put a crystal glass around her and disappear, as if I am the one that dominates those situations; but I feel more like the passive one. I keep a lot to myself, so I don't create conflicts, but sometimes when I get tired of it, I explode. It has also happened that when I'm straightforward she gets defensive. Although we have tried to open the channel of communication as much as we can, sometimes it's difficult because we tend to be very intense.

Passivity has created many struggles for me; although I don't think I'm that passive, she thinks of me as somehow passive-aggressive, as if I was playing with her mind. Nonetheless, at the beginning, she asked me to back off and let her solve whatever it was by herself. Now I keep quiet, I calm down, let it pass and talk about it afterwards. Maybe I do play this passivity strategically sometimes, though it doesn't always work. I know that there are problems that are best to talk about in the moment, which is ironic because I can do it everywhere else except in my relationship. I struggle to find moments to talk about things, which is silly because at the end it becomes a bigger conflict. In the last fight we had, we agreed that if either of us decided to get off the train [the relationship], the other wasn't going to insist or try to convince them not to. Knowing that either one of us, at any moment, can say "*no*" to the relationship, and knowing that after saying "*no*" there's no turning back, makes us a more stable relationship. We're not going to break up or jump ship for any dumb problem. That has helped us think of ourselves as a family.

Every time she goes out of town, I'm not texting her constantly, neither does she. That allows us to focus more on our own stuff, to continue with our lives and to not be

checking in with the other. It has even worked as an escape valve, because the things we hate about the other tone down a little. We don't share everything, and I don't have a problem with that, however I do think there's a difference between not sharing and not being transparent. If there's something I'm deliberately not saying because I know it's wrong, that's a problem. However, it's not desirable to share everything, and it has to do with privacy, and because then the relationship becomes really tedious: It is difficult to talk about new things if you haven't created individual memories. I once asked a polyamorous friend how he managed his time, if I couldn't even do it with one partner. He told me that in polyamorous relationships, your personal time is also important, you are also a participant that needs time given. That helped me to start thinking about my own time, even though during the day is very difficult. I try to get alone time but it's impossible, at least while being inside the house. It's very necessary to find spaces of leisure for each one. Whenever I see friends in relationships where they have time to read, for example, my only explanation of how they can achieve it is because they don't have kids.

Regarding relationships, the clearest thing I can say right now is that it's about two people that in a given moment decide to share time and space together, but they are still two separate persons. You cannot homogenise two lives into one. Problems come when you try to do that. For instance, the moment I realised that my desire for her to be more involved with my family was a whim, that it didn't have to be like that, in that moment a huge expectation shattered, and it gave me a lot of peace and calm. My relationship with my family is one thing and my relationship with her is another. We reached an agreement and that problem got solved. Another recurring problem is that I don't give enough importance to what she considers a nuisance. Time management, schedules and structure: those are the most common problems.

Monogamy and Desire

In a monogamous relationship, it's a challenge to find that "*let's get to know each othe*r" vibe again. To realise we don't know each other completely even though we live together, it is necessary that we both have private spaces. It frightens me that we would come to experience the longing of when we were fifteen, because it would seem there's some nostalgia for our adolescence and for how our life used to be. I don't want to reach 30 or 35 and regret having a monogamous relationship at 21. A while ago we talked about opening the relationship a little bit, but she thinks we don't need it right now. I'm not sure if she thinks at one point we're going to get tired of each other and then we would have to open the relationship to regain new desires. We've even tried to set rules of what monogamy is and what it isn't. She says that flirting is okay, I agree, as long as it doesn't evolve into something intense.[22]

One time we almost broke up. She was texting a man, with whom she had had a thing in the past, and she didn't tell me, so when I found out it was a big deal. I got very angry because I felt that she was hiding something from me. It was a clash in which each of us wanted to see who could push the hardest. We put our cards on the table regarding other possible people we could cheat with. At the beginning of our relationship, whenever she went on trips outside the city, I wasn't sure if there was something going on and vice versa. Until I got tired of having a knot in my stomach and I left it at peace for my own sake. It's weird because, even though we both trust each other, is not like we trust each other fully. We still doubt if the other is being monogamous. To be honest, I used to be more jealous than I am now; I used to feel as if she was cheating on me. The most terrible thing about cheating, what hurt me the most, was imagining that everyone knew and talked about something I didn't know. So, I forced myself to ask about and listen to her past relationships, and what she liked and didn't like about them. If there was a conversation regarding someone I was jealous of, I tried to dig deeper. Of course, my stomach was a knot, but little by little I realised that it didn't have to be like that: if she

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[22] At the moment, the agreement we have is that we can kiss or maybe do more with other people. She doesn't want to find out if I do, though, whereas I told her that I would like to know if she does it. The agreement for both of us is that there shouldn't be feelings involved. We have been talking about this.

wants to do something, she should, I can't control her or worry about that. I don't have a problem now, I even think it's comfortable to know there are things that I'm not good at or I don't like, that my partner can enjoy with someone else. Several times we have talked about what we can and cannot do.

People get surprised because we go out separately, with whom we want and where we want to.[23] When we first started as a couple, I used to ask her permission to go out, and she would tell me, "*why are you asking me, if I'm not going to ask you?*" and it´s because I had a very interiorised way of thinking about relationships as a ball and chain, as police. Something cool about monogamy and desire is that we can talk openly about the people we feel physically attracted to. We realise what the other likes, which doesn't mean that you want to leave your partner, it's more like a way to tranquilise the jealousy of monogamy. We talk about our sex life as well, but we still have taboos, there are still things left in silence. We talk about our fantasies, we make clear what our desires are, and we take it from there. However, the *"how's"* are still taboo; the *"what"* has been established, it's in the *"how"* that we lose communication. Because there's also this idea that you're supposed to be a wizard and you must get it right; that it's better if you don't ask what your partner likes because if you say it, it's not as seductive and as cool. It's a problem to expect the other to do something you want without communicating. We do have expectations around sex, but they are not very clear. For example, if I want to have sex, the expectation is that you want to as well; but that doesn't always happen. Then, the person that wanted [sex] feels bad and the other feels bad as well because they have been there before. There is a kind of guilt around it.

I can say that my desire is directed towards women, but don't ask me why because I have no idea. I believe heterosexuality is taken by default; it's the first thing people say you're supposed to be, and you just let yourself float until you arrive at the dock of

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[23] Sometimes, when we go out together to parties where there are common friends, we spend most of the night separated, each one talking with different friends. We think that is very comfortable.

heterosexuality. Besides, there are certain traits that have been so consumed, that at least from my part, I can no longer consider them unattractive. Like a soft skin, soft gestures, small height, hips, breasts and so on. But if I had to answer why, I would say because it's by default. It's hard to break apart from the absurd imaginary I have of feminine beauty. Sometimes I've asked myself if I would kiss a man, but then I imagine strong odours, raspy hands, body hair; I wouldn't like to feel another beard. But what would happen if I find a man that doesn't have those characteristics? It is not something that I'm actively looking for though. I'm not going around searching for men that fulfil certain characteristics, and mainly because I'm in a heterosexual relationship.

Yumil, 32: *"You fly faster alone, but you fly further together"*

(Before the breakup)

Trajectories

I had a lot of issues when we met. I was in a confusing stage in my life and that implied some insecurity on my part, because I wasn't offering her anything concrete. At the same time, she was putting up a strong barrier because she knew that if she opened herself up to me, this was going to be something important. I see myself as the responsible one, in the sense that I'm more or less clear as to where I'm going, with or without her. Accomplishing my objective is my responsibility, which is building my own space, and somehow, I invite my partner to walk with me towards that goal. Sometimes I feel scared when I ask myself if I should be in a relationship. You fly faster alone, but you fly further together. Anyway, I try not to think about it a lot, because I'm with her and I want to do things right. We do walk together towards a same goal, but she gets too distracted. Right now, I don't have time for silliness, so I'm constantly inviting her to focus, because if we focus we can build something cool. I invite her into what I know, in a subtle way, but I do have the goal that she learns things while being with me. I demand certain things, certain ways of doing, and that exigency invites her to know my own ways. It's hard enough to stay focused by yourself; in a relationship it becomes even more difficult. It shouldn't be so hard to stay synchronised. However, it's a good relationship; is also an opportunity to learn from one self and to do things right.

She's a very curious person; she's always asking questions about everything, as if she didn't know anything, as if she was a kid looking for answers. I like that, I think it's sweet, because she really does seem like a little girl asking questions. She is very demanding, she likes things a certain way. She's stubborn as well, but at the same time, she never demands something without offering it, she's fair in that sense. She's respectful; she lets

people be. She's very proud of herself, her family, her past, her ways, her region. She's also proud in a vain way, which complicates her life: because of her pride, she misses on things that could help her, in her job for instance. At the same time, pride makes her repress her feelings; if she gets angry with me, it can last for three, four or five days. She cannot understand and she's astonished by the shitty world we live in. Because she comes from a cool united family, where they talk about their problems, there are a lot of things she doesn't understand. She's not empathetic; she cannot put herself in anyone's shoes. She just started working but her parents still support her, so she struggles with her finances and it's getting harder and harder for her to maintain her lifestyle. I've assumed the task of reminding her not to spend her money on stupidities. She's very outgoing. She likes to be known, because she's vain. She loves to say that she knows people and places, to move around constantly, to be at every party. She also has a lot of fears; she's afraid of what people think of her, once you get to know her you realise she's very insecure. It's funny because I'm the opposite, I couldn't give a shit what people think of me, but for her it's very important to be liked.

Whenever we fight, I tell her that if she's going to be upset for so long it's going to work out wrong, and it has to do with her pride. We've been together for two and a half years and, in that time, she has identified when that happens to her; but she struggles, she keeps her feelings to herself a lot. She's cold; she doesn't express a lot of affection. In all this time, she's never said, "*I love you*". One time she said it, but she was drunk. It's like if by expressing it, she became vulnerable. She's afraid to open herself up to the feeling of love, so everything's always rationalised. I'm constantly pressuring her to let me in, because I'm someone who likes physical, emotional and spiritual contact.

I also receive a lot from her, I learn a lot. She demands a lot of communication and I struggle with that, especially when it comes to relationship talks. It's hard for me to talk about things without getting mad, without exploding or without telling her to *"fuck off"*. Our main problems are because of my character and her pride: when we fight I feel like

walking away, because she stays angry for hours on end for the slightest things. On the other side, when I get angry I lose my mind and can't communicate correctly.

When you're in a relationship you think together. If we are together it's because we're going to the same place, we are learning and walking together. As far as I can tell, our goals match; we are in-sync at this stage of construction. The way I feel in my relationship is confusing. I feel good, I like sharing, but sometimes I would like to be alone. About a month ago we broke up, we stayed separated for like two weeks and then we got back together. We talked a lot during that time and we reached the conclusion that we didn't hurt each other; that was important. There wasn't anything to complain about, there weren't any hard or ugly feelings. It was sad, obviously, but it was like a cool sadness, we were satisfied somehow; we always supported each other. However, it was confusing because I was going through a rough path with my dad. We just got stuck; without realising it, our creativity ran out. She stopped doing her things and I stopped doing mine, it was very sad. But we readjusted, and it has been great since then. It's cool to do an analysis of the relationship and decide to stick together.

In my first relationship I got hurt. It took me a long time to realise that, in order to have a relationship again and to commit, I would have to overcome that fear: fear of being lied to and getting hurt. But if you want a relationship you must commit to it, you can't half-ass it. That´s the key: having the wisdom to identify and overcome. Nobody is indispensable in life and you have to learn that. For a long time, I had decided I wasn't going to have a girlfriend until I found one that really wanted to be with me, as my first girlfriend did; that was until I ran into someone I really wanted to be with. My current partner has a lot to offer, even though I'm at risk of getting hurt, I'm aware of that and I assume the risk. Usually, you assimilate the learning until after the experience; so, if at some point my partner and I break up, I think I'm going to have a rush knowing I made the best of this relationship.

Masculine Desire

I had another important relationship before this one. It was in high school when everything materialised; she was the one that went after me. In a way, she won me over and she wanted me to be part of her life. But for me, my priority back then was to party and meet other pussies, because I was awakening sexually. On the other hand, with my current partner it was completely different. I was the one that had to go after her for a long time; she rejected me and then I rejected her, then we got back together and so on. At the end, I was the one that had to materialise this relationship.

She makes me work for it [referring to affective and sexual practices], just to make a point, just so I know that it's not going to be easy. The fucker made it so difficult for me during our whole going-out stage. Like "*you want it? Then work for it!*" and sometimes that has brought her problems. We've talked about that stage when we started going out, the whole "*yes but no, no but yes*" stage. Sometimes if I hug her, she pushes me away. It's a conflict because I really like kissing; it's so good! But she can't do it because then she starts to feel, and she doesn't like to feel; she's weird like that. Last time we broke up it was so weird; her reason was that "*in strict terms*" she had stopped loving me. Give me a fucking break! Or she wasn't sure if she loved me, which wasn't fair to me, hence, she had to leave me.

With some friends it's very easy to talk about my love life, with others I don't even touch on the subject and with some others we just talk about pussy, about fucking. It's different with every friend. In high school, when you talked about it, you wanted to sound like a boss and to emphasise how experienced you were, like "*I already touched pussy, I already did this and that*". There was a teenager pressure of competing about which one had done more stuff. I admit I was under this dynamic, but as soon as I had my first sexual experience, that didn't matter so much. Although, sometimes I did exaggerate what was happening, just to feel more badass in the eyes of others. I'm someone that expresses

desire a lot. For instance, I have some clients that are really hot, and I do express it with my friends, like, "*if I didn't have a girlfriend, I would do this and that*", which at the end of the day it's not true, it's not even worth thinking about it, but I do express my lust a lot. I'm sexual, I'm horny and I like looking at women. When I'm walking down the street, I do give them a look; it's a way of expressing it, of always being horny. I don't talk to them, obviously, but I do express a desire always. Sometimes it discomforts me, but anyway.

I define myself as a man because, well, I'm a man, am I not? My penis says it all. I have a beard, my voice is deep, my hormones are different; I ejaculate. Hormones and physique: that's what define me as a man. Also, the desire to penetrate instead of being penetrated; although that doesn't define the male sex, but maybe male biology is more directed towards penetrating rather than being penetrated. I'm a man and that's it. But I don't really define myself. Right now, I give more value to what I still have to discover, sexually speaking, than to what I already know. I feel that what I know is just the tip of the iceberg, I feel that I don't know anything and I want everything.

Gender Expression

To keep myself in this relationship, I've had to learn to think before I speak, before I express my bitterness and release the venom. It has been difficult to express what bothers me, what I want and what I don't in a peaceful and calm way. Because, generally speaking, I could say I'm very aggressive.

Feminine energy, a woman's energy, reaches certain things, fills certain spaces and has a certain shape: care, sensitivity, sentiment and so on. Whereas male energy is different: strength, protection, security. To define roles in your head is a stupid thing; but to accept the role of each person according to their development or their particularities, is what matters. Women can be players and men can be tender or whatever, each person is different. There are gender role differences nonetheless, however there are not defined

but subtle; personality, history and personal past weights in. For instance, my partner is very feminine and I'm very masculine.

Regarding my relationship, the difference could be in the forms: body cream for her and rough skin for me; the way I don't take care of things; the fact that I don't care how I look and she's always so groomed and so pretty and everything's so clean. Could be cultural or gender related factors, I don't know. I don't think equality ever happens, I think that expecting total equality is utopic. On the other hand, to think about equality in the sense that everyone can do whatever they want as long as they respect the terms of the relationship and the other person, that´s attainable. But that goes for everyone, not just the partner. I do believe there should be equal opportunities in which everyone can do whatever they want. I'm never going to tell my partner to do this or that; I'm going to ask her not to be a dick and to focus, but that's communication, not inequality. Equality is an intangible concept. I don't think it exists, as you can observe. There's always going to be someone with more strength, not just physical but also energetic or spiritual. There are different personalities, people with a lot of power, people with little power, submissive people: how can there be equality!

Fatherhood

Fatherhood is something super serious and it's taken so lightly, like a fucking protocol. Everyone is so dumb; they don't know what it means to have children. It pisses me off because people say it's the best experience and that you won't know what true love is until you have a kid. Shut the fuck up, you don't know what you're talking about. For me, having a kid is an expression of ego. I've heard people say that if you don't have children you're selfish, which it's stupid, I think it's the other way around. Having children is the most selfish thing you can do if you don't do it rationally and consciously. I have more respect for people that have children by accident than for those who get married and then have a dumbass family. I do have expectations about it, though; I want to see how I would

behave as a father; see how freely my kid could grow. I have an opportunity to do right where my family fucked up. At the very least, I would like to adopt someone, if I have money and a good life: to make cool children, to do my job in the world and fix two or three people. That I would like. Yes, I would definitely like to be a father; I'm going to be.

In my case, the biggest difficulty I see about being a parent is to convey an objective way of seeing life, to prepare the kid for this shitty but endearing world. Another difficulty is the emotional part, that's a brutal and savage issue. How much can you teach them without affecting them emotionally? How much can you teach them, but at the same time allowing them to develop freely without putting an emotional weight on them? In that aspect, my dogs have taught me a lot. If I ever have children, they'll have a lot to thank my dogs for. With my second dog, I completely eliminated violence; my first one was educated with a strong load of violence, which he absorbed. It hurts me a lot to see that when I get too intense, my dog goes to a corner and shrinks.

With my parents I absorbed a lot of violence and I ignored a lot of things. That shaped me somehow, I'm almost thankful because that made me work to understand the absence or presence of certain hurtful factors, and to have the possibility to repair the damage, by myself, with my own balls. It's a cool opportunity, even though it's hard. Regardless, I would love to be a father. Now that I'm struggling with my dad a lot and he's in a bad place personally, I feel that I'm learning a lot about myself, about my past, my ancestors and my family who are fucking shit and about all the resentment I have towards them. I feel that all this learning is an opportunity for me to do better.

(**After the Breakup**)

Trajectories

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So, I'm going through fucking hell. I broke up with my partner and I don't know, I'm going through fucking hell. When we broke up, I was falling down a dark hole and I didn't realise until it was too late. I couldn't handle that conflict positively and now I'm living the consequences. It's all about expressing what you feel, because conflict comes more from emotions than from reason. I was always trying to help my partner, to take care of her and to advise her. I think where I failed was not in the intention but in the way. I was very rude, strict and demanding; which is very much my style. I used to tell her off because her attention wasn't where it was supposed to be. I didn't take care of her in a subtle and proper manner; I didn't have the wisdom to identify the correct way to do it, so it could be helpful and not a reprimand.

Deep down, when I'm in a relationship I try not to have any change, to keep being myself and to do the same things. I want to know the other person's world but stay whole. When I'm single, I use my time as I please, for better or for worse. When you're in a relationship, you lose contact with certain people; you don't see your friends that often. However, one thing I would change about myself is my apprehension. My job and my personal situation stress me, which weighs on me a lot and that weight becomes a heavy energy that ends up weighing on my partner. I would like to see things in a more optimistic, more cheerful manner, and not to get stuck in my problems. To flow more easily, to relax, have fun and prioritise the pretty things in life. Because the two important relationships I've had, ended for that reason. Context weighs on me, and I just get bitter and freeze. As a result, my partner tends to look for something else; no one wants to have that [bitterness] in their lives.

I believe a big challenge is to recognise where you start and the other one ends. To recognise how does your context, your problems and all your issues damage the relationship. I don't want to have a relationship just because, on the contrary, if I'm single I want to make the most of it and seize the time to build my business and my wellbeing, so I have something to offer somebody else.

Faithfulness is very important to me, in the sense of having the respect you deserve as a person. For example, my ex is very social and one time an asshole that worked with her asked her out, taking advantage of that work environment. She did go out with him, but if it was a work relationship, she wouldn't have needed to go out and mingle with her co-workers. You don't need to go out drinking and talk about life in general. I thought it was out of place, because she and I knew that this guy wanted something else. I strongly protested it. She said this connection could open doors for her, but I didn't think it was the right way and I felt disrespected. If you know the intentions of that person, why give him an entry so that he can turn the situation into something more? You don't do that. I would respect an unplanned one-night stand more than this whole innocent beer thing. That time we talked about it, she listened to me and said I was right; there was understanding. In this relationship, I wasn't jealous at all, with this dude it wasn't jealousy; she, on the other hand, was jealous. When I ended things with my first partner I learned that jealousy is within oneself and is fucked up. You deal with it by taking deep breaths and not letting it take you to toxic sides of your personality.

I could translate jealousy to fear and insecurity. Now that we recently broke up, I imagine her single and partying and my heart starts beating faster. It's a fear of thinking all those damn vultures circling around, fear that she meets someone better than me, who's more fit for her, who fucks her better than me. It's a fear of rejection and disadvantage. In the end, jealousy is for stupid, coward people. And I'm neither a coward nor stupid; I'm smart and brave. When my ex used to get jealous I had to put a limit on it. For example, one day we ran into another ex girlfriend and she got jealous because this girl was very affectionate with me. I told her to get her shit together, because I didn't have any control over what other women did.

Masculine Desire

I don't think I had more privileges in my relationship for being a man, on the contrary, nothing but trouble. She was the one with the privileges. What I do recognise in me was this sexist practice of dividing jobs. For instance, if something needed drilling I'd do it, because I'm the man. However, I've seen her drill, she doesn't do a good job but that's because she also comes from a world in which women don't perform those activities. We might have more privileges because we're men, but they are given by external sources. I realise women earn less but… I don't know. What I can assure you is that men are better drivers, definitively, which has to do with the fact that women didn't use to drive and now they do. However, I don't think I'm in direct contact with a tangible inequality, not really. I acknowledge I come from a sexist culture and I recognise several sexist habits in me, which are, for the most part, libidinous. I'm the guy that sees a girl pass by and… you know. For a while now, I've been thinking that I would like to be less obvious when I look, or to enjoy it differently, but I'm definitely one of those guys. We're used to enjoy looking, even though it doesn't make much sense. What the fuck do you get out of looking at an ass? Nothing, but I do it nonetheless. Sometimes I set myself rules, like: *"I'm going to enjoy everything that comes into my field of vision, but I'm not going to deviate my gaze in function of other asses."*

What I find attractive in women is everything! My favourite things are the eyes. I've always been someone women find attractive, and I love the look that girls give me, which is different to how men look. Men just look at the ass, whereas women always look at the eyes. I also like their movements, the way they move. I like their hair, always so groomed. How do they make it so pretty? I also like their scent and, after that, their tits and ass. There have been fags that have tried to pick me up, but I'm not interested. However, you never know. I've seen dudes that I would fuck, and I've kissed men before, although it was very lame; good thing they were beardless, though. I would never flirt with a guy, but if a guy knows how to pick me up, who knows? All my partners have been women, but I'm not closed to the possibility [of a homosexual encounter]. More accurately, I'm closed to the possibility until the contrary happens, because it really doesn't interest me.

For me, sex is super important. I don't know when I'm going to be with someone that makes me spin around; one day, I hope. That's one of my life's premises, to feel, to experiment, to levitate. I wouldn't like to miss out on that part of life. I want to know ecstasy. I have a female friend that's into S&M and I'm very curious about all that. I've always wanted to ask her if I could go to any of their reunions, to watch or whatever. I know that if I put myself in that situation I'm going to expand my view. I would be willing to cross a line, and it's because I do want to have a great sex life, whatever that implies. Both of my relationships were very similar: "*I want to. I want to. But let's take it easy*", and at the end, not much happened. It wasn't a conflict, because I always relied on the possibility that eventually it would develop, but it didn't. I never wanted to be incisive or to cross the line where I would make my partner uncomfortable. Now that we broke up, I know that if my ex meets another guy that really knows his shit, sexually speaking, she's going to open up. Because I'm not dominant in that sense, I don't have that security when it comes to performance, of saying "*this is how it's going to go down*". In my relationship, we used to talk about our performances and our intentions of what we wanted to do and learn but, in reality, our sex life was very flat, very normal. It had to do with our personalities. Especially at the end of our relationship, we talked a lot but did little, so we gradually stopped talking about it.

Gender Expression

I had to make my boundaries clear more than once. She used to complain about the way I managed my house, and I would tell her that, while it was okay for her to express her opinions, in my house things were like that and I did the best I could; if it wasn't as tidy as she would have liked, then she better not come visit. Same thing with her and her house, I didn't intrude in her stuff. I realise I was replicating some of the violent ways of communication that used to happen in my parents' relationship. I was also replicating a barrier, which the other person couldn't cross: not to listen to the other person sincerely,

taking for granted that the relationship was a certain way and my partner had to live with my problems.

My partner considered herself an empowered woman, but she did that by herself. She didn't define herself as a feminist, in fact, the last time I heard her talk about it, she said feminism had gotten a little out of hand. Regardless, I'm in this stage of analysing my sexism. I think feminism is a response to a disgusting, sexist and utilitarian culture. But there are extremes. It bothers me that now you see people that are only feminist because it's a trend, especially women. As a concept, feminism is cool, but in practice I think it polarises truths from lies and reality from fiction. Honestly, I can't be bothered. I just try not to treat people differently, that's it; but feminism is a foreign subject to me.

Fatherhood

The biggest problem in Mexico, when it comes to a couple's relationship model, is the definition of roles. Of course, it depends on social spheres and geographical areas. I believe that any tradition that involves roles is hurtful. I don't see myself reflected on that; I strive for individualism and self-discovery. The freer you are, the better you can develop. It's easier said than done, though. I come from a very sexist father who had very defined roles, which my mother broke. She never fell into the roles that dictated what a man and a woman should do.

My parents' generation grew up with the idea that the first step in a man's life was to finish school, the second one was to meet a woman and the third one was to get married and have children. In my case, I never had anyone to give me advise on personal relationships, but I've been lucky enough to realise that some things I grew up with aren't cool. I grew up in a family in which the expectation was that you only left home to get married. It's something I see nowadays with several friends. They make the jump from their parents' house to married life. From my experience and from other friends'

experiences, that's the worst thing you can do. I would never get married without having lived with my partner before, built and shared a physical, energetic and temporal space.

My parents' relationship was pathetic. They've been divorced for almost ten years now. It was a completely unconscious relationship, where no one knew what the fuck they were doing. My mom came from a fairy tale and my dad was a complete turd. He didn't have anything to offer, but my mom didn't have the opportunity to see that, because everything was already planned. She had this idea of what marriage was, and she got involved with the wrong person. This is what I'm saying: if I'm going to get involved with someone, I have to know who the person is.

I see my parents' relationship in terms of what not to do; they were each on their own path and there was never any learning between them. That's something I would like to modify in myself, to make my path malleable. I like the way in which my mom has made her money by herself, despite my dad. I think their final separation started there: when my mom stayed in her long-term job and became economically emancipated. Still after that, my mom fought to rescue the relationship, but it was just for her definition of a family as united, caring and so on. She had a lot of hope, but more on the emotional side, for her kids and not wanting the family project to fail[24].

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[24] It's funny to read myself in your narrative. I read it for a second time and I see it is a narrative and a study about my situation: pure ego. In general, everything I said comes from one of the parts that makes me who I am: the "man" part in a culture of machismo, living chaotic times, struggling to get by, and many factors that inhibit an objective, sober, practical and fair vision of the reality of gender. I say fair in the sense that sometimes it would seem as if I was trying to make me feel "better" or to justify this machismo that I hold inside me. This exercise has helped me to create a more rational way to see that machismo and its conditions in perspective, and to recognise that it exists. It is an individualistic narrative but very sincere nevertheless, it is as if I was reading a part of myself with which I don't want to feel identified. My enthusiasm for the study went down in this last stage, I felt unable of having an opinion about what I had written and to formulate conclusions around it.

It's not easy to change the perspective so that we, as civilization, can create a change in personal relationships, and this study is not separated from the progress and evolution of humankind. I write this thinking about the similarities that said process implies and the change that each of us would have to make in their own person, with introspection and choosing to behave differently. It's a collective psychological problem; and it's a fucking mess! In the midst of that chaos, I don't feel alien to my narrative. I think what I

didn't like was the way I expressed myself, but the content is analytical, from my perspective. I was expressing intimate feelings, you know?

In conclusion: for men, there are men and there are women; and for women, there are women and there are men. Within that range, there are millions of different possibilities where sensuality and sexuality are ever present; they are some of the most beautiful aspects in life. In the middle of all this, one struggles to not get lost and to find oneself. At the end of the day, we all seek shelter in the game of "love" and we all want a share of the nectar this world has to offer.

Extracts from the remaining four narratives

Balam, 33: "I feel in a state of transition"

Non-Exclusive Framework

I'd never been in an open relationship before. I've had lovers, but it was never spoken; I had never discussed the subject of non-exclusivity with my partners. Sometimes I don't know what to do or how to act regarding this circumstance. I do see other women but lately not as much. I want to, I fantasise and I flirt, but it's not like I'm constantly texting them and such. Before, I would have thought that if I were in an open relationship, I would be looking to have a new woman in bed every day. I am still sexual and horny, but I don't feel desperate looking everywhere for sex. If I like someone I give it a go, to see what happens, but I'm not thinking, "*Who's next? And who's next?*" until I lure the drunkest and most willing. It's strange because instead of thinking of sleeping with other women, I'm thinking about what I'm going to do later with my partner.

I really like her. She is smart and she takes risks. She's not completely careful; she says so herself, that she likes chaos in her life and I like that, because I feel akin to that. She knows how it is to develop as a woman. She doesn't stress about things I see other women do, like clothes or make-up. She treats me well, she understands me and motivates me to do things; she asks me about my projects and so on. It's a very free relationship. We don't fight because we don't have that type of relationship. With past couples, my worst fights were due to jealousy, distrust, feelings of broken vulnerability or having broken it myself when a third person came into our monogamous relationship. Speaking of jealousy, I understand that I'm not enough nor I have to be enough, and that if she's looking to be happy, eventually she's going to meet another person that makes her happy. I don't have to push myself to be everything for the other person. There's always going to be someone that wants to be with your partner and there's always going to be someone that flirts with you when you're in a relationship.

She sees me as someone that's good to her, that considers her important, but she also sees me as dangerous. I think she sees me with some fear. That's something that other partners have seen in me; not as someone dangerous *per se*, but as someone that could hurt them. I also think it's healthy that she keeps one foot in and one foot out, because that's kind of the nature of our relationship. One difference between us is the way we live this open relationship; she's more careful and I think it's because of the whole slut thing. I understand that for a woman, slut is an insult, whereas for a man is a compliment. In this relationship, sex is one of the three pillars that are its basis: sex, food and staying home. We set up camp in the house to eat and have sex. I like it because it relaxes us a lot; it keeps us in a state of constant caring. We snuggle, we feed each other, we cook as a team, we smoke weed and we dedicate ourselves to pampering each other.

Confrontation of masculinity

I understand feminism as the direct action against a patriarchal system that oppresses females but also, secondly, males. It's an action that strives for equality, not the oppression of men. A man can be masculine without being patriarchal. That's why I think a man can be feminist and not attack his gender, because he's attacking an ideology that is wrong, an ideology that reflects a lot of his gender but it's not his gender. I think you cannot be one hundred per cent feminist if you don't look for equity. If you're not in favour of equity existing in gender as well as beyond gender, then your response falls short. What I like about my partner is that she strives for that egalitarianism. She gets mad with matters of race and class as she does with matters of gender.

All of this confronts me, because I went through life talking about women and my relationships in a very sexist manner. Now, whenever I say something stupid or something that implies a gender difference, she confronts me and in very intelligent ways. For example, instead of lecturing me, she jokes in a way that makes me realise what I'm

saying. I appreciate that, because that's how I learn. My partner is involved in feminist and egalitarian matters, from what she's studied and worked on. She lives it with fire and passion. They are matters that I'm very interested in as well. Now I realise that the best way to learn how not to be a *macho* is to be near a feminist, to ask her questions and to see how she reacts to certain situations. It's very strange for me to acknowledge that I'm not so foreign to sexism. In the past, with my friends in Mexico we used to talk about women in a very sexist way. When I talked about my hook-ups, it was discarding the woman, as if she was an object. I described what I wanted, with the words I wanted, regardless of what she would feel if she were present.

I define myself as a man, but in relation to what I see. This is a very easy question for a heterosexual man that looks and feels like a man; because the physical definition I have of a man matches with what I see. In general, my surroundings make it clear for me that I'm a man, given the way men and women interact with me. In that interaction I am a man. A clear benefit that men have is that we can be players, but we want a good girl, and it makes me very angry that I was a part of that for so long. It's still hard to get it out of my head. Plus, girls that are not good are usually more interesting sexually and personality wise. To be surrounded with critical people that identify male privileges makes me aware, so I don't take advantage of them.

I've been away from Mexico for several years now, so my version of the Mexican man is neither recent nor close. There's this caricaturised version of the macho that is simultaneously a closet gay, which I find rather exaggerated and very general. However, I think it describes an element of the Mexican macho. Juan Gabriel is an example of that: He's a gay, effeminate singer who's very famous in Mexico. I constantly heard people say (I also said it myself) that he was a fucking faggot and a queer, but at the same time he was very famous and loved by those same homophobic people. I find those situations very odd. The Mexican man is very macho; a Don Juan that sings, drinks tequila and can say whatever to lure a woman into bed.

I feel in a state of transition. I realise in my head I don't agree with the traditional way of thinking of the Mexican man, but my everyday actions and thoughts are in a process of unlearning and substituting new behaviours. For instance, in high school we used to pick on one of our friends because he was gay. When he came out, we were already 25, we thought we were super modern and everything was cool, but even then, it was hard for us to translate that intellectual agreement into our everyday behaviours with him. The other day I was wondering how many homosexual friends I had with whom I went out drinking. Yes, I have a lesbian friend, but I think the issue of the homophobic man is against the homosexual man, not against the lesbian woman. A lesbian is sexy, whereas a gay man is not. I have gay male friends but not close ones, so I constantly wonder why I don't have more gay friends. I also reflect about my interaction with lesbians, where there's nothing there, sexually speaking. I realise I do treat them differently to how I treat a heterosexual woman.

To define myself as heterosexual is very determinant and limiting. Even though I don't feel homosexual, I wouldn't want to limit my sexual expression by defining myself as heterosexual. There are men I find attractive, that I like to look at, if they play guitar or they're physically attractive or good at some sport, but I've never fantasised that I'm fucking a man or that a man is fucking me. That's why I don't feel homosexual, because I don't want to fuck men. It doesn't turn me on. Sometimes I feel masculine and sometimes I feel a little feminine and I still don't want to fuck a man.

Maintenance and negotiation of roles

The biggest problem of the Mexican heterosexual couple is the definition of roles. There is an expectation that women and society have regarding relationships. Familiar, social and religious spaces practically allow only one type of relationship with super defined roles about what men and women do and can do as individuals and as partners. We have

created a social and economic structure where the dad must be tough, dry and sober and the mom should be the negotiator, the one that pampers and so on. One of the difficulties of fatherhood comes from the social and economic engineering we currently live by. It must be very tough to be a dad that is present when you work ten hours a day and you're stressed out all the time with the house mortgage, insurance and so on. In this country I'm living in, it's not that extreme, but in Mexico the economic circumstances are way worse for being a father.

It's more permissible for a man to misbehave; men are the ones that go out partying, who can make a mess because they are men and that's just how we are. It seems like a given that because we're not good at handling feelings, we are absolved of knowing how to handle them and those of other people. Because women are more tender and cuter, they can't explode, and because we're somewhat brutes around intimacy and feelings, we are absolved. That's an illogical benefit because I don't feel inept at handling my feelings, so why not be held accountable for them? However, sometimes it's not that easy for me to control my feelings in the moment of a conflict, and I end up speaking without thinking.

Desire and emotions

You feel jealous when you're afraid of losing what you love. Jealousy develops from oneself to the relationship, not from the exterior to oneself. It comes from an insecurity of believing that someone's going to steal my partner, that I wasn't enough, that someone else is going to come to do what I couldn't do right. But no one belongs to anyone. My partner is going to be with me until it's right for her and she's going to leave when she must. I do believe it's easier to affirm this while being in an open relationship. Suffering is part of relationships, not only romantic ones.

I like that we have sexual intimacy. We talk about how gender plays into our sexual behaviour. That confrontation used to give me a lot of anxiety. For instance, one day I

realised that I liked oral sex for how it looked, more than for how it felt: her eyes looking up at you, on her knees, submissive, a lot of power involved. After that realisation, it was very hard for me to receive oral sex; I couldn't maintain the erection. However, I've substituted my pleasure of receiving oral sex with the pleasure of being the one giving it. She constantly tells me: *"you need to appreciate my orgasm as much as you appreciate yours."* Men don't share that responsibility over women's orgasms, which doesn't necessarily translate into stamina, but how you do all of it. If you only think about your orgasm, you forget other things like touching with the right rhythm, in the right spots, giving oral sex and then the penetration. There are new expectations of reciprocity. I still find men around me whose expectation is just to get it in, and women whose expectation is not to have such a bad time.

I used to be attracted to women that looked vulnerable, like I could take care of them. I want to get away from the idea that a vulnerable woman is attractive. If I see a less vulnerable woman, with a more protagonist personality, I like to see what it is about her that attracts me, what frightens me and what confronts me, so that it doesn't become an obstacle. For me, attractiveness is the desire of having sexual relations, which is a desire I feel exclusively towards women, because their skin drives me crazy, their vagina, breasts, back, waist. On the other side, there's the attraction of wanting to be near someone, which I don't feel exclusively towards women. My limit between homosexuality and heterosexuality is that, even though I can find men attractive, they don't give me erotic desire, they don't give me an erection, whereas attractive women do.

Timely communication

At the end, my path didn't have much to do with hers, so we decided to break up. The decisive moment happened one day when I needed her help with a work-related thing. She had promised me that she was going to help me out but she never came, instead she went out with her friends. I got very angry and I yelled at her. It wasn't right that I yelled, though. That night she came to my house and we had a horrible discussion. I told her that ever since she started working, she pushed me away from all her circles and she didn't do anything with me except staying at home, whereas with her workmates she did all kinds of cool stuff. And I was envious! Everything had gotten so monotonous with us and I didn't like that. She got mad and sad because I had kept this to myself for so long and she was right, I keep a lot of things to myself and I don't say them in time.

For me it's important that there's interest from both partners to do things and to propose new things. Interest in communicating and caring; complete reciprocity. She has been the only person that has known my darkest secrets and that's because she was also my friend and my companion. However, a recurring problem was that I didn't say what bothered me in time. I take responsibility for my flaws in my emotional communication, because that was one of the reasons we broke up. I don't think couples should tell each other everything, but they should find ways to say what they think without hurting the other person. The biggest challenge in relationships is communication, to know how to respectfully say things in time. A problem I have is that I don't know how to get angry: I keep things to myself, I control my anger so much that, in the end, I explode. It might have to do with the fact that I don't want to appear like a violent macho all the time.

Relational practices

Despite the circumstances of our break-up, I still think my ex-partner is a wonderful person. I learned a lot with her. She has an impressive way of taking care of others. She's very creative when it comes to showing her love, she's patient and kind. This was the most significant relationship I've had and I'm very thankful for it. It was a relationship where each of us did what we wanted; we had a lot of friends in common, we shared a lot of spaces, but there wasn't any obligation to see each other. Now we communicate as friends, and I'm not pressuring her anymore with corny or cute phrases that actually mean, "*Hey, I'm still here*". That's something that us men do a lot. Of course, I still feel something for her and I know she feels things for me too, because we've talked about it, but right now it's not the moment for us to be a couple. A few months after we broke up, I had a period of open relationships, but it was too short because the mourning process for my breakup has been heavy, so I decided I should go through it alone.

I always want friendship to be in the core of my sexual-affective relationships, whether they are open or exclusive; otherwise, they would be very hard for me to maintain. Mere carnal sex without intimacy, it's unpleasant to me, I don't enjoy it. I feel like I objectivise the other because I don't know her, and I don't like that. That's why what I'm looking for now is to have female friends. Friendship somehow dismantles privileges on a relational level. At least in relational practices of friendship, I think that there's not that much hierarchy. For me, friendship is the freest relationship.

In an exclusive relationship, other spaces of your life become less important; your life starts to revolve around that relationship. It subtracts time, effort and space from other things, so you can put it into building with your partner. I don't like it, but it happens. One aspect of today's relationships is that they seem to have more relational intimacy, but at the same time they are more ephemeral. The couple knows each other more deeply but there is more sense of immediacy and therefore less commitment. You jump from one person to the other. People often say, "*you have already taught me what you needed to*", which I think is a very egotistical phrase.

In open relationships I don't feel jealousy, but I think it's because the commitment is less. My partners even go out with other girls and boys and there's no problem. But it makes me kind of sad if I think of my ex going out with someone else and loving him a lot. I feel it when I think that someone is going to give her something I couldn't and it's going to make her happy, not just sexually speaking. Either way, when I feel jealous I never mention it, because these are my feelings and I have to work on them. They are my insecurities.

Deconstruction

My ex identifies herself as a feminist and our relationship had a transversal gender perspective, which was very important. She introduced me to feminism, she taught me about the violence that women live in the street. She also made me realise some of the gender violence I perpetuated. Having a feminist partner is good and scary at the same time. I like it because it invites me to grow and it confronts me. It's an intellectual challenge. Feminism has also influenced me a lot, for example in the way I speak to my students and the topics we talk about in class. Another thing that changed is that I started to detect masculine practices in me and in others that I relate to violence. This allows me to be more aware of my actions, but at the same time it puts me at a standstill. Sometimes I freeze because I think everything is violence, however I'm in the search of learning when to put the purple glasses on and when to see that I'm in horizontal relationships with other issues.

I define myself as a straight, *cis* male, in the sense that I recognise myself as a person with a penis that also has privileges and has a masculine side, although I don't consider myself very masculine. I'm someone that others see as a man; I have a beard, short hair and a certain way of walking. I perform as a man. I acknowledge I have male privileges although I wouldn't like them to exist. I think of myself as a man that tries to deconstruct those privileges as much as I can. Although I don't specifically know what makes me feel like a

man, having a penis indeed has a lot to do with it, also having a beard and body hair. Those are physical things that represent me, but I'm not sure, it's a very difficult question.

I think a big problem in heterosexual relationships in Mexico is power struggles and domination. A lot of the times, men get frightened with the success of their partners. Mexico is an extremely classist country, nonetheless there is a similar machismo between the *cholo* and the *fresa*[25]. Each one reproduces the discourse of "*I can handle all women; all women are mine and I own everything I touch*" in their own way. Now that the feminist presence is strong, and women are more empowered, I see a crisis of men that don't know how to relate to women. There is a lot of anxiety around it; I believe there is a weird relational crisis happening. I myself don't know exactly how to relate to women either, but to some extent I try to have communication and consensus, and not to impose with my gaze or my persistence. Also, now I have more female friends than male ones, because the discursive and narrative practices of men have started to wear me out; I feel they revolve around a lot of competition and aggression, whereas I'm a person that loves to take care of others. I think us men are better at letting others take care of us than actually taking care of others.

I understand privileges as a guarantee of rights and as a defence of violence. There are given privileges that have to do with the biological, the symbolic and the representational. I try to handle them as much as I can, but they're privileges that I would hardly be able to change by myself. In a way, my human rights are guaranteed, with men in general; but with women, even though they are written, they don't always apply in practice. Moreover, I think I'm more susceptible to exerting violence and therefore to exerting power. What I propose is that on one side there are representational or categorical privileges, and on the other there are relational privileges. We can't get rid of categorical privileges, at least not

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[25] [In coloquial terms, cholo is a derogative word used to define a person with a specific aesthetic and subculture: lower class, mestizo, from the streets, gang affiliated, pierced, tatooed and aggressive. A fresa, on the other hand: is clasist, middle to upper class, flaunt their wealth with expensive clothes, cars and accesories, and is detached from experiences that would be considered "of the poor"] (Author's note).

in an immediate way; however, we can intervene them man-to-man. Not so much from women to men because regrettably when this happens, women are generally ridiculed; but when a man confronts other men in public, it creates a strong tension. On the other hand, relational privileges can be tackled by interacting between men and women.

My first relationship was very romantic and full of passion, like in the movies. In my adolescence I used to believe that there was only one person in the world for you. Now I don't, now I want to share something really cool with someone, but I know that there are a lot of really cool girls, not just one. I want someone that has this drive to fight for something like I do, this gender perspective like I do. I want someone to walk together with, to share projects with, but who is also cool with having individual projects.

Ways of Love

I don't know what equality is, but I think relationships should be reciprocal, where both partners feel that they get something very close to what they give, even though each one loves in different ways. It's especially important to know how the other loves and to ask how the other loves, so you know how to receive that love. For instance, I'm very expressive; I like to write and to verbally express my love, whereas my ex-partner showed her love through actions. She was constantly telling me that the fact I told her I loved her didn't mean much, but rather I had to show it through care and through being present.

In a family dinner, the topic of true love came out, because I told them that I'd broken up with my partner. A cousin said that the only true love she knew was that of our grandparents, because they've been together for sixty years. When she said that, the adults in the table looked at each other like saying, "*that's not what love is*". Because what my grandma saw in my grandpa was that he was a good working man and he could provide her security; and what my grandpa saw in her was that she came from a good family and she could provide him with children. They arrived at an agreement of

companionship, but without any sexual component, which I think is representative of that generation's relationships. It was an unknown love. The same thing with my parents; they didn't know each other. They went out for nine months and then they got married. It was a very bad relationship, now they are divorced, and they don't speak to each other.

With my ex, I learned a lot in the sexual sphere, however I did want to experiment further, and I couldn't with her. It bothered me that we didn't talk about the sexual sphere as much. I used to tell her that we had to work on it by talking about it, but her conservative upbringing made it very difficult. Conversely, in my open relationships I have been able to talk about the sexual sphere, even about what we don't like; I've learned to say what bothers me and to accept what bothers them.

Lately I'm very curious about being penetrated with a strap-on by a woman. I've been talking about it with a friend, with whom I have an open relationship; it sounds fun and we both feel like it. To talk about sex-related topics with my partners amuses me and excites me; it's like playing with sexual dialogue. Sex is important in my relationships, but it's not the most important thing. It's a nice act that creates a lot of joy and funny anecdotes. I'm not a conventional guy so I like to play with it, to make sex one of the many recreational activities we have; however, the most important part for me is the care of the other.

I define myself as heterosexual. What I like about women has to do with their femininity; they know how to listen, because generally us men don't. A woman cares about maintaining the relationship and keeping the agreements alive. I also don't like the symbolic violence that men enact; in fact, I think feminism made me like women more. It might sound weird, but what I like most of women is their voice, their smell and their soft skin. But it's complicated because I can also find a man attractive or a lesbian or a trans person, but I wouldn't build a sexual-affective relationship with them. A long time ago I had encounters with men, but I didn't like it; I had the curiosity, but it didn't stick.

Intense

After a few weeks of going out, she told me that she wanted to have a date with me, but a formal date in which we would dress up, have dinner in a fancy place, go out dancing and partying afterwards. It was our first official date. That day I even borrowed cologne from a friend.[26]

When we arrived at her place, the first thing she told me was to fix her a joint. Then we started making out and undressing, it was like heaven what I saw then; she had an incredible pussy, so nice and she was so wet. I ate it, sucked it and then started to talk dirty to her, pulling her hair and biting her. It was funny because at one point she told me I was very vulgar, so I answered that, if something was bothering her, she could tell me and I would stop, but one second later she pulled me back to her body, showing that she was loving this too. I've never had so much sexual chemistry with a person the first time having sex; it was an incredible thing.[27]

I see myself very, very in love; I'm very happy and, in a way, I have peace when I'm with her. I don't know how I see this relationship in the future, but despite the short time we've been together, I could bet on this given the craziness and the intensity I feel now.

She has an amazing body. She's currently in a stage of changes in her life and she's not too clear about what she wants to do. Have I said she's hot? Because she is very hot. She also

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[26] I never mentioned that we didn't start properly dating right away. We were going out just as friends, which I wasn't expecting. My initial idea was just to have a good time with her, drinking, smoking, fucking and doing other stuff. So, we went out a few times, I even slept in her house without having any sexual approach, just as friends.

[27] After reading myself (as I assume that's what I am doing), I get this feeling that I'm reading a person that is just focused on his sexuality, and to some extent I think that is not completely true. For me, physical contact has always been very important; the body is the most intimate thing I have, so sex for me is having an intimate encounter.

has an amazing laugh and when we're high we laugh a lot. Her sex is also unique; I've been with a lot of women but with her it's incredible. She is very nice but can be very dirty, and dirty in a pretty way as well. She is a girl that's at the same level of hornyness as me, and I've never encountered that before. She also has a lot of energy to do activities; she's very sensitive and caring. She likes to experiment, like I do. I could say that I have been more open to try new things since being with her and I have enjoyed it a lot.

In my previous relationships I wouldn't have been able to talk about some things that I talk about with her, like the possibility of having threesomes, orgies or an open relationship. Before, it would have been very hard to consider my partner having sex with someone else, because I used to think, "*what does he have that I don't?*" Nowadays I don't think, "*what does he have?*" but rather that it is her desire that's at play, same as mine; not because of the characteristics of the other person but for the characteristics of our own desires. She still has some doubts about taking certain steps[28], but I tell her that we're just fantasising and that doesn't mean that we must do it, however, to openly talk about it gives us the possibility and the confidence to say if we feel comfortable or not and to be perfectly capable of backing down and keep reflecting.

There are a lot of things that I find attractive in women. I'm very attracted to their company. I love their sex, but mainly, that they have desire; that they also want to bite you, eat you and fuck you everywhere. The role that sex has in my relationships is a fundamental matter to me. I've been wondering for a while if all this desire to fuck was a macho thing or more of a personal thing; I think it's a little bit of both. I've managed to deal with the macho thing[29]; however, I've realised when I've talked with other people and female friends, that for me sex is super important and fundamental and

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[28] I must tell you, it's not only her that has some doubts; for me it also is incredibly scary to open sex this much, have orgies, threesomes, being a swinger. Nonetheless is something that I love fantasising with her.
[29] Yes, I have managed to deal with some things! But the 'macho thinking' is still there, and it's something that I have to question continuously about myself.

physiologically necessary. I have desire in my head all the fucking time, so sex becomes fundamental. What's cool is that I've found a partner for whom sex is also important.

Tension

A clear change I have when I'm in a relationship is that I stop hanging out with a lot of people; however, I never lose my close friends. Another change is that I try not to flirt a lot, even though I would like to. I try to behave accordingly,[30] to comply with the contract even though I don't think it's disrespectful to flirt with other people, but if that's the agreement and you respect your partner, then you have to stop every other fling and flirt.

The biggest challenge of being in a relationship is talking things out with a cool head, because sometimes I get too excited, or when she gets aggravated or annoyed, I do too.[31] If in the middle of the conversation I feel attacked, I'm also going to respond strongly; sometimes I go away, give myself space and the next day we talk. If I'm really angry I'd rather leave, get rid of my anger, if I need to hit a punching bag to let the emotion out, I do it; I just don't like to be in that angry state with my partner because I can say things I don't want and vice versa. It is better to reflect about issues without so much passion and emotions, and to see things more clearly, away from the euphoric moment; to let the emotion fade a little bit in order to talk about what is going on.

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[30] I think this is really fucking difficult, because desire doesn't behave; desire is desire. Anyway, I think of it as a possibility for doing something. For example, if we agree upon not fucking with other people and I start doing it, she is going to be deprived of sex, whereas I will not, so that's just unfair. Same for her.

[31] Oh fuck! I still think this is the biggest challenge. For example, I think she was raised to be jealous of her boyfriends. Sometimes I have gone out with friends and through the night I get lots of text saying, "*are you home? It´s really late. Are you ok?*" And I'm like, "*I just went out, I need to go out! Chill*". We have been working on this, but she keeps doing it. The other day I was just fed up and I kind of tormented her because she went out and didn't tell me she was back at her house, so I was texting her like crazy. It was bad, because I was trying to make her feel the violence I feel when she writes to me like that.

In Mexico, a big problem of heterosexual relationships is possession[32], there's no room to say: "*this body could and might want to enjoy other pleasures*". Understanding that I want to be with my partner but sometimes I also desire to be with other people in a sexual or intimate conversational level, always entails a conflict. When I tried to open my relationship, it was very difficult for my partner to understand that I can love her a lot, but I would also like it if we could have encounters with other people, without neglecting our relationship. I think I'm capable of being in an open relationship[33]; however, she is not ready for it. She said no, so we are still exclusive.[34]

I haven't been able to reach an agreement and I don't think we'll do it anymore, because she gets really hurt whenever we've talked about open relationships[35]. In most of my relationships, I've had an agreement of exclusivity; but in most of them I've been with other people. Right now, I'm great with her, but when this concern overwhelms me I will tell her instead of cheating on her. So, this commitment is on now, and it will last for as long as this relationship lasts. She has told me that she's afraid she won't be able to see me with another person in an open relationship, but I tell her that we don't have to fulfil it but if we both enjoy fantasising about it, we can continue doing it. We avoid a lot of problems by having a level of fantasy and a level of fact. It is a process, because we have been taught how to think about the heterosexual couple; so, defying the norms to this extent is hard. We are living in a society that doesn't do that.

It's weird what happens with jealousy, I've tried to remove it from my head even though I still experience it a lot. Of course, I feel jealousy, but I don't say it, or I don't want to because they are not healthy, I want her to keep talking with whomever she wants. It is

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[32] This does not only happen in Mexico. With my experience of living in other countries and knowing other couples, I can tell that the problem of possession it's all around the fucking world.

[33] Sometimes I think I have a lot of confidence in myself. However, I think such confidence is much more a desire than a reality. What I mean is that I don't know if I'm ready for open relationships; I really wish to be, though! Maybe we start having relationships with other people and I just go crazy!

[34] Here, for example! I think she was fucking wise on telling me "*I'm not ready!*" I don't really know what would have happened to me in an open relationship.

[35] Nowadays, this has changed. We are talking again and fantasising about being with other people. Now we think about it as both of us being in the same place with other people. However, it is still a fantasy.

your *self*, your life and your privacy. If I want to continue in this relationship, I have to believe that she will take care of me[36].

Extensive

When I evaluate my parents' relationship I realise it is one that I would not like to have. I don't want to have violent communication. That's something that was very heavy for my parents. I also think that's the way a lot of couples communicate. I believe couple relationships are violent, at least for the most part, and I want to get as far away as possible from that. That's what I see with a more critical eye: how violence becomes explicit in some discussions.

After having worked, helped and collaborated in a feminist space for all this time, I feel pretty feminist in a way. I do feel that feminism makes me question about every aspect of my life. It also confronts me. And I wonder what role men have in feminism. Lately I have questioned how to act from this position and one of the answers, which might be silly, is to do it with my friends and people I know. Because it's not about using this discourse to explain to women what I understand by feminism, but to explain people of the gender I identify myself with, why feminism is important to me.

Maybe I'm getting it wrong, but I think sometimes feminism is violent, not to repress the rights of others but to reclaim one's own. For instance, when a man feels attacked by feminism and disqualifies it, what he is doing is saying "*you shouldn't have these rights*". That's why, when a feminist woman or man responds aggressively, it's not to take rights away from the other, but to say: "*we are fighting to reclaim our rights, asshole, don't attack us because of it*". I think us, as men, must take responsibility for what other machos

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[36] A friend posted a quote that made a lot of sense to me. She said: "remember that jealousy, most of the time, is an expression of the fear of loosing the person you love". That has helped me a lot. It has also made it possible for me to talk to my partner and tell her "look, I'm felling this way because I have insecurities too, and it's bullshit to be jealous, so I rather tell you my insecurities".

are saying. All this growth I've had around jealousy and relationships was thanks to feminist reflections that I've had with feminist women. A female friend gave me a definition of feminism that I really liked; she said that feminism revolved around three issues: The first one is the power that men have over women; the second issue puts it in perspective by saying it's the relation of power between white men and other ethnicities; and the third one revolves around the private goods over the commons.

I'm trying to put all my life in perspective from that learning. In many spaces I don't talk or ask to talk first, and I think that's good, because I know that just for the fact that I'm a white, middle-class, college-educated man I have the microphone given in any space; in the sense that I can be heard. To have privileges means, at least in my everyday life, that what I say gets more recognition than what women or other minorities could get[37].

I could only talk about the average Mexican man by looking at my friends and the people around me.[38] Commonly, they are given the definition of having a double moral standard; they say that they're very open for everything, but they don't want to be questioned. They also have an ideal of what a relationship should be, which is getting married, having sex only with their partner, striving for an economic wellbeing; they have this idea of being the providing man, having a house and so on, before getting married. They are also in a rush to have kids while they're young; most of my friends have kids now.

I steer away from that in several ways. I have a very clear perspective of not wanting to be the providing man, nor that my partner be the providing woman. There are many things she looks for that I don't, which we'll have to solve long term, and the economic aspect is one of them, but it hasn't been a matter of men-women privileges as much. I earn more

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[37] Sometimes I feel that having privilege also implies being able to talk about them without actually doing something about them that would really matter. I'm kind of fed up having to listen to people back in Mexico saying, "*I'm getting rid of my white male privileges*" or even "*I'm getting together with a lot of other men to talk about our privileges*". I don't know; it seems so absurd.

[38] I think I have lots of blind spots. I keep talking about my friends and the average Mexican without really questioning what I do. Lately I have been trying to think of myself closer to the average Mexican and to identify my similarities.

money right now, but I don't think it's a privilege of the relationship *per se*, but of a social system in which women earn less. For many years now, I haven't seen myself as a person that wants to have children, but my partner has. If that is so important for her, then I'm willing to do it. Is not that I don't want to have children, but that I've never had them in my plans. If that's my partner's dream, the partner I want to be with for my whole life, then, let's go for it. I think in that aspect I would be closer to the definition of the average Mexican.

For me the penis is important, I feel so much satisfaction through my penis. I don't know if I can define myself as heterosexual, each day is more difficult for me to keep thinking of myself that way. I think the heterosexual man is afraid of another people's penis, even if he is not getting penetrated. I don't feel afraid of them, I've even thought that if at any moment I feel like it, that's good, but I don't feel like having a sexual relationship with a man yet; I don't know why, I'm just not attracted to them. However, I don't define myself as entirely heterosexual and I think that defining as heterosexual is just that: being afraid of another people's penis. So, there I am: more or less defining myself as heterosexual but trying not to define myself as such.

Tonatiuh, 30: "I will have to take charge eventually"

Novelty and routine

I admire my main partner a lot. I enjoy sharing my life with her; she's a person with whom I like hanging out and sharing good part of my free time. I feel comfortable projecting activities and plans with her. The best moments are when we share spaces, friends and find a project that we're both passionate about.[39]

It is important to say that in a relationship like this, very little is new. It is rather based on routine, which is enjoyable and pleasurable. I'm a dude that is practically married and I have a fairly conventional relationship. I work more than her, I take less care of the domestic; I'm clearly at an advantage. It's an issue because in my relationship everything is all right; it's fine. It's fine and that's it. That's a big issue, because there is little novelty in a relationship like this. I'm happy but not satisfied. It is enough, but it is not very stimulating. I don't know if the best thing for me is to always be expecting jolts and novelties and always be having an incredible time outside routine, but deep down I do like novelty. The other day I was joking around saying I want everything in life: a steady relationship, security, tranquillity, knowing that there is someone waiting for me at home, and I also want to have crazy night encounters with someone else.

We have a sexual issue that we haven't managed to solve, I don't know if it's due to routine, work or what. More clearly, we still have the task of figuring out what's going on, because what's going on is not that good anymore. In a conventional relationship, having sex relegated to a secondary or tertiary level is not something that excites me; it even makes me question my permanence in that relationship, it is a very serious matter.

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[39] I think those projects shouldn't be opposed to sex, but be complementary to it. I don't believe it's convenient to think in an opposition between sex and everyday activities to which you feel profoundly passionate about. Rather, I think sex is also something to feel passionate about, not just as something momentary but as something you need to take care of. Sex is something that's also part of -or should be part of- everyday life. The thing with my main partner is precisely that it doesn't happen; sex is not part of everyday life and that's not good.

My secondary partner is younger, she's very pretty, very intelligent, I like her; I'm attracted to her. She also finds me attractive, I think she sees something in me that she doesn't find in people her age; it's a common thing when someone goes out with someone relatively older. We don't really have problems, we don't see each other often, we've never discussed[40], and, we see each other for more than just sex.[41] We are not exclusive. Do you understand when I say that there is no novelty on the other side, but there is novelty here? Things have been escalating, we see each other more often, and have more sexual encounters. Everything is new, adventure, immediacy. I'm always thinking that everything is going to collapse and everything will get rotten. I would like to be more detached and to be willing to accept in practice that everything ends.

Affective Practices

Regarding my main partner, I think we love each other, and I think we are both in a state in which we know each other's flaws and we have trouble accepting them, but we suck it up. Our sexual encounters are very infrequent. We don't have a very active sex life. It's just that one of the very good things that this life has to offer is having great sex; it is truly something incredible for which it is worth sacrificing everything. There lies the problem: with my other partner I have really good sex, incredible, out of this world.

Trust is something important in my main relationship; we are not jealous partners. I am neither jealous nor apprehensive, within reason. Obviously, if I see my partner kissing another man, it's going to be very different. But if one day I find out that she spent the night with someone else, I perfectly understand because, how boring would it be to spend her entire life with me, right? However, the fact that I'm not jealous doesn't mean that I don't feel jealousy in some occasions. When I do feel jealous I don't manifest it, because I

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[40] We had, actually. Last year, for instance, we had an argument regarding one of her past relationships.

[41] It's not just sex or just talking. I think by now it's a more complex relationship, where we support each other, we talk a lot, we meet up for a drink and yes, we have sex, but there're a lot of other things occurring.

know it's my shit, how am I going to demand exclusivity? It would be very fucked up to demand something to them that I'm not offering myself. In this matter, I think I'm in the most tolerant moment of my life. I'm not saying it's easy to reach that conclusion, but I make myself try because it's not ok, because nobody is anyone's property.[42]

Regarding the other relationship with my secondary partner, we are very reckless. There have been moments in which I almost put everything at risk: job, partner; everything. I feel good, but I feel worried because I'm very into two girls. I also have very little time and very little mind and very little heart, and I have to divide it. It's one thing to have a slip up, or a hook-up; but I think I'm in another stage in this relationship, we have been going out for almost a year and we have our own routine now, our words, our games, our places. Although we've never said, "*I love you*", there are many affects involved, we just don't manifest them and we keep quiet.[43] In a way, not verbalising them takes care of us.

What am I doing to have healthier relationships? Nothing, I'm screwing up, everything's wrong. Both relationships are very close to disaster and I'm the one in the middle of it. I don't have a bad time, neither do my partners[44], but the specific healthy practices that I may be able to carry out, are in contradiction with the bigger situation of being in two relationships.

I don't agree with feeling guilt for being a man, because I didn't choose to develop as a relatively conventional dude. I also have a very clear heterosexual desire (as clear as it can be): I like women. But I couldn't affirm that I consider myself heterosexual, it's more like a

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[42] At least in my main relationship, I haven't had to face a situation like that. I still think the same way and I stand by what I said, but I wouldn't want to affirm that I would act in a particular way regarding a situation that is, in affective terms, rather complicated. I like to think I'm capable of handling it in a good way.

[43] Now, a few months later, the relationship is still happening and now we do say that we care for each other. I think we couldn't deny the skeletons in the closet. You feel what you feel and whether you name it or not, it's there. You don't need to say it in order for the emotions to manifest themselves.

[44] Some time later, I was talking with my secondary partner and she told me that in fact, she has had bad moments, but for a long time the good things were what made it worth while. She told me that there have been moments in which she felt bad for realising there where few possibilities of evolving together. That put me in a crossroads, which translated to the impossibility of continuing with both relationships.

continuum. I couldn't say that I don't feel affinity for men as well, but I don't consider wanting to fuck a man; that doesn't mean that there is not like some sort of small homosexual desire, more like a primal desire that is sexual, but I find the most convincing and satisfactory path in what we call heterosexual desire. What do I like about women? The vagina. Their body, which is different from men's bodies, I don't like figures that are more masculine. I like the vagina, to eat it, to be inside it.[45]

I'm in an open relationship with my main partner; she knows about my other relationship, partially. Well… she knew. I have to be honest: it's one sided, really; it's not actually consensual. It's something that I have taken beyond the agreements, but it's not that easy to set the limits within the agreements. It is clear to me, however, that now I'm beyond them.[46]

Domestic Negotiations

I've been living with my partner for a few years now. After coexisting and sharing for that long there is little to hide, things are straightforward. Here at home I can be as I am, sometimes I'm grumpy, sometimes caring, sometimes active, sometimes lazy and that's all right. I carry all my vices with me and she is not always willing to accept them, so she gets mad, a lot of the times because of stupid things; well, I don't really know if they're stupid, like, I don't clean the dishes or I don't fix something in the house. Those things really get to her; it's a daily thing. Not because I get drunk or I do drugs or because I go out without telling her where I am, but for the dirty laundry. It is also true that I overwork and I'm exhausted when I get home. When I had more time, I used to take care of house chores, I used to cook, wash the dishes and do the laundry. Now she has more time to do domestic chores.

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[45] Fuck! Did I really say that? I sound like a fucking caveman!

[46] I can see a very clear contradiction here. However, it is true. I don't like it but I think I should leave it as is.

One of the biggest challenges of being in a relationship, at this moment, is privacy, to have a space of intimacy and solitude is complicated. I like to have a part of my life reserved only for me, not for her. Having things I don't share with her, doing things I don't tell her. I also think it's important for her to have that space. In that way there can be equality; whatever one does in that space is something the other person shouldn't care about.

Patriarchal Dividends

[Ricardo], your participant sample is biased: you're interviewing middle-class, college-educated, young men, with a series of privileges, not only of gender, but also of race, class and sexual orientation. I live with a tremendous class privilege; it would seem arrogant to talk about the average Mexican as if it were my own experience. People like us tend to generalise just by looking at our bellybutton. There is a fundamental difference between the relationship I have with my partner and that of most Mexicans; young people from a rural community up in the mountain have nothing to do with my acquaintances and me. I barely represent the average Mexican; most of the people don't live in the conditions I have.

My secondary partner was a student of mine when I was teaching and doing my posgrad in Mexico City. The whole issue of me being a teacher, being older and being in another relationship plays a part; I clearly have an advantage, which doesn't mean that she doesn't have any. The profit is similar in the way that she's with someone that used to be her teacher and I'm with someone that used to be his student. There is surely an erotic thing involved; we have talked about it very clearly, we both have advantages and we both have risks: we are implicated. There was a clear privilege regarding the role that teachers represent to the students. When I was a teacher, women used to paid more attention to me, probably because I was older and I teached; that positioned me differently with women. Your image determines the form of interaction with the rest of the world; this becomes clearer when you make legitimate use of certain positions or attitudes of what a

man is supposed to be. It confronts me to realise the privileges I enjoy and not knowing what to do with them. However, I'm not willing to stop doing the things I like, and it's not like I went around seducing my students when I was a teacher. I didn't take advantage of it, but I did realise it was something that occurred.

I'm not going to leave what I have at home for this relationship, but I don't want to leave this relationship for what I have at home. There lies the big problem. Right now, I'm at a point in which I don't know what an easy exit of this situation would be and, to be honest, is not like I want to get out.

I don't want to be an asshole with either of my two partners; maybe I'm being one with both. I don't know what I´m going to do with my life. I worry about fucking up the relationship with my main partner and to hurt her. I'm not doing anything to have healthier relationships, I'm going through shit, everything's wrong, there's so much to be done. I'm at a point of no return and it's not because of bad intentions or bad will, but a lot of clumsiness. This situation is becoming paradigmatic and is getting harder and harder to reconcile. Clumsiness is not justification; I could have been more respectful. Now is time to do damage control, to ask myself what to do for everyone to end up less hurt. I'm not going to try to justify myself: it's not fair, I'm being reckless with her; that's the most fucked up part. However, I don't have the resources or the tools to put an end to it right now. I can but I'm not willing. I will have to take charge eventually. It would be carelessness if she finds out and I hurt her.

Oscillations of Masculinity

Although I agree with the foundations of what could be understood as feminism, there are topics with which I could be more or less in agreement. What I understand by feminism is that nobody, regardless of their biological sex or gender, is worth more than someone else due to those characteristics, recognising that men have historically oppressed those who

have the biological sex 'women' and those who represent femininity. That big idea in principle is one in which I firmly believe, I have it as a reminder of how to interact with women. That doesn't mean that I don't contradict myself sometimes and I don't know what to do about it. For example: where is the limit between feeling good with what you want and next minute to be trampling or oppressing someone without realising?

To define myself as a man is a complicated business. It's such a fiction. It is fundamentally learned; the body in which you are born doesn't determine anything[47]. At the end of the day, it's at home where you are taught to act like a boy is supposed to act, and where you are shaped to become a man. Being a man is to participate in the convention of what it is understood a man is. Far from having a penis, it is to be able to identify myself with a group of people that assume themselves as men and to differentiate myself from a group that doesn't assume themselves as such or that we don't recognise them as such.

There is something in the feminine, beyond the materiality of the body, that I find attractive; in the way I relate with the feminine and the way women relate to me. There is a certain type of sexuality. For instance, personal grooming: I don't find women that wear a lot of makeup attractive, but then I find certain gestures of grooming that I find extremely attractive, like fixing their hair in a certain way or the way they wear a watch, and it's not that those gestures are naturally feminine but that I associate them with femininity and I find them attractive. I also find them in men, but I don't want to fuck them; however, in women they can crystalise into a sexual attraction.[48]

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[47] I would like to correct myself in this part. I do believe the body plays an important role, but not as a condition given in the organism itself. Rather, the body is placed in relation with other bodies.

[48] Damn! It's very striking to read myself in this way. I really don't know. I gave you some comments, but I wouldn't want to modify a lot of things because in the end, I said what I said and that's it. However, I would like to talk about this with you. I'm not sure how it would fit into your research, but I would like to talk, maybe as friends or maybe you would like to record it; who knows. We can discuss it.

CHAPTER 5. A DIALOGUE WITH THE NARRATIVES

The process of writing the previous narratives was based on a collaborative methodology, in such a way that the participants were involved in the process until the last version of their stories was concluded. This chapter, however, delves deeper into the exploration of specific topics, while making explicit my own voice as the researcher. The topics and themes resulted from the consonance between my research interests, prior to the data collection, and the interests expressed by the participants throughout the recording of the video diaries. Each one contributes to the understanding of sexual-affective heterosexual relationships and masculinities.

Coming back to my initial research interests, I wanted to focus on the ways that men, as gender subjects, negotiated their sexual-affective relationships from within a social position that allowed them easier access to privileges (Connell, 1995). Gender relations are power relations; however, given that masculinity entails an everyday performance involving a myriad of practices and representations and a construction of an identity that is felt to be an essential part of oneself, masculinity as a social product is rendered invisible (Kimmel, 1993). Therefore, one of my initial interests was to see how the invisibilisation of the effects of masculinity contributed to the reproduction of unequal sexual-affective relationships.

However, after starting the collaborative research process with my participants, it became clear that there were certain topics that generated more emotional investment and attention in their video diaries. These topics were later categorised into the three main questions of this research: how the men positioned themselves within discourses of masculinity, how they negotiated their desires and how they communicated emotionally. Hence, this analysis focuses on these three elements taking a critical view on power, masculinity and heterosexuality.

In what follows, I explore each of the three themes in depth. Each speaks about the challenges that arise when masculinity is regarded as inherently contradictory. In the first, the contradiction lies in the emotional realm, specifically in the masculine separation of reason and emotion, which is unsustainable. The second revolves around desire in that, even though it is felt as a primal drive, it can only be experienced through social mediations. Finally, the third one points out the possible transformations of masculinity and the problem of the distance between discourse and practice. Each theme supports the argument that, because masculinity bifurcates into two parallel trajectories (as an everyday performance and as a system of domination and differentiation), navigating through them as a man carries a series of contradictions.

Emotional communication

The men in my study touched on a wide range of emotions while telling their stories, which could be seen in the way they expressed affective practices through storytelling and reflection (Wetherell, 2012). There were two modes in which affective practices appeared with the participants: First, the emotions generated by the actual process of recording their video diaries, which could spark feelings of regret, vulnerability, love or guilt. Second, through a meta-reflexive process, the participants reflected on how the handled certain emotions in context. These men showed a wider emotional range and vocabulary than what is usually represented through the trope of the "inexpressive man" (Seidler, 1995). However, they still acknowledged their difficulty engaging in effective emotional communication during specific conflicts or situation within their relationships.

According to Jokin Azpiazu (2017), it is not entirely accurate to affirm that men do not express emotions or that men are more restrained when it comes to the emotional spectrum. Such a statement could be part of a strategic discourse, which could enable new masculinities to enter the social sphere without necessarily breaking apart from the

hegemonic model. Azpiazu argues that there are certain emotions that men are legitimated to express, which, if women were to express, it would result in them encountering a set of sanctions. The opposite happens as well: when men express emotions that are legitimated for women within heteronormativity, social sanctions are likely to occur. These sanctions are built to maintain a binary emotional categorisation.

Frequently, the discourse of the participants showed a more emotionally stable reflection than the emotional response that was being described regarding a particular situation of their past. In other words, the retrospective view, which was more separated from the performative game of masculinity, allowed them access (even if hypothetically) to a wider emotional range. Moreover, part of this reflection involved that the participants recognised their own challenges. Imari, for instance, recognised that he did not know how to get angry; however, it was the desire to separate from dominating masculinity (represented in the image of the macho) that, paradoxically, made him explode.

Men's perceived lack of ability to engage in adequate emotional communication does not only translate to staying silent or not showing emotions. If men have been taught that showing certain emotions is a sign of weakness and, if "being emotional" has been categorised as feminine, then to experience certain emotions can be felt as a menace to masculinity. The former statement does not mean that there is a stable and finished masculinity that can be defined and grasped; but that certain emotions (like fear, shame or tenderness) can be considered as not fitting in the representation of dominating masculinity, which is often simplified through condensed semiotic-material packages like the ideas that "boys don't cry" or that one has to "man up". For hooks (2005), men and boys have to be taught to embrace and practice compassion, empathy and intimacy, in order to stop relying on anger as an emotional response.

One strategy that the participants had to address conflicts in their relationships was to give time for emotions to dilute. This sometimes translated into them leaving the

conversation, disengaging, going out for a walk or hitting a punching bag. These strategies had the objective of managing emotions by subtracting them from experience, waiting for them to disappear so that, only then, these men could talk with reason and arrive to a solution. However, this approach to conflict resolution contributes to the notion that men's field of expertise is reason. This idea comes from the relationship between masculinity and reason that strengthened in the eighteen and nineteen centuries (Seidler, 2000; Valencia, 2009). The relation of power between men and women was further accentuated with the exclusive access of men to the field of science, politics and economy, and with the consequent intervention of nature. Hence, the metaphor of the feminine expanded, not only to emotions, but also to the idea of nature as something to be intervened, tamed and dominated. Under this metaphor, the man that is in control of his emotions has managed to conquer in himself what the discourse of hegemonic masculinity proclaims to have conquered in the world.

However, for some men such as Imari and the other participants, the promise of masculinity has been revealed as just a myth; therefore, their relationship with the field of emotions has become different. Imari recognised his anger as a problem; however, it was a problem that he linked to a critique of masculinity. Imari had been part of men's groups that question their masculine practices; also, his ex-partner defined herself as a feminist. These elements pushed him to develop a more conscious reflection about his own practices, which included thinking about anger as a generally masculine and violent practice. Imari did not deny the possibility of getting angry, as anger is just another valid form of experiencing the emotional spectrum. However, in the frame of masculinity, anger and violence maintain a naturalised relationship. Imari's reflexive work, which was still in progress, lied in unravelling the relation between anger and violence.

Imari recognised that controlling his anger might be counterproductive; however, the reasoning behind that control had to do with a desire for separation from dominating masculinity, in which one of the characteristics of a *macho* is that he does not have to be

held accountable for his anger. Strength is one of the pillars that hold the fiction of masculinity together; from this logic, anger is an expression of strength. Terrance Real (in hooks, 2005) has addressed the violent socialisation of boys as a "normal traumatisation" that comes with introducing boys into patriarchy. In this process of 'turning a boy into a man' a connection with non-violent expressions of affect is lost. Once again, the contradictions of masculine practices can be observed. In this case, even though Imari made a conscious effort to move away from the image of the violent macho, the control of his anger derived in either a later explosion or an emotional silence.

It is that concrete moment that appears to still be tied to a masculinist discourse of "uncontrollable anger". Anger is a clear example of how the idea that emotions come from "outside", makes it difficult to take charge of it (Seidler, 1995). It would seem as if emotions were defined as irrational and the first task of a man, when addressing a conflict, was to control those emotions, whether they be his or his partner's. Miztli, for instance, recognised that his best response to that moment of conflict was to leave the area and go "hit a punching bag" to cool down.

By leaving the physical space where the interaction is occurring, one is also deciding when and how the other can interact. Again, there is an implicit discourse of danger and protection that reaffirms the masculine stereotype. Danger translates into the idea that, in the heat of the moment, men cannot control what they say or do and, therefore, it is best to draw away. It is an idea that keeps feeding this particular beast that is the violent man, unable to control himself. However, something interesting happens in the *new-man* discourse, and it is that, because of the inevitability of danger, he now realises those interactions are not positive or well valued, and in consequence he creates a type of protection response towards his partner, which is to take the beast away. It is the same man who, in a sort of dissociation, recognises himself as the one unable to control his emotions and as the one who will solve that problem. That is how the affective performance comes full-circle.

It is important to clarify that when I talk about the contradictions of masculinity, I do not mean that the participants of my research are, intrinsically, contradictory persons. What I mean is that masculinity, as a form of representation of the bodies and as a system of institutionalised practices, is filled with contradictions. Therefore, it is not strange that men who perform a masculine identity would reproduce the contradictions of the system. In this specific case, these contradictions can be seen in the management and communication of emotions. For men socialised into dominating masculinity, emotions turn into obstacles, and only after getting rid of them, is the problem and its solution clearly visible. This situation can result in frustration for men, when they realise that not all conflicts can be solved as they might be in different social spheres, like the workplace or school. In current capitalist societies, the instrumentalisation of life is a requirement for productivity; however, this has now been extended to personal relationships as well, in such a way that heterosexual men tend to solve conflicts as if they were just another work-related problem (Seidler, 2000).

As shown by Seidler (2000), the heterosexual man tends to ask his partner to tell him what is troubling her so that he can proceed to fix it; which is an approach that oversimplifies the complexity of interpersonal relationships. Frustration happens when these men fail to solve a conflict or even to comprehend their partner's discomfort. This frustration is also connected to the idea that men hold the monopoly on morality, which is another product of modernity (Seidler, 2000). This assertion is sometimes used strategically, by pairing morality with a sense of reason and temperance, regarded as mostly masculine traits.

A recurring issue in masculine emotional communication is that codes and language from a rationalist tradition are used to engage with personal emotions in an impersonal manner. Moreover, emotions are reduced to a narrow range of what men are allowed to experience, which in many occasions translates to anger and compartmentalisation of feelings (hooks, 2005). This displacement is a protection mechanism of masculine identity,

because letting other emotions in, such as fear, sadness or tenderness, would mean a higher amount of menace and vulnerability for men. The weight that the exaltation of reason has in the conception of masculinity is extremely important when it comes to thinking about conflict management in heterosexual relationships. The assumption that there is a "correct answer" for the resolution of a conflict makes men leave the emotional component aside, making a complex social interaction merely a problem to be solved (Seidler, 2000).

There is also another form of danger, which relates to a form of 'recklessness' of heterosexual men in relationships. This dangerousness, however, has been appropriated by the masculine imaginary as a quality of value, which can be analysed from two figures: the lover and the rebel. Both figures can be understood as producing affective practices, in the sense that they show patterns of affect (Wetherell, 2012). It is possible to observe how different components assemble in a particular relationship that emerges as heterosexual, which, according to Seidler (1995), it is both an acknowledgement of the self and a relation of power. The implications of the former statement are that the set of components that make up an affective practice can also strengthen an unequal relation of power and a self-identity that becomes paired with domination or oppression. The "bodily desire" of heteronormativity, as Ward (2015) would put it, strives to become the norm and disavow what is deemed as abnormal.

The figure of the lover, the Don Juan as understood in the popular language, is someone whose abilities of seduction are so refined that allow him to court any women. However, the techniques that he utilises are strongly anchored in the postulates of romantic love and not in a mutual agreement of satisfaction of desire. For Don Juan, women's biggest attribute is numeric, meaning, his relation to women lies in (number of) conquest, rather than intimate connection (Galic, 2014). In this scenario, women's satisfaction lies in being wooed, but they are not yet in charge of their pleasure and desire. This means that Don Juan's identity is constructed as a conqueror, as someone that would do everything in his

power to reach his goal. It is not important, in this case, if Don Juan is searching for true love or if he's only after the satisfaction of his sexual desires through the game of love; what matters is that, within his practices of courtship, there is a discourse that surrounds women in a promise of true love, unbridled passion and complete surrender. Don Juan, the lover, is a typically heteronormative masculine figure; it condenses a set of components that are put into motion through affective practices, like over-the-top chivalry, violence disguised as protection, infantilisation and so on. Many of the behaviours of the Don Juan fall into what Bonino calls *micromachismos*: as practices of power and domination that usually pass unnoticed (Fallarás, 2018).

The men in my study perceived some of these practices in their own relationships with women; however, at the same time, the critique of dominating masculinity was not always consistent with the practices that resulted from that realisation. Dominating masculinity is constantly reiterated in multiple forms of representation, whether is in mass media, cinema or in the cultural traditions of a specific group, like the Mexican macho. Hence, there is a difficulty to overcome the contradiction of enunciating a discourse that speaks of equality and anti-normativity, while still reproducing affective practices that are strongly heteronormative. Men have learned that women are more romantic and cherish stories of romantic love more than them; as a result, romantic love is used strategically and, oftentimes, in a reckless manner. Under this affective practice, love becomes an instrument of conquest, in other words, it is capitalised as an object of consumption (Illouz, 2009). For Giddens (1992), romantic love feeds into the narrative that once the love of the lover is received, it will fill every aspect of the loved one's life. The metaphor of completion is one that is rooted in patriarchy and became stronger in the wake of the nineteenth century, at par with the cult of the individual (Illouz, 2009). Romantic love, however, has been opposed by feminism and women's emancipation (Herrera, 2011). It is worth remembering Quetzal's narrative, in which he mentioned his concern about men's attitudes, which can be thought of as a strategic use of the discourse of romantic love:

> A common thing regarding male privilege, for instance, is to believe that there are no consequences to sleeping with someone, and it turns out that there are. With my partner, I was very persistent for her to be my girlfriend. Then, the consequences are that you have promised a lot and so you are demanded to comply with it; and I think it's fair. That's where it becomes conflicting: these forms of control given by patriarchy turn on us, and it's very easy to complain about the jealous girlfriend or wife, but if we have created a phallic patriarchal world in which men hold the keys, then of course women are going to hold on to their men.
>
> (*Quetzal, 35*)

A first step towards moving away from the figure of Don Juan, his hyperbolic promise of love and his endless pursuit of sex, is to modify the uses of language with which we approach relationships, at least in the first stages, where emotional intensity is higher. In this sense, men can reclaim the figure of the lover and walk towards engaging with their partners *with* love, while fostering what hooks (2005) has called feminist masculinity.

There is also the risk of falling into the second figure: the rebel, which can be represented by popular actor James Dean. I will not talk about the implications of a character such as James Dean in a post-war context, where the ideals of undaunted masculinity start to transform into a form of masculinity that, little by little, begins to admit its own fragility and meaninglessness; at least, of course, in the social peripheries and vanguards of the United States. What interests me is how hegemonic masculinity connects the lack of meaning, which is central to postmodernity, with the sense of danger, of not having to be accountable or to respond to anyone.

This idea of danger relates to the handling of emotions and desires. Balam, for instance, believed that men are more prone to hurt women emotionally, he also admitted he had done so in the past. Here, the choice of words is important; Balam used the word "dangerous" to define himself, which did not necessarily have a violent connotation, but rather one that spoke of risk and, more specifically, risk taking. Language is not only a carrier of emotions, but emotions articulated (Koivunen, 2010). This means that the discursive elements chosen for the definition of the self carry emotions and shape the relationship with the other.

Tonatiuh was involved in two relationships; he had broken the agreements he had with his main partner about what they could do within the frame of their semi-monogamous, semi-open relationship. In other words, he developed a strong sexual-affective relationship with someone else unbeknownst to his main partner. Tonatiuh's discourse shares some similarities with Balam's in the sense that there is a realisation of risk and danger in both, and at the same time a sort of benefit to their partners for taking that risk. For Tonatiuh, the consequences of his actions were clear. He seemed to have formed an ethical judgement, which did not reprimand the fact that he had developed feelings towards his two partners, rather, reprimanded the decision-making process that had taken him there. In a less clear way, Tonatiuh also developed a risk-benefit relation in his discourse. Just like Balam considered himself dangerous, Tonatiuh was preparing himself to do "damage control" at the moment the video diaries were being recorded. Here is where the difference between the figure of the lover (Don Juan) and the rebel (James Dean) becomes clearer. In the first one, the man promotes all the features of romantic love, whereas in the second one, the man presents himself as a risk that will bring certain benefits. Both are figures of dominating masculinity in which, for the most part, men define the rules of the game and the benefits of that amorous transaction, through the use of a specific emotional language and a set of affective practices (Wetherell, 2012).

However, both Tonatiuh and Balam said they were changing their practices and ideas around masculinity, despite admitting they still reproduced some aspects of dominating masculinity and romantic love and still had difficulties addressing conflict. A first step towards the transformation of masculinity is to be willing to question one's own masculinity. Therefore, these narratives should not be read from an assumption that change has already happened in full, but from the realisation of everything that is still to be done. In this sense, one of the recurring topics in the narratives was the communication and negotiation of needs. Many times, given the idea of masculine

strength, these needs are not communicated because it is assumed that men do not have them (Seidler, 2000).

Part of the masculine emotional silence comes precisely from the invisibilisation of masculinity as a topic of discussion (Kimmel, 1993). To talk about issues that could directly or indirectly relate to one's own masculinity can be regarded as a sign of weakness. For many men, these questions are not even present, for they have never been considered as an element that affects their relationships and their way of being in the world. Opening the door to such interrogations, through the questioning of masculinity, implies accepting that many of the elements with which men define themselves, and which they assume as truths about themselves, must be transformed. When men accept the scary idea that they might have flaws and they might need help, a process of transformation can begin, and men can start to heal the wounds of dominating masculinity (hooks, 2005).

Affective practices

The processes of the participants for reflecting on their emotions, and modifying the emotional communication with their partners, is good for thinking about affective practices as a product and not as essence (Wetherell, 2012). These men made a conscious effort to rethink their relationship with masculinity and, by doing so, their affective practices were modified. This, in turn, shows the indivisible relation between discourse and affect (Koivunen, 2010). However, there is also an embodied element to discursive-affective practices, which appeared to be less clear on the participants' reflection: the emotional response in the specific moment a conflict happens and how said response is experienced in the body. Moreover, Connell analysed how bodies are "both objects and agents of practice" (Connell, 1995: 61), this practice, in turn, informs and shapes the structure in which bodies are defined. It is the experience of the body through interaction, and its social effects, what Connell calls 'body-reflexive practices':

Body-reflexive practices […] are not internal to the individual. They involve social relations and symbolism; they may well involve large-scale social institutions. Particular versions of masculinity are constituted in their circuits as meaningful bodies and embodied meanings. Through body-reflexive practices, more than individual lives are formed: a social world is formed. (Connell, 1995: 64)

Communication of needs is one of the biggest challenges in a relationship. The complexity of this communication is that it is not only about addressing the context in which said needs are framed, but also the positions of each individual expressing them, along with the previous expectations that have been socialised, in great deal, from the ideas of romantic love. To help with this analysis, three elements are taken into consideration, which Wetherell (2012) proposes when she talks about affective practices: flow, patterns and power.

The first element considers affect as flowing activity, meaning, to realise that affective practices emerge in a rhythm and that they are connected and articulated. Sometimes it is a reiteration of practices that flows steadily and other times it can be more abrupt. When talking about sexual desires, for instance, Miztli and his partner seemed to have made the verbalisation of fantasies an erotic element. They did not only communicate certain expectations or come to agreements on what pleasure meant and how to satisfy it, but they made the dialogue an end in itself. This affective practice was represented by language, which was charged with emotion and eroticism. However, sometimes this erotic flow of affect via language can encounter bumps, which disrupts the rhythm. From the analysis of these controversies, it is easier to see how emotions are communicated, negotiated or bypassed. Initially, Miztli had affirmed that they could fantasise and talk about anything freely; however, as the relationship moved forward in time, certain topics began to generate discomfort in his partner and, therefore, the communication process became more complex. Language did not stop being emotionally charged, the difference was that the discursive practice that was an element of eroticism before, had now become a point of conflict, bringing forward a new set of emotions.

The flow of affective practices relies on the context in which the people involved develop. In Miztli's case, as the relationship was becoming more grounded, time passed, and other feelings started to evolve, what once could have been unimportant, suddenly acquired weight. There was a clear discrepancy between Miztli and his partner; that is, Miztli believed in open relationships while his partner wanted to be monogamous. Furthermore, their relationship was monogamous. Miztli mentioned that, to avoid uncomfortable discussions, he preferred to not talk about the issue anymore. However, a viable alternative could still be found in the realm of fantasies, where language became charged with eroticism and turned into a game, specifically located in time and space. Taken as such, this could appear to be a simplistic explanation, in which: he wanted something, she wanted something else; they resolved it in the realm of fantasy. Yet, while reading Miztli's narrative, it was possible to see that throughout his story, his desire and belief in open relationships was not set in stone. There is a fluctuation where, sometimes he was confident about his positioning, and sometimes he doubted if he would be able to manage it. The verbalisation of his desire was inconstant and influenced by his context.

The second element that Wetherell (2012) proposes to understand affective practices is to understand them as emergent patterns. These patterns are not always articulated in the moment of their appearance, they can also be constructed in a posterior moment, where the individual would try to give meaning to their actions. Understanding affect as patterns also helps to clarify the relation that affect and discourse have; in other words, it helps to analyse affective-discursive practices. "Affect is lodged within embodied sequences of action" (Goodwin: in Wetherell, 2012: 361), these sequences, in turn, are also framed within a larger context. Emergent patterns can be observed in Yumil's narrative, in the way he talked about himself in relation to his partner. During the methodological process of recording the video diaries, which lasted for about eight months, Yumil's relationship with his partner ended after two and a half years. These affective-discursive patterns were modified when the context was modified as well. Even though the underlying feelings prevailed, the attitude towards those feelings seemed to have been transformed. Before

the breakup, Yumil defined himself as aggressive, bitter and as someone who had "venom" inside and given the right situation, he would release it. This aggressiveness can be seen throughout Yumil's narrative, especially in the '*Before breakup*' part. There is a moment, however, in the beginning of the third video diary, when the emergent pattern of affects changes. It is the time when Yumil had just ended his relationship. The tone and the emotions conveyed through his discourse showed a different approach, far from aggressive, in which Yumil recognised his flaws and mistakes. This moment of vulnerability allowed him to gain a much deeper reflexive view on himself and his past relationship, while placing him further away from the idea of hegemonic masculinity that men do not need to reflect on their own affective practices. According to Echeverria (2013) this approach to "masculine vulnerability" challenges hegemonic masculinity or, for the purposes of this thesis, dominating masculinity: vulnerability can also bring destabilisation to an otherwise "fixed" masculine identity. The inseparability between discourse and affect (Wetherell, 2012) is quite clear here.

This does not mean that words, by themselves, contain the totality of the emotions that are being expressed or that there is a dependency of affect to discourse; however, another choice of words would have articulated another assembly of emotions. What it means is that there is *inter*-dependency between affect and discourse, in which both emerge in the situation and shape each other. In this case, when Yumil talked about his breakup, which had just happened a couple of weeks earlier, he used memories to bring forward the feelings that had been developing during this time. A reflexive change had occurred, which was only possible through the abrupt modification of his affect following the breakup. Again, this reflection was not merely cognitive, but was charged with emotions and, what is more, aimed to change Yumil's future affective practices.

However, there were still spaces where masculine practices of power and domination found their way through, which is the third element in Wetherell's (2012) analysis of affective practices. In Yumil's case, the inseparability of affect and power could be seen in

his assumption of a more objective knowledge than that of his partner. All the participants found an element of power connected to their affective practices with their partners. Nevertheless, it is important not to forget that individual practices are framed within larger contexts. In the case of these men, their desires and emotions were framed within what Preciado (2002) calls the heterosexual matrix and Ward (2015) refers to as heteronormativity. These concepts must be culturally and geopolitically situated, meaning, the affective responses of a particular masculine identity carry the influence of a collective past. Both the image of the macho and the critique of the macho contribute to these men's Mexican masculine identities. Both their economic and racial privilege and the political turmoil and constant violence that the country is in contribute as well. Both the representations and the practices of masculinity place them in an intersection that is in constant change.

As it has been stated earlier, reason and masculinity have been historically intertwined and, since modernity, reason is thought of as an objective light that shines over reality. From reason, men can access forms of knowledge that are not accessible from mere experience. A consequence of the former is the sense that men have to fix (or direct) their partners' life, while being armed with a superior sense of morality, granted by reason (Seidler, 2000). Such is the case of Yumil: even though his intentions could come from a place of kindness or care, "to help my partner, to take care of her and to advise her", it would seem that there is still the reiteration of an unbalanced relationship, in which the man/active, would solve the problems of the woman/passive: "her attention wasn't where it was supposed to be."

Yumil's impulse for directing his partner's attention towards the right way can be extrapolated to other common examples in which the man tends to consider his point of view as the more adequate or pertinent for solving any given problem. In the language of 21st century, feminists have referred to this as "mansplaining", a concept that has gotten heavy backlash from men both in the online world and off. To criticise mansplaining, does

not imply that the opposite would be creating individualistic societies, where no one would be involved or have an opinion in each other's life. On the contrary, the aim is to transfer the practices of imposing one's point of view, to an ethics of collective care; to foster a relational identity instead (Hernando, 2012). In other words, to stop assuming that men possess the higher moral reason, the most exact knowledge or the most effective solutions; give a step back and initiate a dialogue, where care and involvement is clear and consensual by everyone involved.

Power relations unravel in a discursive-material framework, meaning, on a prearranged foundation, which generates certain conventions about how specific elements are to be handled. William Reddy talks about an emotional regime (in Wetherell, 2012), which is not one that prohibits but that manages (in a Foucauldian sense) the "dominant norms of emotional life" (Rosenwein, 2010: 22). This regime feeds on the normative conventions of gender. For Tizoc, breaking away from the emotional regime of masculinity, resulted in a partial separation from the larger social group of "men". Tizoc defined himself as a man, while distinguishing himself from the group "men"; in this case, this incongruity worked in his favour, for he was still being read as a man and therefore he still had access to the privileges that implied; on the other hand, he acquired a reflexive positioning, which allowed him to create an identity that was further from the normative masculine standards. Tizoc also recognised that getting rid of the economic expectations that came paired with being a man was a constant process, from which he had not fully detached.

The myth of the self-made man that is solely responsible for his own success has made men to perceive needs as flaws and help as weakness. Tizoc utilised the analogy of Superman, a male character that, despite struggling with the responsibilities that come with his power, always manages to fulfil the expectations. Clearly, Tizoc battled with the idea of power and the (re)actions that came with it. There are social advantages of being the economic support. However, for Mexican men, living in a country where welfare is not

perceived as a guarantee, there are also pressures of fulfilling the expectations of being a "superman".

The relation between affect and power is extremely complex; it extends from the regulation of emotions to the creation of new connections between affect and the material elements that trigger specific emotions. Sara Ahmed (2007) talks about the drama of contingency to refer to the way emotions are framed within the experience and are interrelated with objects, places, and people and, by extension, with ideology, memories and the forms of representation of the social world. In this sense, when men interact with the conceptualised 'other' from the frame of dominating masculinity, they do so from affective-discursive practices. Men place a specific emotional energy in that other, which would be different if our conceptions of the other were not founded in assumptions of domination and inequality, if they were not founded, perhaps, in the sex-gender system.

This section of the analysis focused on the range of emotions men can have access to, within the emotional regime of dominating masculinity (Rosenwein, 2010), and what happens when other emotions are explored further. It showed how reason, as a defining concept of the masculine self, constructs an identity of male domination through the access of superior knowledge and moral ground. However, the reflexive emotional work that the participants engaged in, expanded their spectrum of emotions and allowed them to perform a masculinity that was not as bounded to the constraints of hegemonic masculinity. The former statement shows the indivisible relation between affect and discourse (Koivunen, 2010). Finally, this section showed how the analysis of specific affective practices could be useful for the understanding of the relationship between masculinity and emotions.

In what follows, the focus is placed on the way desire is negotiated within social mediations, norms and lived experience in the space of the participants' sexual-affective

relationships. Heterosexual desire is analysed as being intrinsically mediated by social norms, power and representations of masculinity and femininity.

Social mediation of desire

The second key theme in the narratives was that of how the participants handled, expressed and negotiated desire in their sexual-affective relationships. The expression and satisfaction of desire is always a manifestation and a practice of power. One of the ways to disrupt this relation is to challenge the traditional conventions of the hegemonic sex-gender system; a practice that the queer and gay movements have turned into a political action, and a question that remains open for heterosexual *cis* people.

The concept of social mediation is used to refer to the moment when desire becomes socialised and translated into the allowed, pre-established, social codes. Social mediation often creates new stories in which desire, in the context of dominating masculinity, aligns with the founding elements of the sex-gender system and the heteronormative binary of social organisation. The former implies that desire cannot be foreign to the relations of power that the hegemonic sex-gender system creates. Even though there can be anti-normative expressions of desire that resist or separate from the hegemonic system, the norm still exists as a reference.

The men that participated in this study oscillated between practices closer to heteronormativity and practices that partially questioned it. This oscillation seemed to be guided by the quest for pleasure, joy or wellbeing, sometimes with a high price to pay in the relationship. Desire was traversed by morals, by the ideas of what is right, by shame, imposition and tradition, but at the same time it was traversed by eroticism, pleasure, happiness and the expectations of a good life. Oftentimes, all these emotions and ideas presented themselves in an indissociable and indistinguishable manner, in such a way that

the participants could experience pleasure, guilt and happiness while doing something contrary to their own sense of ethics.

Desire and frustration are two affects that modern, western societies seem to have weaved inextricably. People have been socialised into experiencing desire as lack; more specifically, into desiring that which they don't have and once obtained, desire seems to have moved elsewhere. Desire appears as a horizon: each step taken, it moves a step further. This conception of desire should not have to be the only one; desire could also be experienced as excess instead of lack, as overflow in the words of Michel Onfray (2006), meaning, it could be regarded as a liquid, not as a solid. For several authors (Easton & Hardy, 1997; Onfray, 2006; Herrera, 2011), loving or desiring someone other than one's partner should not necessarily have to mean taking the love or desire for one's partner and giving it to someone else, rather they can overflow in the space of the partner and reach other relationships without ceasing to occupy said space. From the monogamous, heterosexual logic, fluid dynamics turn even more complicated as these relationships tend more to settlement than fluidity.

Modification of normative desire

Social mediations are immersed in power relations; as such, they can either align closer to pre-established norms by the hegemonic regulatory statutes or closer to forms of resistance and innovation that confront those norms. Moreover, they also depend on context and are the result of the intersection between several factors that are cultural, political, symbolical, economical and so on.

For Livingston (1994), the question of 'why do we desire the objects we desire?' relates to the beliefs of the subject that desires, which in Girard's theory is referred as the mimetic agent (Livingston, 1994); however, this does not mean that the choice is made through a conscious and inductive process. It could be said that one does not "choose" their social mediators of desire deliberately; one does not choose which elements are going to

mediate over which desires. This logic differs in some ways with feminist and queer theory, in which desire can also become political and, therefore, transformed in a more-less conscious manner. In other words, the mimetic agent can turn into a producing agent. However, in most cases this shift requires the assimilation of non-hegemonic discourses, the access to other forms of social mediations, and the recognition that power traverses desire:

> "Sex is a technology of heterosocial domination, which reduces the body to erogenous zones in function of an asymmetric distribution of power between genders (feminine/masculine), making certain affects to coincide with certain organs, certain sensations with certain anatomic reactions." (Preciado, 2002: 22)

Preciado's statement strengthens the idea of desire as a social product, more than just a psychological pulsion. Also, it sheds light on the relations that have been established between desire, representation and organism. Gender, as Preciado (2002) affirms, becomes a *somatopolitic* fiction. Hence the importance of understanding the naturalised relation between gender, sex and sexuality as put together by technologies of power. By considering these elements as contingent to each other, it is then possible to look for the ways in which they have been made to feel indissociable (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1998). In the case of dominating masculinity, rooted in the heteronormative matrix of sexuality, the connections are clear. Yumil, for instance, had not been involved with feminism in any way and did not have any background of academic discussions of sex and gender; for him, the primary characteristic that defined him as a man was his penis, "my penis says it all" he stated. Immediately after he added "the desire to penetrate instead of being penetrated". Heteronormativity, as an element of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Ward, 2015), establishes a normative link between sex (man-woman), gender (masculine-feminine) and sexuality (heterosexual). That link is strengthened thanks to several technologies of gender (de Lauretis, 1987) and, in this case, social mediations of desire.

Social mediations of desire, however, are not considered as an element of a specific body that desires (although it can be found there) but are understood as discursive and therefore radically social. This means desire is also traversed by power and the hegemonic conventions of a determined historical moment and place.

Despite acknowledging the former, desire is, nonetheless, experienced as a part of one's *self* that is thought to be exempt from the influences of society. It is experienced as a personal, intimate and uncontrollable drive. It would seem that desire, the forms that desire takes, the objects of desire and the practices to satisfy that desire escape from the logic of social dynamics, as something that reason would attempt to understand but not control. As such, elements like social influence, history or power relations are not thought of as an integral part of desire. There lies the importance of making explicit the connections between: desire and the heterosexual regime, desire and hegemonic masculinity, desire and practices of resistance, desire and normative rupture. When studying how men express heterosexual desire, a critical perspective is essential to avoid falling in naturalising and universalising conclusions. This is more relevant when dealing with harmful expressions of desire that, in countries like Mexico, have been thought to be as normal as love itself.

Jealousy, coded as a symptom of love and passion, has been made more explicit with the institutionalisation of romantic love, which "presumes that a durable emotional tie can be established with the other on the basis of qualities intrinsic to that tie itself" (Giddens, 1992: 2). In other words, romantic love is loving the rituals and symbols of what it is established as love; it is a central social mediation of desire in the neoliberal era of mass consumption. Since the late eighteen hundred onwards, romantic love has grown as a goal for relationships, not necessarily linked to marriage yet not entirely detached from its idea. Romantic love creates an individualised narrative in which 'romance' grows within an individual that has "no particular references to wider social processes" (Giddens, 1992: 40). As such, one way to approach the feeling of jealousy is as a product of the

institutionalisation of romantic love. In Mexico, the connection of romantic love with the overwhelming influence of catholic religion, make jealousy an important part of heterosexual relationships. All men in my study recognised jealousy as a harmful emotion; they equated them with notions of control, conquer and violence. At the same time, they stated that jealousy was deeply rooted in them and it was an emotion they still felt. Balam and Imari affirmed their jealousy was a response of fear of losing their loved one, which for Giddens (1992) is a statement of the strength that the romantic relationship has in modern society.

In Mexican culture, which is rooted in patriarchal traditional discourses, the idea of conquest traverses more than one aspect of life. The birth of our identity as Mexicans is the result of a violent conquest, a war that was lost in 1521, which would keep the newly created Mexican race, indigenous and mestizos, under the reign of Spain for three hundred years. La Malinche, paradigmatic woman of the conquest, was an indigenous *Nahua* woman that would assist Hernan Cortez as an interpreter; she was also his slave and would give birth to Cortez's child. In Mexican culture, La Malinche is viewed as treacherous, not only of the motherland (by helping the conquistador), but of men (by sleeping with the enemy). Mexican popular culture seems to have forgotten the fact that she was actually given to Cortez as a slave.

Mexicans are the sons of La Malinche (sons of *la chingada*[49]); we have developed a collective identity from that paradigmatic myth of being violated by the Spanish (Paz, 1950). Mexicans blame La Malinche as much as the conquistador; they are at the same time a product of the conquest and revolutionaries that reclaimed their land, that took back what was theirs. In the novel "Los de Abajo", Mariano Azuela (1915) showed how the revolutionary men of early twentieth century fought against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and its aftermath in the hopes of building a democratic republic, but at the same time

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[49] La chingada means 'the fucked one'. The verb chingar is a colloquial term, usually considered a bad word or an insult, which can refer to multiple situations, however, they all symbolically reference the act of fucking or getting fucked.

devastated entire towns, raped and stole women and took law into their own hands, especially in the north of the country. The Mexican man of the revolution fought to regain what was his and, by doing so, included women in the spoils of war.

Nonetheless, showing the historical relation that Mexican men have with women in order to talk about jealousy does not imply that there is a direct correlation between, for example, La Malinche of the XVI century and Yumil's partner. Globalisation has multiplied the trajectories that traverse and constitute the postmodern individual: Internet access, western mass culture, the need to obey the global neoliberal market, the influence of western feminism and the irruption of Latin-American feminism, just to name some, make it impossible to affirm that Mexico is a hermetic culture. However, Mexican idiosyncrasy is still firm, it is something that Mexicans are proud of and aim to maintain. Since the second half of the twentieth century, the average Mexican has become a hybrid between their own traditions and the global culture.

All the men in this study admitted having experienced jealousy, but talked about them as something negative, based on control and possession. This is clearly a step towards relationships based on negotiations and agreements rather than romantic love and conquest. However, it is still possible to see the ways in which the discourse of dominating masculinity creates objects that become its property. An example would be the permissiveness that the man can give to himself, but his partner cannot have in the same measure. This can be observed in the operational definition of jealousy and the logic behind it, which functions in favour of who enunciates said definition: for Yumil, jealousy was for "stupid, coward people". He consciously separated from those characteristics and from the people that experienced jealousy; at the same time, he affirmed that his ex-partner was in fact a jealous person. For Yumil, jealousy was no longer coded as a virtue of masculinity (coward and stupid). He detached himself from jealousy by reaffirming his own virtues (smart and brave). This distinction created a cohesive narrative thread with

the idea that Yumil made of his *self*, which could be observed in other situations that would otherwise be incongruent.

The heterosexual man of the 21st century has more freedom to express non-heteronormative desires without necessarily expecting an overwhelming social sanction. Queer movements have indirectly helped to relax the constraints of heteronormativity for heterosexual people; ironically, queer folks still struggle to achieve the freedom of expression of their desire and sexualities. However, the modification of the heteronormative matrix of sexuality (Preciado, 2002) is still met with passivity by the heterosexual man, who is still guarded by contradictions, fears and doubts. Most heterosexual men have accepted the semiotic-material package of dominating masculinity, which not only creates an identity, but also grants transversal privileges in different spheres (Coston and Kimmel, 2012). To admit new desires that are not included in the semiotic-material package implies a separation (at least partially) from the dominating model and, consequently, a loss of privileges, which is often perceived as a threat. Therefore, even though the heterosexual man may have more freedom to express non-heteronormative desires, when this happens there is often a backlash, both towards oneself and from other men. For the men of my study, there was desire and curiosity to perform practices that were more or less separated from the heteronormative field, specifically, those relating to anal penetration, sadomasochism and performing oral sex.

Imari spoke about his desire to be penetrated by a female partner, as a curiosity, as something potentially enjoyable. This is not a minor statement, given that for the heterosexual man, the anus is still prohibited territory, the ultimate threat to their masculinity and heterosexuality; even if the anal penetration occurs within a heterosexual relationship. Jane Ward (2015) has contested the previous statement in a way, by saying that in fact, homosexuality is a key ingredient of heterosexual masculinity. By "translating" homosexual sex through the codes of heteronormative masculinity, according to Ward, heterosexuality and masculinity are strengthened. Heterosexual men might engage in

mutual masturbation, nudity and fondling, or pretend sex with other men; however, these acts would not be deemed as "gay" but as a strategy to bolster their homosocial bonds and in consequence, dominating masculinity. The anus, despite being a genderless organ, is however feminised: masculine identity is defined through the penetrated/non-penetrated binary (Saez and Carrascosa, 2011). Therefore, the heterosexual man places the anus in an abject place, it is rejected as an element of pleasure and it is subjected to scorn.

In a patriarchal society where penetration is equated to conquest and submission, where the penetrated body is a feminised one, for a heterosexual man to offer his anus to another man or woman has the potential to be a subversive act of love and pleasure. Thus, it is important to acknowledge Imari's desire of being penetrated, because it represents a reformulation of the codes of heterosexuality that could result in a partial loss of the stability that heteronormativity grants. This loss, however, is greater for other sex-gender identities that already stand in the margins of the heteronormative regime.

Men´s understanding of sexual pleasure is generally focused on their own experience, on their own orgasm, because female orgasm was not really considered relevant until research like that of Masters and Johnson (1966) in the 60s and with second wave feminism bringing it to public discussion. Once again, desire has become political and for 21st century feminism, female orgasm and sexual wellness are important issues to bring forward into the discussions around equality and relationships, especially heterosexual ones. The problem is that men are just starting to acknowledge their part in this matter but lack social references. As a result, men can receive women's sexual revolution defensively. What men like Balam, Imari or Miztli show is that pleasure, like desire, can be malleable but it has to undergo a process that is both personal (understanding one's own body and the body of one's partner) and social (realising there is a symbolic-material system that is a producer of desires), like Quetzal continuously showed throughout his

narrative: "desire requires a strong questioning on a political level", "sex is power", "I understand heterosexuality […] as a political regime".

However, even conceding to the former statements, to step out categorically from the heteronormative logic, not only represents a risk but is also a process that cannot always be taken to its limits. Seidler et al. (1995) explained how men's lack of knowledge of their own bodies and desires prevents them from confronting their own self, and by doing so, it prevents confronting the likely vulnerability that masculine identity perceives as threat. Unsurprisingly, men are more likely to uphold the discourse of detached sex, than to make a process of self-knowledge of their own body, pleasures and emotional investments. Men have "learned to desire sex without contact or emotional involvement" (Seidler et al., 1995: 90) because it is through this conception of sex that several risks are minimised. The overwhelming importance of sex for men is a discourse that keeps getting fed in a neoliberal system where sex is one of the most profitable objects of consumption. This creates a set of frustrations when the ideal is not met, which for Yumil, for instance, were reflected in the hope to "know ecstasy" one day. Yumil was open to expand his sexual practices if that would lead him to experiment more intense pleasure. However, part of his frustration was due to the masculine mandate that men must have sexual desire all the time, to express it and to satisfy it.

For Yumil, desire was mediated by frustration and lack. Yumil desired the possibility of desiring more, of experimenting exorbitant pleasure that was still just a promise. The mediation of desire present in Yumil's narrative is the promise of a pleasure yet to come, which could be at the same time the promise of a fulfilled hypersexual masculinity and the discovery of a whole new range of non-heteronormative pleasures. In Balam's case, desire was mediated by a reflexive process, which had a strong visual and symbolic element, tightly bounded to the representation of sex in pornography. This mediation helped him change his practices of pleasure towards different ones, where his orgasm was not the

central focus. Finally, for Imari, desire was mediated by the introduction of a symbolic-material artefact, which disrupted heteronormative masculinity: the strap-on.

In conclusion, one of the strategies that hegemonic systems have for the maintenance of their hegemony is reifying dominating and subordinated positions through ritualised practices that are made to be natural, ahistorical and unquestionable. Social mediations of desire, when wielded by hegemonic masculinity, can reaffirm patriarchal relationships, even in quotidian and subtler forms, as shown in this quote by Yumil:

> I'm sexual, I'm horny and I like looking at women. When I'm walking down the street, I do give them a look; it's a way of expressing it, of always being horny. […] We're used to enjoy looking, even though it doesn't make much sense. What the fuck do you get out of looking at an ass? Nothing, but I do it nonetheless.
>
> *(Yumil, 32)*

However, their production and reproduction are a live process, constantly being contested and challenged. Desire (to desire) cannot be separated from an analysis of power, which makes Quetzal's question a continuous challenge:

> Why do we desire certain bodies and what are its implications? It's very easy to say, "I like whom I like, and I can't change that". But it's about realising that desire requires a strong questioning on a political level. Because there are bodies that are discriminated and excluded by other bodies, which are legitimated in order to maintain relations of domination.
>
> *(Quetzal, 35)*

Intensive and extensive

Social mediation of desire can also be observed in broader social processes that relate, for instance, to the implications of defining the relationship as it progresses in time. Specifically, in this section, two wider processes are shown, which include several social mediations of desire, and that relate to representations of masculinity and globalised neoliberal societies.

A common challenge in relationships relates to the difference between the intensity felt at the beginning and the way in which emotions and desire seem to extend as the relationship grows in time. Intensity is a concentration of energy; it occurs in space more than in time, as intensity cannot be maintained for prolonged periods. In the context of sexual-affective relationships, that concentration seems to be guided by affect and immediate satisfaction of desire. Intensity is the place of amorousness and breakups. For Giddens (1992: 37) the period of intensity is the field of passionate love, as it is "marked by an urgency which sets it apart from the routines of everyday life with which, indeed, it tends to come into conflict". This intense urgency connects love and sexual attachment, while detaching from the extensiveness of everyday life. The period of intensity at the beginning of relationships is often idyllic, because there has not been enough time for specific conflicts to develop. Long-term expectations are generally not communicated in this period and the agreements that formalise a relationship have not yet been made explicit.

In Miztli's relationship, for instance, the period of intensity followed a very clear temporal line. In the first video he recorded, just a few weeks after having started the sexual-affective relationship with his partner, it was noticeable the way in which emotions and experiences were hyperbolised; moreover, his discourse focused exclusively on concrete experiences that were connected to specific encounters. An essential component in Miztli's period of intensity was the role sex played. In this first period, most of his stories talked specifically about sexual encounters, which Miztli considered fundamental in his relationships. Desire and sexual pleasure directed the action; they were the main characteristics of intensity in his narrative. To have found someone who also considered it fundamental, who, in Miztli's words is, "*a girl that's on my same level of hornyness*", was one of the reasons why, in this period, he threw himself so intensely into the relationship. At first glance, it would seem that he was objectifying his partner by making most of his stories revolve around sex encounters and physical attractiveness; I would argue, however, that it was more about a sense of clarity regarding the character of the

relationship. Miztli did not shy away from the physical and sexual aspect of the relationship, he put it in the foreground and he let the reader know, in his own words, that it was reciprocal. Nonetheless, there were still steps and norms that guided his interaction; even though they differed from a more conservative and traditional approach to the courtship period of a relationship, they still constituted forms of rituals, which are becoming more frequent in the relationships of late capitalism (Illouz, 2009).

One of the practices that are becoming more common in contemporary western societies is the process of starting a relationship as non-exclusive or "open", and only when certain time has passed, and other emotions have developed, the couple would make an agreement of exclusivity. This was the case for Miztli: a strong sexual intensity came first in the agreement of a non-committed, open relationship, and only after some time the relationship became monogamous. This "becoming" monogamous was also present in Tizoc's narrative. There seems to be a pattern, in which monogamy is linked with specific elements of romantic love, such as commitment, true love, jealousy and property. As Paul Johnson (2005) has stated, it is the heterosexual monogamous ideal that binds love, sex and sexuality together, even to the point they become indiscernible. For Johnson, the cultural ideals of romantic love cement and legitimate heterosexual normative practice.

The period of intensity can also involve some risks, in the sense that the images of romantic love appear in a more explicit form and the emotional energy placed in rituals and sexual-affective practices is greater. The representation of romantic love entails formalised myths and rituals that will eventually become harmful to the relationship. The idea, for instance, that the period of intensity can be maintained throughout the relationship, creates a series of frustrations when routine and everyday life become regular. Frustrations that occur when people realise their relationships are no longer intense in a world where everything revolves around immediate euphoria and the "if you want it, you got it!" slogan (Illouz, 2009). It takes a deep understanding of one's own feelings, and those of the partner, to accept that a relationship has lowered in intensity

and has passed to an extensive stage. For heterosexual men socialised within the dominating forms of masculinity this presents a challenge, as one of the components of hegemonic masculinity is that it places its emotional investment, or cathexis (Connell, 1995) in emotions deemed as more productive, which would strengthen the imaginary of what a man does and feels.

For Tonatiuh, the transition from intensive to extensive was not easy; the standstill to which he and his partner had arrived was evident. He spoke of it as a lack of novelty in their daily routine; whereas with his secondary partner, who he had been seeing for about six months at the moment of his first video recording, their encounters were charged with adventure, risk, sexual energy and novelty. He referred to his main relationship as a conventional one, and in a somewhat negative tone, as "practically married". Conversely, his secondary relationship, which had an element of forbidden risk, was "crazy" and filled with "novelty". Tonatiuh lived his two relationships in constant contradiction; the situation he was in was directly related to the effects of dominating masculinity. On one hand, he reproduced practices that are common elements of dominating masculinity, like dishonesty within monogamy (Herrera, 2011), compartmentalisation of emotions (hooks, 2005) and rationalisation of affective practices (Seidler, 2000). On the other, he was actively working on his jealousy, which he regarded as a form of control and property; he acknowledged he was not being fair to his partners and was constantly in an emotional struggle, and he strived to maintain agreements of equality within the everyday routines of each relationship.

In this sense, Toniatiuh (like the other men in this study), was neither fully performing a dominating masculinity nor fully performing an alternative, anti-normative or feminist masculinity. Rather, his gender performance included multiple expressions of masculinities. Moreover, both the desire for novelty and the means of satisfying that desire were mediated by representations of masculinity. The search for novelty and for sexual-affective intensity was resolved, in Tonatiuh's narrative, when he began his other

relationship. However, this was an agreement that, while it was transparent with his secondary partner, it was not with his long-term, primary partner. A new element was added to intensity, which was the risk factor, of executing socially reprehensible practices and having to move within the frame of secrecy. This had two main consequences: on one hand, it made desire greater and reduced conflict with his secondary partner, for their relationship was clearly delimited; but on the other hand, the satisfaction of that desire, the search for pleasure and novelty, was covered with guilt, as Tonatiuh knew that what he was doing was not fair for his main partner.

Tonatiuh struggled to achieve a period of emotional stability, where he could be at peace with the decisions that had led him to this point. He suffered from not finding a solution to his situation, but he also enjoyed the benefits that each of his relationships brought him. Both feelings are part of the same desire; they come from the same root. Expression and satisfaction of desire happen in a social framework that includes practices, institutions and representations of gender. When desire is not in harmony with social conventions, it can carry a feeling of guilt; but it can also create spaces of collective transformation, for instance, the increasing acceptance of polyamory as a possible sexual-affective practice (see Easton and Hardy, 1997), or the gay, lesbian and queer communities, which are also a vindication of pleasure and amatory practices.

On the other side of the spectrum, the extensive occupies space and time alike. Intensity dilutes, emotions start to acquire weight and the relationship develops a memory. In the extensive, rituals and traditions are created or adapted within the relationship's boundaries, but it can also give space for routines, discomforts and resentments. These new elements must be considered in the light of an extensive affective framework, meaning, they are influenced by ideas of sexuality, desire and, in this case, masculinity, which men have learned as forms of representations (de Lauretis, 1987). Mass media, social networks, online dating, cinema and music, just to name a few producers of

representation, have modified not only the traditional practice of courtship and dating, but also the way in which desire and affect have evolved and are experienced.

Contemporary sexual-affective relationships are closer to Giddens' (1992) idea of the "pure relationship", in consonance with the liberties that a neoliberal world has promised (Illouz, 2009), albeit it has also come with multiple and complex challenges that relate to a culture of the self, individualism and merchantilisation of sexual and romantic life. Despite the former, the break from the traditional has meant, for women, liberation from the mandate of marriage and a further exploration of their desires. Nonetheless, in Mexico, these changes have encountered more resistance from men, as they are felt as a loss of control in a society where traditional values are deeply patriarchal (Guevara, 2010). Even though the men in this study are more liberal in their thinking and acknowledged their own machismo and were actively trying to modify it, they still presented discursive hints of an ingrained machista way of thinking.

Ulrich and Elisabeth Beck (1995) have added another layer to the analysis of modern-day relationships, by stating that the current cult of individuality, which has been exacerbated in postmodernity, but started as one of the principles of modernity, has reshaped the way we experience love, by stripping it of the rituals, norms and conventions that traditionally gave it some stability. The results are relationships that fall apart quicker, are given less value but at the same time are experienced with shorter and more intense feelings; they are relationships that have partially detached themselves from the social norms of the past but haven't managed to create adequate new agreements and game rules. For Byung-Chul Han (2012), the inability to consider the other as a fully developed person, due to a generalised narcissism, has made us incapable of experiencing *Eros* anymore. For Han, one of the effects of neoliberal postmodern societies is that the exaltation of the individual prevents the recognition of the other, from which love can develop.

Modern individuals are shifting their focus of emotional energy from committed and stable relationships to personal goals, professional success and self-realisation; which has also brought more control of the romantic life, deeper understanding of one's self and more equality between the sexes (Illouz, 2009). In this way, equality and autonomy will have to live next to the new norms of postmodernity. There is a difference in the relation of power of the heterosexual couple of the late twentieth and 21st century and the one of their parents and grandparents, where women acquire more sexual autonomy and spaces to achieve their own pleasure. However, as Johnson (2005) and Ward (2015) have argued, heterosexuality is still largely defined by the precepts of heteronormativity and romantic love. In between innovation and tradition, the relationships described by the men in this study showed the struggles of contesting monogamy and jealousy while reproducing traditional relationships, of challenging their notions of heterosexuality while admitting they have never felt any desire to experiment; in general, the struggles of generating alternative discursive practices within the frame of hegemonic masculinity.

Easton and Hardy (1997) have taken advantage of the fact that the institutions of modernity, while still present, have become more malleable and, as a result, can be shaped to cater to specific relationships. Resistance brings creation, and as Preciado (2002) has shown, creation from the margins can mean a whole new form of experiencing pleasure. However, given that the men in this study are installed in heterosexuality, the path towards a new form of relationship becomes more complex: as this path is created from within the norm, which invisibilises its own practices of domination, and from a position of privilege, making change from within entails a real challenge.

Considering that the relationships of these seven men, as well as most westernised societies, happen in a global context of overstimulation, saturation of free time and work, immediacy and constant satisfaction of desire; the capacity to maintain a long-term relationship becomes more difficult. In open relationships, there is usually a rejection of certain types of feelings, which are considered more in line with exclusive relationships

and that could be categorised as amorous feelings and jealous feelings. Men tend to avoid the first ones because, from the normative frame, love should imply exclusivity. Balam learned this open/exclusive logic as well, so when he started to develop amorous feelings he decided to keep silent because, from his perspective, they did not fit in with his relationship. Miztli, on his part, pushed for a non-exclusive relationship with his partner, but as time progressed and feelings of love became stronger, his partner moved towards monogamy. One of the first teachings of polyamorous relationships (Easton and Hardy, 1997) is that this polarisation of *love-exclusivity* and *superficiality-openness*, is at the service of maintaining the traditional family system, whose economic and social interests of control fall heavily over women's bodies, as Gayle Rubin (1986) has extensively studied. Work that is still to be done, in the frame of heterosexual relationships, is to release feelings and amorous practices from the realm of monogamy; to equate love with respect and care, even in our most intense, open and short-term relationships.

In the extensive stage, everyday life unfolds. People not only have to deal with the challenges that come with sharing a life, but also with the danger of showing parts of themselves with which they are not comfortable. Without having the necessary tools to tackle the complications and hardships that a long-term relationship implies, heterosexual men educated within dominating masculinity avoid these confrontations and turn to the public life, like their job, which they know are capable of managing (Seidler, 2000).

Authors like Simone de Beauvoir (1949), Monique Wittig (1992) and Teresa de Lauretis (1987) have clearly shown how in a sex-gender system which privileges men and masculine forms of representation, women are defined as 'other'. bell hooks (1984) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) have added more complexity to the concept of 'otherness' by talking from their position as black women. The conception of otherness has repercussions regarding expectations in a heterosexual relationship, as men bring certain ideals of femininity to the table, which are mostly defined from a masculine position. Moreover, there is an increasing frustration that develops when all the stimuli in the

public space aim to the idea that "you could be better", an idea that 21st century capitalism has elevated to exorbitant proportions. It is so, that the frustration of feeling incomplete is found everywhere, in sexual-affective relationships as much as in the supermarket or at work, in our place of residence or in cable television.

As it has been shown, the extensive stage modifies desire and the sexual practices that could come paired with it. Extensiveness mediates desire in a relationship, but not only through events that could be regarded as external or unavoidable, like the passing of time, which as Marc and Piccard (1989) have shown, it is also a sociocultural frame through which we build our interactions. Extensiveness also mediates desire through the myths and representations of sexuality and romantic love within a hyper stimulated, fast paced, immediately satisfied, individualistic society. The product of this mediation often translates into boredom, lack of novelty and decline of sexual drive. However, when people stop accepting the myths of romantic love and start building a more realistic, situated and adaptable relationship, other forms of social mediation of desire may arise.

Two things should be clear by now. The first is that not just because a relationship has entered an extensive period, necessarily means it will unavoidably enter a stage of decline. However, new challenges arise as the extensive period either aligns with or separates from the normative representations of romantic love and sexuality, and the imposed expectations to each gender. The second is that desire is rarely expressed and satisfied without any form of social mediation. One strategy to challenge heteronormative desire is to analyse the social mediations that reproduce it.

The last section of the analysis centres on the way men construct their masculine identities from a conflicting set of references that relate to: representations of hegemonic masculinity, their situated geopolitical context, and contesting discourses that speak of other ways of living. Men negotiate their gender performance as a product of the former elements, which most of the times results in contradictions between practice and representation of masculinity. A critical study of masculinity needs to acknowledge the

contradictory character of masculinity, both as a system of domination and as a gender performance, in order to understand the points of conflict and spaces of opportunity.

Masculine Pantomimes

As it has been stated before, masculinity is both a system of hierarchical differentiation between the sexes, and a gender performance that speaks about an identity of the self. Both movements occur simultaneously, they are not bounded to a specifically biological body and they have effects in the macro-sociological as well as in everyday interactions. This section addresses the dual movement in which masculinity is displayed in western societies, by focusing on the discourse of seven Mexican men at the intersection between tradition and change, between willingness and structure.

Given that these men were not foreign to the discussions around gender and women's equality, a recurrent topic was given to them in their video diaries: they were encouraged to position themselves as sex-gender bodies within their narratives, and to talk from within their own comprehension of their masculinity. Throughout the six to eight months of data gathering, the participants went through a process of questioning of their masculine practices and identity. Some did it by connecting their reflections to their experiences in the daily life; others tackled it as a more personal process, which they tried to reflect in their relationships with their partners and with other men; while some others went through it in a more superficial or private manner. In every case, however, there were moments in which it was possible to see a discursive separation from traditional masculinity that did not always translate into emancipatory practices. It is important to mention the above as a reminder to avoid the filter of judging which men pass the "feminist test", and to better focus on the ways these men situate themselves within the new discourses of gender, equality and masculinity.

Whenever there is talk about a process of deconstruction, it is important to be careful not to fall into the allure of voluntarism, in which a complete and finished identity would exert, by its own means, a process of de-identification, mostly by using the discourse of reason. Moreover, if men (supposing there exists such a descriptive category in a concrete form in the social world) would decide by their own means to "relinquish" their privileges, that decision would only be possible from a position of power; hence the question, would men actually un-possess said privileges? Or would men decide, from their own exercise of power, to not practice said privileges in a given moment?[50] Conversely, it makes more sense to think about the process of deconstruction and subsequent transformation of masculinities as a result of the influence, pressure, and struggle that other minority groups exert onto men. Masculinity can only be transformed with the existence of alliances with other gender identities.

Having reached this point, it could be conceded that the 'new masculinities' do not exist insofar as to be considered a new category of identity but, 1) As an adaptive response to the feminist discourse; and, 2) As a result of the conflicts and negotiations of power between other minority groups and the hegemonic one.

For this specific analysis of masculinity, I focused on three aspects of discourse found in the narratives of the participants of this study. All of which relate not only with a situated gendered identity but also with a *use* of discourse that produces certain reactions and shapes relationships.

The first aspect is the discursive positioning within the feminist and gender discourse, showing how these men separated themselves from older generations and more conservative ideologies in terms of how they thought and lived their masculinity. The former resonates with the analysis of the philosophers of postmodernity, which in broad

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[50] This is a reflection taken from the comment section of a compelling article written by Jokin Azpiazu in 2013 for Pikara Magazine. Retrieved on 10/03/2019 from:
 https://www.pikaramagazine.com/2013/03/%C2%BFque-hacemos-con-la-masculinidad-reformarla-transformarla-o-abolirla/

terms show: a rupture with the big myths and promises of modernity (including gender) and the "do it yourself" individualistic attitude (Seidler et al., 1995). In this sense, I question the way in which this 'liquid -*à la carte*- identity' (Bauman, 2000) fails by not being able to be situated in relation to the current socio-political context and by assuming that talking about dissidence is the same as practising it.

Secondly, I delve further into the concept of discursive dissidence in dialogue with Connell's (1995; 2005) approach to what she calls 'complicit masculinities' and Seidler's (1995) take on heterosexual men, their emotional life and power. Here is where the contradictory character of masculinity is clearer, as the men regarded themselves -to a certain extent- incapable of changing the social and economic structures that granted them privileges and maintained the *status quo*, and therefore incapable of modifying a broad set of relational practices. It would appear to be an unconscious separation between their progressive self-concept and their historically situated subjectivity. Once again, the dualism of individual and society, inherited from modernity, is analysed from the light of complicity and the structural privileges of masculinity.

Finally, I talk about identity practices. It is not possible to affirm that the heterosexual man has undergone a radical and finished transformation, or that talking about 'new masculinities' means the dominating or traditional ones are no longer current. What is more, new masculinity is not automatically better masculinity, it can also be that the hegemonic system is readapting as a response to the pressure exerted from the minority groups (Azpiazu, 2017). However, this does not mean that the efforts of certain men to change their ways of relating to others and to question their privileges are in vain. There are specific and ongoing actions that talk about a process of change which, while it is true it has not fully replaced the hegemonic system of masculinity, it has opened a dialogue with the feminist and queer movements. These practices cannot yet be assumed as the effects of a new gendered identity, however they are attempts to move towards an otherwise possible horizon.

Discursive Dissidence

Jonathan Katz (1995) has shown that the critique of heterosexuality as a system of coercion/domination is fairly recent, dating back to second wave feminism. The idea that the social organisation of sex "rests upon gender, obligatory heterosexuality, and the constraint of female sexuality" (Katz, 1995: 133) is now more widespread both in political spheres and gender studies. In this sense, even though masculinity and heterosexuality are two elements of identity that are not biologically bounded or essentially linked, they nonetheless work together to assure a particular economic distribution of power. Understandably so, to reflect on and to question heterosexuality from the position of a heterosexual man carries several complications, one of which is to assume heterosexuality is merely a matter of the object of desire. This was noticed in the participants' discourse around their own heterosexuality, which can be regarded as an aspect of discursive dissidence. Some participants, like Balam, struggled to define themselves as heterosexuals, because they considered both the limitations and the oppressions heterosexuality brought. However, even though Balam, for instance, said he felt sexually limited by heterosexuality, he did not have sexual attraction towards men, he did not "feel homosexual". Like Balam, most men in this study refused to admit a determinant heterosexuality, however, all of them affirmed they did not feel sexual attraction or desire towards men.

This affirmation showed a complicated relation with their heterosexuality, a discursive dissidence from heterosexuality in terms of a potential expansion of pleasure, despite the fact in practice there was nothing that aimed towards non-heterosexual practices. There was also a traditional preconception that femininity in men would result in homosexuality, in a desire to have sex with men who, in turn, would be masculine. The feminisation of homosexuality shows that, even though there is an impulse to expand the realms of desire, the logic that supports it is still bounded to the limits of the binary, to the heteronormative matrix of sexuality (Preciado, 2002).

The feminisation of homosexuality can have different ramifications. It seemed that facial hair, for Yumil or Tizoc, was a relevant element when defining sexual attraction. It is in these moments when the interrelation between masculinity and heterosexuality became clearer. However, I am referring only to the normative alliances that the sex-gender system builds to uphold relations of power, which do not exclude the fact that there are other non-normative alliances. Tizoc wondered what would happen if he were to find a man that did not have the physical characteristics he related to masculinity; immediately after, however, he remarked that he was not actively looking for that, because he was in a heterosexual relationship. For Miztli, the heterosexual man was afraid of other men's penises; even though he stated he was not afraid of them, he did not feel like having a sexual relation with a man. Heterosexuality, for all the participants (except for Quetzal) was defined by the lack of desire to "fuck men" as Balam put it.

There seemed to be a reticence for these men to admit themselves as men and as heterosexual. This reserve, however, did not come from an empowered subaltern position that refused the identity category that had been given/imposed, as it is the case, for example, of women, queer folks or African Americans. This separation from the ideas of masculinity and heterosexuality appeared to be discursive and somewhat strategic. Discursive in the sense that it had not been taken into practice, yet it was part of a discourse that could be regarded as sexually progressive and sometimes feminist; it was a separation conducted solely with the tools of reason through which an ethical positioning was achieved. Strategic because by stating the potential expansion of desire, they distanced from the traditional "straight man" category that, for the first time, has entered the conflict zone. The participants' reflections around heterosexuality and desire are just an example of how discursive dissidence played in each of their discourses around masculinity and relationships.

An element of discursive dissidence is the structure that reason creates in discourse, by which specific games of truth can acquire legitimacy. In modernity, reason is erected as the most productive form of organising the western world and its institutions; at the same time, it grants men the most access to the field of reason (Seidler, 2000), while women are placed in the field of emotions. Our historically binary thinking has counterposed reason and emotion, giving a position of power to the former and relegating the later as just a vestige of our past, of our connection to a feminised nature.

Seidler (2000) centres on the period that includes the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution as the most representative era of the cult of reason, which brought the sexual divisions that still prevail. While for historian Silvia Federici (1998), the first moments of primitive accumulation and the beginnings of capitalism around the 15th and 16th centuries in Europe are more representative of the sexual division of work and its effects. The sexual division of work and the cult of masculine reason helped to consolidate the sexual identities of men and women. It is also true that the construction of identities is a collective process in constant change, so in order to understand how identity is both in constant movement and discursively grounded, a Foucauldian approach will come in handy.

A big part of Foucault's work revolves around the relation of power and subjectivity, particularly how the exercise of power shapes bodies and identities by framing them within a specific discourse. For example, the medical and psychiatric discourse has created the truth of mental illness and therefore mental health. Another example is how a series of disciplinary technologies were put into motion to develop a *scientia sexualis*, sheltered by Christian morality, into what became the western discourse of sexuality in the 18th century (Foucault, 1976). These "discursive machineries" have strong effects in the way people construct their identities and the practices of freedom that can derive from it. If the body is a cultural and social product, then the assumption that one can completely separate from the dominant discourse that traverse them, could be seen as naïve.

However, it is also unfair to deny that digression and discrepancy from the norm exist. The question of how one acknowledges one's own individuality grows increasingly complex. In terms of the discourse of masculinity, for Balam, the process of deconstruction or "unlearning", in his own words, was a matter of differentiating himself from the norm he was supposed to embody, specifically, from the traditional way of thinking of the Mexican who was a macho, in general terms.

Balam tried to separate himself from the representation of the macho, and by doing so -or in order to do so- created a caricature, which allowed him to stand in a different place from that very delineated representation. This, again, is a common positioning of the generations that grew up in the end of the 20th century. To use the word "positioning" is probably not the most accurate phrasing to describe the former statement, given the element of fluidity and detachment of the modern individual, (Bauman, 2000). It is, in this case, a lack of discursive positioning, as these individuals turn their backs to old traditions and geographies but lack new ones to substitute them. Balam knew that he was not that traditional Mexican macho, however he regarded himself in a state of transition, a lack of place that was strengthened by him living in another country.

Undeniably, change happens, some traditions get lost, others get reformed and some others are overthrown; however, this change moves at the pace of generations, it is a slow movement because it is the thought of society that is moving. The first quote on the first page of the first book that defined my interest for social psychology explained it in a simple and beautiful way. It can be found in "The Spirit of the Street: political psychology of everyday culture" by Pablo Fernandez Christlieb. In there, Fernandez quoted Charles Sanders Peirce: "Accordingly, just as we say that a body is in motion, and not that motion is in a body, we ought to say that we are in thought and not that thoughts are in us" (Fernández, 2004: 1).

In "The discourse of language", Foucault (1970) showed how discourse does not come from the subject who enunciates it; rather it is the subject who is constituted by discourse. In other words, in a specific moment in history, that which can be taken as truth and constitutive is established and with it, rules, agreements and sanctions that frame the limits of discourse are established too. Foucault builds a notion of discourse as something productive (Kendall and Wickham, 1999), specifically, that produces truths and materialises them into actions, which in turn have effects in subjectivities. What is more, discourse is materialised in subjectivities and yet, it is at the same time external from them. Discourse is not synonym of language and the mental processes that produce speech; rather, it extends to institutions and spaces alike. Consequently, discourse appears in two simultaneous forms:

> "Discourse 'uttered' in the course of the day and in casual meetings, and which disappears with the very act which gave rise to it; and those forms of discourse that lie at the origins of a certain number of new verbal acts, which are reiterated, transformed or discussed" (Foucault, 1970:26).

The speech can change but the function of discourse remains, and in the last two or three centuries the driving force of discourse has been the will to truth. For instance, to look for the truth of the deviated and the abnormal has been the mission of medical science and law ever since the eighteen centuries. It was a truth that was hidden in the very discourse of the subjects: "it was through their speech that one recognised the madness of the mad" (Foucault, 1970: 16). By implementing diverse technologies of power, certain institutions are erected as producers of truth, clearly representing the power-knowledge Foucauldian relation. These technologies generate the "conditions of possibility" for any given event to occur, in other words, the conditions of possibility refer to all the elements that had to be put into motion for a certain something to be possible (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). In the case of the discourse of sex and gender, the conditions of possibility are strongly rooted in our bodies; however, the real matter is not sexual difference *per se*, but how that sexual difference is constructed within power relations.

Going back to Foucault's argument, the will to truth has sexed the body in a normative binary; by recognising oneself within this discourse is that one also creates an identity. For heterosexual men socialised in dominating masculinity, their sex-gender identity is strongly rooted in the penis. When asked if he defined himself as a man, Yumil stated "my penis says it all", he also talked about his ability to ejaculate and his desire to penetrate.

Yumil's response is a statement that accurately represents the normative discourse of sexuality. The importance of the penis, both in the sexual pursuit of pleasure and in the sex-gendered identity, is overwhelming. The penis, however, is at the same time a biological appendage and a *somatopolitic* tool for the exercise of power (Preciado, 2008). In this sense, to transform maleness and masculinity does not mean to deny the existence of the penis as a physical organ, but to contextualise it as a symbolic and material element. In the case of Imari, for example, the biological materiality of his penis was not overwhelmingly more important than the social aspects of masculinity. Imari defined himself as "a person with a penis that also has privileges and has a masculine side". For him, as it was for Balam and Tonatiuh, being a man was a social category before a biological one.

The discourse of sexuality has had tremendous modifications as feminism began to make way into science, research and politics. Works like those of Donna Haraway (1991), Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1994) and Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000), to name just a few, have contributed to a strong shift on how bodies are read. This scientific turn has come hand in hand with the social movements that have fought to redefine their bodies in their own terms, slowly gaining more recognition legally and socially. All of this creates ripples that affect men and their conception of masculinity and maleness. Men's most common response to changes in gender relations is usually a backlash, which Susan Faludi (1991) has linked to the feeling of loss (of privileges, of identity, of spaces and power). This backlash can have violent ramifications, as seen in the massive cases of domestic and

gender violence worldwide. However, the ripples can also mean a reflective reaction that shifts the conception of what it means to be a man.

Both Tonatiuh and Quetzal separated, not only masculinity, but also maleness, from the biological script of the body. For Tonatiuh, being a man was primarily a convention that allows an individual to be identified with a group. In the case of Quetzal, being a man was a position that grants advantages in detriment of others. The discourse of both men showed a will to separate biology from destiny and at the same time a certain accountability of the benefits of being read as a man. Moreover, both men were clearly immersed in the discourse that, since the second half of the twentieth century, has regarded gender as a social construction. One of the most important consequences of the previous affirmation is that it invariably leads to thinking the world as a series of contingencies: nothing in history has happened as an absolutely necessary and independent event. The discourses that are accepted as truth in a given moment do not necessarily obey the logic of historical continuity, contrary to what the ideals of progress from modernity have assumed; rather, they depend on the order of discourse of the time, or "episteme": a system of relations between signs (Foucault, 1966). Within discourse, there are more fixed or structural parts and there are more dynamic ones. From this perspective, the subject as such does not exist, for it is the product of the episteme of the time; in other words, identity is traversed and is constituted by the discourses that say the "truth" about the subject.

Having reached this point, it could be assumed that the subject is completely determined and without much chance to change. However, that is not the case. Every exercise of power faces a practice of resistance. The institutions and the frames of representation are slowly modified thanks mainly to concrete actions by the bodies that are in the material and discursive peripheries, which exert pressure, demand rights and aim for more representation. As previously shown, an example of this is the introduction of feminism in science and academia. Feminist epistemologies have made way through spaces that were

traditionally occupied by men and by masculine thought, and have managed to reclaim them and to produce different knowledge. These changes are slow and unfinished; however, it is by the constant pressure and questioning of the hegemonic discourses that an improvement in the conditions of women and other minority groups has been achieved.

There is a risk, nonetheless, that the hegemonic system would absorb the minority groups' ideals and turn them into a part of its own survival, as it is clearly seen in several aspects of the "crisis of masculinity" that appears as a reaction to the feminist and LGBTQ+ movement. Imari talked about a relational crisis, which had to do with the increasing empowerment of women and a lack of an adequate response from men. Men's sex-gendered identity had never been put into question until recently; first by feminism and then by men's groups, which started to arise in the sixties and seventies and asked themselves about their role in the fight against sexism, and how patriarchy affected them as well (Carrigan et. al., 1985). In general terms, however, the questioning of masculinity has not meant the loss of the structural privileges in which men are complicit, regarding hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). One of the critiques of the concept of "new masculinities" (Carabí and Segarra, 2000) is to the claim that it represents a paradigm shift, when actually the masculine system of privileges remains in place. Twenty-first century feminism constantly warns us about the "new men" rhetoric that is discursively exceptional but in practice still maintains its privileges to the detriment of others.

A main element of how hegemony works is the use of consensus, which in this case it is seen by the absorption of the transgressive discourse to immobilise the active minority (Feliu & Jauleneusse, 2004). Yumil, for instance, paired equality with sameness; however, he moved within the discourse of individual freedom. There is discrepancy, or confusion, when he spoke about being in favour of equal opportunities but recognising that equality does not exists. With this discursive entanglement, Yumil positioned himself in favour of gender equality and, at the same time, made it unattainable. This is a common stance for

people in positions of privilege, which is the use of individual freedom to avoid systemic accountability. After all, it is not easy to acknowledge that the odds are placed in our favour in certain situations. In this quest for gender equality and the "surge" of new masculinities, feminism plays a central role, both as an ideology that has become increasingly more popular and as a practice – of care, of politics and of everyday relations. Given that men are not the political subjects of feminism, the question of how to participate in the discussion for equality has been remarkably complicated. For most men, feminism is regarded as an exaggeration that is no longer relevant, as a menace for the values of family and tradition or, in the best cases, as an invitation to change. In Mexico, it is clear that men have struggled to detach from traditional gender roles (Guevara, 2010).

Three out of seven men in my study felt passionate about feminism and they considered themselves as actively doing something to change gender relations. However, their approach to the feminist movement had a particular tone, which was obviously distinct from women's experience, but also differed from the unwavering man that refuses to open up to change. For Miztli, feminism was felt, first and foremost, as a confrontation; which is a generalised feeling in men (both with the ones that agree with the feminist perspective and those who do not). Understandably, the difference in the embodied experience of feminism between men and women is abysmal: for most women, trans and queer people in patriarchal societies, the fight for equality and diversity is a matter of life or death, of humanity or barbarism; it is not an invitation, but a necessary irruption in the constant flux that keeps flushing them out. There is a sense of disembodiment when men talk about feminism and gender equality; it is articulated from a rationale, as something that makes sense and not so much from an affective experience or a vital necessity.

For some men, it can be difficult to accept the contradiction of realising that masculinity is both a system that oppresses and differentiates gendered bodies, and a set of institutionalised practices that constitute part of their identity. To avoid the contradiction, Balam for example, separated 'patriarchy' as the thing to fight against, and 'men',

'masculinity' and 'gender' as identity traits that are not necessarily *wrong* in the way patriarchal ideology is. However, as we see with Connell's (2005) explanation, hegemony is not only enforced by institutions such as the state, but it traverses cultural practices and belief systems. In other words, patriarchy as an ideology is rooted in our understanding of gender, and its effects are both symbolic and material (Federici, 1998). For Balam, fighting against the patriarchal system did not necessarily mean attacking masculinity, whereas for Quetzal it was paramount. At the beginning of his narrative, he spoke about how men hold on to masculinity and the idea of being a 'true man', because if men were moved from that place, they would become vulnerable. In other words, the concept and the adscription to masculinity still bring benefits to men. Balam and Quetzal's arguments show a common debate in feminism, which relates to Azpiazu's (2013) guiding questions: What do we do with masculinity? Do we abolish it? Do we reform it? Or do we transform it? Readings on 'new masculinities' (Messner, 1997; Carabí & Segarra, 2000) argue more for the latter option; however, following Azpiazu (2013) masculinity is always changing as it adapts to social and historical changes, and in certain ways, that is a positive change, but it would be a mistake to think of it as a finished process. The new man does not exist.

Quetzal's contradiction was clearer. He acknowledged that *everything* regarding maleness and masculinity was negative, and at the same time he regarded himself as a man. There was a transformative process in his practices, in the way he tackled and rejected certain male privileges, in how he related sexually, economically and politically with women and other men and so on. Yet, he was still, unequivocally, a man. How, then, to move forward in the quest for equality? This question relates to the previous questions posed by Azpiazu (2013). While Balam separated two linked elements of masculinity to avoid the contradiction, Quetzal charged categorically against it, deeming it all "fucked up". The approach to this contradiction is not mathematical but ethical. It starts with accepting a reality where two distinct elements exist in the same space and the actions taken against one affect the other. It is an internal reflection that implies a lot of self-knowledge that men historically are not used to having (Kimmel, 1993; Seidler et al., 1995), and it is also an external conversation that would bring political and institutional change.

To be a man questioning his privileges, however, implies being aware of the relations of power that traverse one's interactions with other subjectivities. What is more, the discourse of the feminist man is one that has gained recognition, to the extent that in certain groups it can even come with its own set of privileges. Being a "man questioning his masculinity" becomes a cover letter that could be utilised strategically to position oneself ethically and to justify certain relational practices, without it necessarily translating to a rejection of privileges or ceasing to occupy certain positions of power. Quetzal shared this concern in his own academic workspace, showing both the gains of being a man positioned within the feminist discourse and his own critique of that situation. The privileges he spoke of revolved around having more credibility when encouraging a feminist discourse, being more empowered by feminism than some feminist colleagues, and being benefited by pacts between men.

Acknowledging both the progressive discourse of rejection of masculinity on the one side, and the everyday practices that maintain certain elements of traditional masculinity on the other, is not always a conscious process. For instance, some participants completely rejected masculinity, while still occupying the 'male' social position; others were not fully aware of the fact they still reproduced some of the practices they were critical about. In some respects, the participants' discourse was more radical than the actions that should follow. The absorption of the radical discourse by the group in a position of power can lead to immobility, making actual change by the minority even more difficult as the group in power shows a discursive alliance but not institutionalised change (Feliu & Lajeneusse, 2004). Even though male privilege is not an "all or nothing" relation of power, it is still possible to affirm that men's sense of urgency to change the conditions of gender inequality is not the same that women and other non-binary identities have. How does one fight from a position of privilege? Can one fight patriarchy from the position of power that patriarchy gives?

It is partly thanks to the expansion of feminism and the social and political accomplishments that it has brought, that men are now capable of coming in and out of the discourse of hegemonic masculinity in a somewhat strategic way. Currently, there are a slow-growing number of men who would recognise themselves as allies to feminism and the equal rights movement (Messner et al., 2015). Some of them are also critical of their own masculinity and accept the statement that masculinity also constrains men. However, given that the sex-gender system still grants men positions of power (always in relation to the intersectionality that traverse them: white, western, heterosexual, economically stable, able-body and so on), some men can allow themselves to "play" with the critical posture, utilising the feminist discourse as the situation requires, without having much at stake. This is the central point of discursive dissidence and it has to do with the way language is used to comply with the current discourses of gender equality, without losing the privileges that the system of inequality gives.

Being a man enunciating speech acts of discursive dissidence does not necessarily imply a conscious and carefully planned manipulation of the feminist discourse; but it shows the intrinsic difficulties of striving for social transformation from the position of privilege that one is trying to destabilise. Miztli exemplified this trouble in two moments. After having connected with several feminist friends and companions, Miztli took on the feminist fight. From his perspective, some of the obligations of the feminist man were to: confront other men about their sexist practices, learn to keep quiet and listen, and share centre stage. These are all conditions that the new feminisms demand of men that want to be allies, amongst many others. Later, Miztli stated that having privileges meant, at least in his everyday life, that his voice had more recognition than what a woman or other minorities could say. After revising his narrative, Miztli wrote in a footnote:

> Having privileges also implies being able to talk about them without actually doing something about them that would really matter. I'm kind of fed up having to listen to people saying "I'm getting rid of my white male privileges" or "I'm getting together with a lot of other males to talk about our privileges". I don't know; it seems so absurd.
>
> (*Miztli, 29*)

It is not entirely clear if Miztli included himself in that critique or if he separated from it in the sense that he had actually done "something about them that would really matter". In any case, these two moments show a use of feminist discourse and its critique, within a single individual. Discursive dissidence exhibits a will to step away from the toxic behaviours of dominating masculinity, but also the gains that come from performing said masculinity and maintaining hegemonic positions.

Imari described himself as someone trying to deconstruct his privileges as much as he could. He agreed there was a structural and systemic aspect, which granted a certain type of privileges and that could not be eliminated just by changing one's own practices. On the other hand, he affirmed there were other privileges that had to do with everyday gender interactions. This separation between macrostructure and everyday practices was useful to Imari as an analytical resource to have a better handle on the tangible elements he could change about himself and his relationships. However, Imari did not mention the correlation that exists between structural and relational privileges, as he put it; how one enables the other and how one feeds back to the other. For example, the way in which the sexual division of labour relates to the practices of courtship, or how maternity as an institution creates unequal practices of care. Moreover, "privilege is not monolithic; it is unevenly distributed and it exists worldwide in varying forms and contexts" (Coston and Kimmel, 2012: 109). In the case of what constitutes a minority, it is not so much a numerical quality but about who, when and how a group is perceived as minority (Feliu and Lajeneusse, 2004). Having access to certain privileges that a majority group upholds is connected to what Feliu and Lajeneusse have called "multiple belonging", which means that, in a specific situation, certain qualities become more relevant than others to define the membership of a group.

Discursive dissidence is a complex phenomenon; it does not necessarily come from a place of deceit or harm, but it is enabled by a position of privilege that allows for that strategic

positioning to be enunciated. While there is a risk that it can minimise the actual practices of resistance that originate and are fought from the margins, it can also contest hegemonic performative practices of who enunciates it. In this way, discursive dissidence could possibly become a tool of transformation of dominating masculinity, only if it linked to practice and is in constant communication with the stakeholders that are in the subordinated positions within the hegemonic system.

Structural complicity

This section illustrates the way in which, in the eyes of the participants, some practices that could be regarded as characteristic of dominating masculinity remained active in their relationships. If discursive dissidence re-interprets the discourse of voluntarism in order to separate from the "traditional" man, structural complicity shows the way in which the responsibility for why certain patriarchal practices remain is redirected to the social structure.

The concept of structural complicity feeds on Seidler's (2000) idea of displacement of responsibility: Regardless if one leans towards biological arguments (nature) to explain gendered behaviours, or towards sociological arguments (nurture), it would seem that individual agency and personal experience are determined, in such a way that one cannot be held responsible for the harmful attitudes of dominating masculinity. Social psychology has been studying these behavioural responses for decades: the fundamental attribution error refers to the way people tend to favour internal explanations of causality before circumstantial ones; however, this usually happens as a self-serving bias, which means that internal attributions are paired with success and external attributions with failure (Feliu and Lajeunesse, 2004). A typical example could be the idea that men are unable to control their sexual impulses or their anger because they are part of the masculine condition, but social and economic success is deemed as a result of one's own blood, sweat and tears. These psychosocial processes act as a framework for the development of

a great number of consequential actions. In the case of the participants of this study, the displacement of responsibility was manifested in diverse ways.

Even though these men expressed a desire to separate from the traditional gender roles of production and reproduction, they declared themselves incapable of doing so in the current socio-economical context: Tizoc talked about how he would not like to reproduce the gender roles his parents had, where his father worked all day and his mother stayed home doing domestic work; then, he spoke about his own relationship in which he was the breadwinner, while his partner stayed home to look after her son and the house. He realised in the current economic situation in Mexico, he had better chances of having a higher paying job; also, he had been building a career throughout the years, while his partner had been focusing on the domestic realm. For Balam, it was harder to be a father in Mexico than in a developed country; however, it seemed that he assumed this situation as a given, but at the same time he felt foreign to it, as he was currently living in a developed country. In the sexual-affective sphere, Tonatiuh was clear on the fact that his position as a male teacher had granted him a higher level of attraction from women, which was difficult for him to manage.

These three examples show a deep understanding of gendered institutions; whether it be family, work or education, these men positioned themselves critically. However, it would seem that, if by accepting the fact that economic, social and familial structures are deeply rooted in the current state of society, both the privileges and the hardships resulting from them would just be an effect beyond any form of agency and responsibility. This is one of the strongest tools of hegemony: the assimilation of the dominating ideology in various aspects of social life. Connell's concept of complicit masculinities (2005) is not far from these examples. For her, complicity happens when men reap the benefits of hegemonic masculinity without being the ones actively exerting explicit practices of power and domination: I, as a man, benefit from the wage gap, even though I am not the one on the

top of the corporate and political ladder making the executive decisions that would benefit me.

There are many other benefits that come from the institutionalisation of gender differences, which would explain why men are more reluctant to change their practices and to entertain possibilities to transform the current sex-gender system. This approach to structural complicity opens a new dialogue with the complicit masculinities as it brings the issue of agency to the forefront. It is, in fact, a very complex matter, given that the capability of agency is different for people in the power position than for the subordinate. This distinction also proves that agency and embodiment are two tightly linked processes. The male body, this symbolic-material subject (Haraway, 1999), is not exposed to the violence and scrutiny that female and non-binary bodies face. Therefore, his experience of how he assimilates the gender script and his own genitalia, facial features and so on, also differs greatly. For women, regaining their agency is a continuous social struggle that traverses their bodies; it is both about institutional transformation and about symbolically and affectively redefining their relationship with themselves. For men, it is about starting to unveil the constraints that dominating masculinity has also clenched in their bodies, emotions and desires. The starting points for social change are substantially different, as Messner et al. state:

> If we define male privilege -domination of public life, feeling no obligation to do housework or child care, assuming the right to sexual access to women's bodies- as a set of gendered interests shared by men, then it follows that it was not in men's interests to "see" women's subordination, much less to act to change it. (Messner, Greenberg and Peretz, 2015: 17)

I remember a discussion I heard a couple of years ago, after a film screening held in '*Cuerpos Parlantes*', the feminist collective I was a part of in Mexico. A man was talking about how he sometimes felt the pressure of having to be masculine and the limitations that entailed, "I would like to learn how to knit, for example, without feeling judged or made fun of" he said. And it is true; the ideals of masculinity imply a very strict

performance, in this way dominating masculinity is a constraint to our desire to be more diverse. The next moment, a woman responded that she understood his grievance, "however -she said- I would like to go out on the streets at night without feeling that my life is at risk, because I could get raped or killed". Her comment brought the whole room back into a reality that is still present in countries like Mexico and pushed us to prioritise our political perspectives. Masculinity as a constraint for men has to be studied contextually and in relation to women's experiences and other non-binary identities. Both statements hold true and it is a slippery slope trying to classify hierarchically the diverse oppressions that different groups face. As bell hooks has argued (2005), it is not about minimising men's journey of emotional hardship and violence, nor is it about point-by-point comparisons to see which sex has suffered the most; it is about acknowledging that men's oppression to women coexists with the damage that rigid sexist gender roles inflict:

> Male oppression of women cannot be excused by the recognition that there are ways men are hurt by rigid sex roles. Feminist activists should acknowledge that hurt, and work to change it -it exists. It does not erase or lessen male responsibility for supporting and perpetuating their power under patriarchy to exploit and oppress women in a manner far more grievous than the serious psychological stress and emotional pain caused by male conformity to rigid sexist role patterns. (hooks, 2005: 26)

Patriarchy affects all, but it does not affect everyone the same. An indigenous woman and a white upper-class man have radically distinct experiences of what it means to live in a patriarchal and racist society such as Mexico. For the men in my study: young, light-skinned, middle-class men, the position they occupy was not entirely fixed. In a country like Mexico, where to be middle-class means a constant struggle to obtain or maintain a job, and to never be economically stable while consuming the neoliberal ideals of a life that could always be more privileged and luxurious, these men might not receive the benefits of the system of hegemonic masculinity in an obvious manner. They were preoccupied, as Tizoc expressed, in fulfilling the provider role and attaining a certain standard of economic wellbeing.

For Tizoc, the economic system bounded him to the traditionally masculine role of the breadwinner. However, he was aware that the role he was performing was not inherently tied to his male condition but, more accurately, to the condition of being born in a developing country. If the economic system were different, the gendered relationship with his partner would be different as well and, as a result, Tizoc's relationship with his own masculinity would be too. Nonetheless, currently Tizoc was the one who, in his own words, was "focusing more on my professional work and she is falling behind". This created a snowball effect, which made it more difficult to rethink their relationship within the domestic and the public spheres. The stress to which the breadwinner is subjected is undeniable, as research about working men in the Mexico-USA border has shown (Hernandez, 2016). However, that social position also entails spending more time in the public sphere, creating connections, producing incomes and, in some cases, having a sense of personal and professional achievement and overall a sense of accomplishment outside the household.

For men growing up in the last 20 years in Mexico, the panorama radically differs from that of earlier generations. The war against drugs has stained most of the 21st century, since former president Felipe Calderon publicly declared war on the cartels in 2006; just recently, 2017 was declared as the most violent year in Mexico's recent history with figures going up to 23 thousand violent homicides (Nájar, 2017). The ongoing economic recessions, the lack of opportunities that the youth face (even those with college degrees, which represent only 1.7% of the population), the constant state of violence and death and the ruling of what can be considered a narc-state instituting a *necropolitics* (Valencia, 2017), are some of the elements that surround the people of Mexico.

The current state of the country develops in a cultural context that is still profoundly conservative and religious, where machismo is still very present and it is expressed in its two ramifications: as disproportionate violence towards women, with official numbers reaching seven femicides per day and two thirds of women having experienced some form

of gender violence (La Jornada, 2017), and as paternalism and infantilisation of women as an object/symbol *for* men. It is in this context that even non-conservative families, like that of Tizoc and his partner, end up reproducing traditional gender roles regardless of whether their liberal thought is directed elsewhere. Seidler et al. (1995: 99), have pointed out that, "the model of heterosexual, white, middle-class traditional relations has been modified partly due to the increasingly higher number of working women", which means there is not so much a sudden realisation by men that they should strive for gender equality what pushes them to change, but mostly a series of contextual factors that traverse them. However, those notions of equality and freedom usually break with the arrival of children, pushing the couple back to traditional gender roles (Seidler et al., 1995). Tizoc was aware of the traditional gender roles they were reproducing, he also knew what it would take to disrupt them; however, it was not something he and his partner regarded as essential at the moment, neither was it economically feasible.

Quetzal's stated that the traditional family inherently maintained notions and practices of male sexual, economic and cultural domination. A sort of vanguard would propose relational practices that would steer away from marriage and the heterosexual nuclear family, as it is in this context that women have historically been exchanged as a commodity to sustain men's position in the productive, public sphere (Rubin, 1986). One of the effects of feminism and women's liberation has been some loss of power and control from men in different spheres of life. This sense of lost, as Faludi (1999) has argued, is not foreign to the expressions of violence against women. Once the ideals of masculinity are put in doubt and the control that was once promised by our male ancestors is not achieved, violence works as a resource against the inability to express that grief. For Faludi, this is also visible in men's overreaction to women's progress: "'The women are taking over' is again a refrain many working women hear from their male colleagues –after one or two women are promoted in their company, but while top management is still solidly male" (Faludi, 1991: 86). This quote refers to the United States; a lot has changed in the representation of women in business and politics over the thirty

years since Faludi wrote her book: advances are continuously being made, even though there is still a crystal ceiling, generalised wage gap and not enough diversity in politics. Those advances had come with a price, as women's empowerment has been one of the sparks for the growing violence against women in Latin America, as Mexican researcher Marcela Lagarde (2014) has also affirmed.

Modernity has created a link between masculinity and reason, in such a way that it is assumed men are inherently rational (Seidler, 2000). One of the most important effects of this link is the entitlement through which men legislate over other groups. It would seem that part of the masculine performance has to do with the privilege, granted by reason, to be right. Being right is taken to a battlefield and is turned into an end of itself, leaving behind other possible outcomes like empathy, compassion, understanding or agreement. This logic can also be found in traditional heterosexual relationships, where stereotypes still place each partner in their assigned gender roles.

The privatisation of masculine reason could be observed in Yumil's narrative, justified by the necessary steps to reach a goal. An objective that, while abstract and unclear, gave the impression that it was Yumil's goal and it was extended to his partner by default, first as an invitation, then as a demand. That subtle invitation is part of the new discourse of masculinity, where there is a conscious separation from the violent macho. In the new discourse of masculinity men try to break away from the violent behaviours that are traditionally connected to masculinity; however, still rely on the link between reason and morality. They try to be more in touch with their emotional side but still struggle to de-feminise emotions. They try to carry out more equal relationships, but still rely on the 'men-know-best' trope. Some of the characteristics that grant privileges to men still exist within new masculinities, but they have been discursively modified so they can fit in the language of 21st century gender equality.

Structural complicity is also visible when the responsibility of men's actions is displaced onto women. This is a very complicated issue because it speaks about a key question that relates to the agency of the subaltern (Spivak, 1988). To go from subject to agent has been a long and conflictive process for historically oppressed groups; it is not only that the social and productive conditions have been constructed in favour of the dominant group, but also the subjectivity of the oppressed has been shaped in relation to their oppressors. In this sense, for the oppressed to find their own voice implies, first and foremost, to unlearn the hegemonic language and to craft another for their own. In Balam's case, structural complicity was visible in the unfolding of the heteronormative matrix, specifically focused on courtship. Balam said he reproduced some behaviours that were proper of dominating masculinity, which some women found attractive; therefore, despite the fact he did not agree with them (as a sample of discursive dissidence), he continued to exert them in the understanding that women were the ones who desired them, because they have been taught to do so by their social environment. When Balam stated, "girls that are not good are usually more interesting sexually and personality wise", he did so by using certain codes of the non-normative discourse, which catered to the idea of the "new man" and the "liberated woman". The good girl and the bad girl, however, are still values that come from the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) and through which women are still defined, that is, the virgin or the whore.

The process of deconstruction of gender representations is imprecise (de Lauretis, 1987); it means to constantly ask if the new tools are still at the service of the group in power. For masculinity studies, this is a call to be aware of the context in which agency can exist and what that represents for the hegemonic system currently at place. Moreover, the line can be very ambiguous in some cases, because affirming that a woman consents to certain conditions has historically been an act of ventriloquism by men. Again, the questions of who talks for women and how is the terrain set for women to be able to speak freely appear. This is visible when it is assumed that a structure of equality already exists, in which both sexes can make decisions freely.

Erasing the sex-gender subject from sociological analysis is, in my opinion, a mistake that some philosophers of postmodernity have made, such as Bauman (2013) or Byung-Chul Han (2012), when it is assumed that, because in the neoliberal world everything is presented as an object of consumption, as even the narcissistic subject consumes itself (Han, 2012), it is not necessary to study the particular ways in which this narcissistic imposition affects different sex-gender bodies. In practical terms, this invisibilisation can allow men to justify certain behaviours that result in their favour.

Structural complicity is a form of protection of the self in the frame of new masculinities. It also establishes a double benefit for the man who enunciates it: On the one hand, it displaces responsibility of both the actions that grant him privileges and the lack of actions that could remove him of privileges. On the other hand, it helps to maintain the hegemonic system of masculinity using discord as a tool, specifically, with the absorption of the dissident discourse for the benefit of the hegemonic one. It is not elimination, it is not prohibition; it is assimilation. In the 21st century, the hegemonic system of masculinity is neoliberal, it speaks of a consumable rebelliousness, where dissent is a dystopian story on the big screen and every act of resistance is potentially marketable. The risk that could come with men consuming the discourse of feminism is that it turns into merchandise without change and that the assimilation by hegemonic masculinity would be so subtle, so detailed, that it would erase every distinction between the system and its opposition.

The next section of this chapter will show that, even though the hegemonic system of masculinity is still in place, and there are still visible strategies for the maintenance of unequal power relations, there are, nonetheless changes in a positive direction. Within gender relations, there are practices that show an effort towards equality; these practices, while they cannot be assumed as part of a new masculine identity, they are steps towards another possible way to relate.

Identity practices

It can be problematic to affirm that a radical transformation of masculinity has already been achieved, when male privileges, for the most part, have not been modified in relation to other oppressed groups and the effects of patriarchal societies still extends to most corners of the world, whether economically, politically or socially. Of course, as it has been said before, the former does not deny that, under the current neoliberal and postcolonialist system, marginalisation and exploitation extends throughout various geographies and gender identities. That is, men are not at all times and under every circumstance subject to privilege just because they are men (Coston and Kimmel, 2012); furthermore, the category of "men" is equally problematic and diverse, especially when discussing masculinity.

Despite the fact hegemonic masculinity is still the predominant producer of ideology, masculine identity has started to be confronted, it has been pushed from its space of invisibility, from an absent, ahistorical and decontextualised place (Kimmel, 1993), and it has been forced to be accountable; partly because of global structural transformations and partly because of the social movements organised from the margins. It is undeniable that the men in this study, as many others, have gone through a process of reflection and transformation of the practices and representations of masculinity, which were thought to be inflexible and unquestionable. Change in the representation of masculinity is constantly happening (Azpiazu, 2013), as its performance derives from power structures and language that constitute gender, but they don't determine it (Perez, 2008). Thus, it would be unfair to say there has not been any change in my participants. These changes, however, have not fully come from a sense of embodied urgency that radically traverses identity (as it is the case of marginalised bodies), but from the dialogue with, critique of, and fight alongside other minority groups, primarily the diverse feminisms they have interacted with. This is an important distinction and it is why, in order to reflect on the steps that men have taken towards equality, it is not possible to affirm that there has already been a complete transformation in the heterosexual masculine identity.

All the men in this study, one way or another agreed that they were undergoing an unfinished process. Balam referred to this process as "unlearning", Miztli talked about the "macho thinking" still being there, Imari admitted trying to "deconstruct those privileges" as much as he could, while recognising that some privileges could not just go away that easy. All of them agreed on the fact that the path towards equality was not over, and that their active involvement was an indispensable element to get there. However, the road towards the transformation of masculinity also requires understanding men's own vulnerability, admitting errors, accepting help and exercising humility and empathy.

As has been stated before, new masculinities do not exist in the sense that *new* could be understood as a break from the old (Azpiazu, 2013). Masculinity could be best thought of as performative discontinuity, because its reiteration gives the illusion of a natural essence, and it does not necessarily follow a linear, progressive evolution. However, there have been advances in some of the everyday relational practices with women, LGBTQ+ community and other men. Obviously, these practices cannot be completely separated from identity, and it is not wrong to say that as practices get modified, identity would be affected as well. For Benhabib, social change requires a situated subject position; that is to say, agency and resistance need to be enunciated from a place where identity can be conceptualised (Perez, 2008). This situated subject position is thought of as strategically political, not essential or universal (Guerra, 1997).

What I call identity practice is not identity itself, but actions charged with intention that are aimed towards a future representation; in a sense an unspecified utopia, an otherwise *self*. Balam, for instance, had a partial understanding of what it meant to be that "new man" and wanted to walk towards that representation of masculine identity. To do so, he had to carry out a series of actions charged with intention, in the hopes that these could translate to the desired representation. To conduct identity practices towards a possible transformation of masculinity does not have a clear completion point; in other words,

there is not a set amount of practices that, once reached, would give the certainty that an identity has been transformed into another. Rather, the transformation *is* the process. Balam shared the story that made him modify his desire and perform other practices towards more equal forms of pleasure. This practices by themselves are not enough; they are not the representation of a new masculinity foreign to the hegemonic apparatus. They do, however, represent a movement towards a place *elsewhere*, which form is unclear but it begins to align with ideas like: the emotional reconnection of men with their bodies and those of their partners (Seidler et al., 1995), the recognition of the female orgasm and new politics of pleasure (Segal, 1994) and the possibility to think of a feminist masculinity (hooks, 2005).

Even though the discourse of gender has introduced the concept of new masculinities and there is increasing action being taken towards the demolition of the model of hegemonic masculinity, this is still being reproduced, if slightly transformed, to assure its survival in the times of hyperconnectivity, individualism and diffraction (Azpiazu, 2017). There is still the idea of Rambo as a caricature of masculinity, embodied in his 2017 version Dwayne Johnson who is one of the higher paid actors in Hollywood. 'The Rock' mocks his hypermasculinity, however he still performs it, but by mocking the system he enacts, he assures its protection and maintenance. In postmodern terms, hypermasculinity mocks itself but it is still taken as reference; at the same time, other references coexist, which are subtler, less questioned and closer to the local contexts of men. All of them still feed from the figure of the heterosexual man, mostly white or "bleached", economically stable or in pursuit of it, and in complete use of his physical and mental abilities.

Another way identity practices were enacted by the participants, were in their definition of heterosexuality. For Quetzal, heterosexuality was more than the placement of the object of desire in the female body, for him heterosexuality was also a political regime. Heterosexuality can also be regarded as a system (Katz, 1995) that organises and categorises social and material relations, or as a matrix in the sense of what Preciado

(2002) has called the dominant apparatus of verification. A critical approach to understanding heterosexuality should see it simultaneously as an object of desire and as a normative framework with symbolic and material effects.

It can be inferred that Quetzal´s definition of heterosexuality had effects in the way he related, not only with his partner, but also with the sexed world in front of him. At the same time, that political regime that is heterosexuality traversed him as well and his definition of himself as a heterosexual man. By modifying the definition of heterosexuality, Quetzal intervened his own identity too, how exactly is uncertain, but it is possible to affirm that this intervention had effects in his practices and attitudes. Despite the fact the hegemonic model still exists, each process of renovation (resulting from a point of conflict) opens possibilities to move a few steps further from it, to rethink sexual-affective practices and the practices of care that men have with other sex-gender identities. This does not mean that the road towards equality is already paved and walked. However, it would also be inaccurate to deny that some consequences of the ideological restructuring of the hegemonic apparatus could be used strategically in favour of equality.

Identity practices, which are actions charged with meaning aimed towards a new representation of an otherwise self, are best observed in everyday relationships, and what is relevant here, sexual-affective relationships of some of these men with their partners. Imari acknowledged that it was his partner who introduced him to feminism. Likewise, for Quetzal, having a feminist partner was pivotal in the way he conducted his life, it was, "a necessary mess". It is clear that the job of feminist women is not to hold the hand of men through the road to equality, reproducing once more traditional gender roles. However, with love and care, these relationships can flourish in a context where feminist thinking of equality and community can be a central focus. Reconnecting the emotional processes of men and women is vital to begin to heal, giving its right place to the pain, vulnerability and fears of each individual by walking together:

Women can share in this healing process. We can guide, instruct, observe, share information and skills, but we cannot do for boys and men what they must do for themselves. Our love helps, but it alone does not save boys and men. Ultimately boys and men save themselves when they learn the art of loving. (hooks, 2005: 16)

REFLECTIONS

This thesis has affected me.

To have started this PhD gave me the confidence to pursue a committed, intense and loving relationship. It provided me with the possibility of saying "I'm ready to give myself to another and to share our worlds". It was indispensable fuel and shelter.

One year later, I found myself overwhelmed and divided between the writing of my thesis, my underpaying dishwashing job and my relationship. I could not cope with the time and emotional energy my partner required of me, so I decided to break up. I realise now how close I am to the characteristics of dominating masculinity I speak of in my thesis. Shielded behind the demands of my job and studies, I put my relationship in an inferior hierarchical order. It is a wound that, after two years, is still healing. I separated from my partner because I was not willing to give her more than what I was giving to my PhD. Completely immersed in the 'all-or-nothing' narrative, I could not visualise that two things could share the same space; this narrative is part of the discourse of romantic love and the logic of modernity. Of course, the apparent impossibility of reconciling my relationship with my PhD was the fertile ground for a series of accumulative conflicts that, at the time, I perceived as irresolvable.

When I started reading bell hooks (2005), for the first time I understood the way in which I ended my relationship: I separated from my partner and I distanced myself from love because I had never, in my life, learned to love and to be loved[51]. To be completely vulnerable in front of another was something I could never allow myself and that, mainly, is a teaching from masculinity. Vulnerability in love lies in accepting oneself and accepting the other as a complete person separated from me, and not as the figure that I want that

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[51] Of course, I did not know it then. I had a feeling I could not name, which was reflected by a sharp separation, closer to a panic reaction than a breakup.

person to represent. Putting my relationship on the same level of importance as my PhD would have implied a greater commitment than I was willing to give, because of my pride, because it was something that could not be demanded of me. Even though I do not consider myself a man completely adhered to patriarchy, I often find new roots that connect me to it. Thus, although I never had the desire to be the providing man and sole support of a family, my work and studies have always been the most important. Work as measure of manhood (hooks, 2005), is enacted in me as it does in most Mexican men (Hernández, 2016).

Strength, temperance, sobriety: masculine attitudes that are still valued in detriment of others such as flexibility, empathy and tenderness. Since childhood, men learn to numb certain feelings and to build, from a place of derision and violence, a self that, in some way, alienates from himself, from his body and from the emotions that affect his body: inconsolable crying, care in friendships, self-love, abandonment and so on. To regain the passion for our own body -for the affects that traverse our body- is the first step to relearn how to love (hooks, 2005). This is something Victor Seidler has also written in 'Unreasonable Men' (2000): when men are paired with a certain type of masculinity - namely, dominating- at the same time they are denied the possibility to reflect about their own experience of *experimenting* with their masculinity and, from a paradigm of power, they are also denied the chance to make sense of their own needs and wants.

When I was a child, I was overweight, which made me a target of constant mockery. I remember the kids mainly made fun of my breasts; for them, that was the most shocking part of my body and the most painful for me: the fact that I was a boy with women's breasts. More than my belly, my cheeks or my butt, that was the part of my body that I could never stand; it was a chiselled trace of that sex-gender binary that we knew we should not cross. From then on, I learnt how to walk slouched to hide the protuberances, to wear loose clothes and, most importantly, to never show my naked torso. That kid I was, never spoke with anyone about how his body was his worst enemy, about why even

his closest and most loved people made fun of him; he never shared that pain with his mother, his father and least of all his friends. Twenty years later and that slouched walk still finds ways to manifest itself: my pain, my sadness and my vulnerability still feel only mine; incommunicable. Except it is not because they are ineffable, but because I just do not know how to do it. When I was a kid, my mother used to tell me that I did not know how to hug; it is something that some friends have also told me: that I have a distant embrace, executive; a 'pat-on-the-back' kind of gesture. I never learnt how to extend my most intimate emotions, because to communicate my sorrows would inaugurate a new relation with the other, where I would officially be someone in need of help.

In her book "The will to change", bell hooks wrote that, for many boys, there is a time in their lives when they break from the irresistible joy and the necessity to love and be loved. Right there, I know she is speaking directly to me, and it is as if she were writing: Ricardo, you were "remembering a primal moment of heartbreak and heartache: the moment that [you] were compelled to give up [your] right to feel, to love, in order to take [your] place as patriarchal men" (hooks, 2005: 15). Except that moment is almost never a conscious choice; it is closer to a process in which the boy enters, through scoffs, through violence, games and toys and mass media and the teachings in school and heteropatriarchal families; and through the rewards of being the one who scoffs and the one who is violent and who teaches others to be a patriarchal man. Masculinity is often seen as armour that protects and covers men's vulnerability; however, more accurately, dominating masculinity does not protect from harm but it is what produces the harm -to ourselves and to those around us. It is what denies the possibility of an ethics of love. Hegemonic masculinity has two faces: the promise of the privileges that masculine power grants, and what we must sacrifice in order to get them. The upsurge of male violence that has intensified in the last years is connected to the realisation that the patriarchal promises of power and domination are not easy to fulfil at all (hooks, 2005).

Throughout the development of this thesis, it became clear that a conceptual separation had to be made between hegemonic and dominating masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, based on the ideas of Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), is built in as a positioning system of sex-gender bodies in relation to forms of representation and privileges, which are granted or denied depending on the place each body occupies within the system. Hegemonic masculinity is deployed in the institutions, ideology, social representations and so on. Whereas dominating masculinity is a performative expression of the hegemonic system of masculinity; it is the identity and performative manifestation of hegemony. Through practices, attitudes and ways of being and doing, dominating masculinity normatively imposes over other expressions of masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity numbs men's bodies. I understand now that a great part of men's pain comes from the separation that occurs between their rational identity and their emotional structure (Seidler, 2000), which prevents them from reflecting about their emotional processes while creating an affective dis-embodiment. Currently, I'm in the process of reactivating the range of emotions that go through my body, and to do so, I have to engage in something that men deeply struggle with: to share, to care for others, to ask for help and to detach from the toxic notions of patriarchal romantic love.

Two years ago, I ended my relationship and now, thanks to the writing process of this thesis, I'm learning to see myself with love, to acknowledge my needs and my fears, my flaws and what I have to offer to the people around me. I am open to love once more. The process has been painful, filled with tears that stop right before exiting; they stop because the fear of being vulnerable still prevails.

A consequence of ascribing to dominating masculinity is the development of an individualistic identity, which undervalues the relational aspects of life. The heterosexual man receives the mandate that only he can fight and protect and strive in a world that is in constant war. Even though he might find satisfaction by providing financial care to

those who depend on him, the striking weight of his individuality is still maintained. The solipsism can be even greater in a context of precariousness, as the man must handle his adscription to dominating masculinity while recognising his failure to fulfil it. To learn how to love implies, for heterosexual men, cultivating a relational identity (Hernando, 2015).

I do not assume a totalising love, without complications, a love that is unaltered essence. I do not assume a love that, by itself, can conquer all, or that it must be maintained despite it all. I do not assume an ineffable love, metaphysic or heavenly, but neither a quantifiable love, delimited by scientific instruments that would dissect it and would make it reproducible and universal. The love I speak of is relational; it has in its base the care and joy for the other; it is a modest love, everyday love, constantly being renegotiated between the big myths and the specific agreements of each relationship. This is a complex love, filled with contradictions and difficulties, which acknowledges other feelings like guilt, insecurity or anger, but at the same time accepts that these feelings arise in a relational network and can be managed. Consequently, self-love is achieved insofar as one builds relationships with one's surroundings that are based on love. For bell hooks, love is action; it is "the will to nurture one's own and another's spiritual and emotional growth" (hooks, 2005: 65). But this action requires practice and, amongst other things, to understand the dominant discourse of love and to relate it with the way of being a man in the 21st century and ask: how have men been taught to love?

Today's relationships have partially separated from the precepts of the western model of love from earlier generations. The search for a 'blind' endless love at first sight, which is grounded in profound emotional connection, and a sense of security for ascribing to the institution of heterosexual family, is being surpassed by the possibility of sexual freedom and experimentation, "the consumerist hedonism of leisure and the rationalised search for a suitable partner" (Illouz, 2009: 376). There is certainly more freedom in this model, especially for women, however this freedom implies the immersion of love into neoliberalism. Love as an object of consumption creates relationships whose logic follows

certain characteristics like disposableness, superficiality and efficiency, while creating higher intensity, diversity and liberty. Authors like Bauman (2013), Illouz (2009), Esteban (2011) and Han (2012), all point towards the idea that there is a price to pay in postmodern love. However, not many focus their analysis in the experience of the heterosexual man, that is, from a situated perspective. As stated before, feminist studies of masculinities have focused more on unpacking topics like work, sports, violence, war, emotions, sexual practices, homosocialibility and anti-normative sexualities and gender expressions. There is still value in the narratives and experiences of love and relationships of heterosexual men; however, only if this analysis is undertaken from a critical approach with the goal of social wellness through the radical transformation of masculinity. To understand this experience does not mean to undermine the female partners or to invisibilise other expressions of sexuality, sex and gender; on the contrary, it situates the concrete experience of the heterosexual man necessarily in relation to other ways of doing and being in the world. The most effective approach to achieve the former is through a feminist methodology.

Like me, the seven men that participated in my study carried an entire history, which is complex, which cannot be reduced to a closed idea of masculinity for they are actively changing as well. Like me, their relationships suffered the effect of being raised in a heteropatriarchal society; they formed and developed under the system of hegemonic masculinity, which has brought them all conflict. These seven men decided to enter a process in which they would share aspects of themselves and their relationships; they accepted to begin a hard, reflexive process, which would push them to that space of vulnerability, exposing it to me for its scrutiny. For that, I am completely grateful. During the eight months that I heard their stories, I felt more identified with them than I had originally imagined. The naïve idea of dominating masculinity as a totalising identity, which manifested as unique and constitutive of a body, also shattered. I realised that a man could show traits of dominating masculinity in certain aspects, while actively making an effort to deny it in others. Like me, these men did not fit in the stereotyped image of

the Mexican macho: even though they still reproduced some *machista* practices and some of their behaviours, attitudes and ideas were still connected to the traditional sex-gender system, they also attempted to have more open and fairer sexual-affective relationships.

This is a key point in Raewyn Connell's (2005) notion of hegemonic masculinity. The man that incarnates all the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity does not exist. Moreover, the model of dominating masculinity that comes off from the hegemonic system of masculinity is not the only possible one; in fact, one body can express multiple masculinities. Connell succeeds in taking the Gramscian analysis of hegemony to the spatial terrain, by thinking about the positions that one occupies at any given time within a system in constant motion. The patriarchal trade (hooks, 2005) and dividends (Connell, 1995) are visible there; currently, to fit in the version of dominating masculinity allows men to have access to certain privileges that are denied to others.

Not long ago, a friend that conducts equality and diversity workshops asked me: how to turn the white, straight, middle-class patriarchal man into an active ally, how to make him question his privileges, be self-critical and change those practices of domination that have brought him benefits throughout his life? In that moment, the only answer I could think of was that transformation could only come through the pressure of the minority groups that strive for change. However, that answer did not convince me, because it fused those men with dominating masculinity once more, as the only overwhelming expression in their male bodies. The answer I would have liked to give her is in fact one of the objectives of this research: By understanding their everyday affective processes, their desires, their fears and expectations, it is possible to comprehend how the system, which they are part of, operates. Through the creation of a space where they can ask themselves questions they may have never asked, their relational identity, which has historically been placed in the background, can be reactivated (Hernando, 2012). For bell hooks (2005), this is the key result of fostering a feminist masculinity. In this process, men will realise that patriarchy also damages them profoundly.

One of the outcomes of this thesis was to understand that both the more violent and brutal expressions of masculinity as much as the internal, personal ruptures that damage our relationships, are nurtured from the same hegemonic system. Moreover, the separation between those violent men, rapists and killers, and the other men that are exempt from it, is a fiction in the sense that, as Rita Segato suggests (Vizzi and Ojeda, 2017), the acts that are typified as crimes are a product of all the other practices that are not criminalised and are produced in a capitalist patriarchal society; practices that would not happen if society was not as it currently is. Criminalising does not solve the problem, for the issue is in all the patriarchal expressions that are not criminalised and that normalise aggression.

I agree with Connell (1995), with Carabí and Segarra (2000), with Azpiazu (2017) on the need to speak of masculinities as plural, but that approach should not favour a mere analysis of identity to the detriment of a systemic analysis. This is a mistake that, according to Hernández (2008), has been common in the studies of men and masculinities in Mexico. In this thesis I took a Foucauldian approach, meaning, I assumed that our interactions are framed within discourse, our practices and representations are a result of discourse, which is historical and collective but also contingent and mobile. Hence, that my conclusion was already in the title of my thesis: Masculinity is contradictory, because it is at the same time a gender expression deployed in identity practices, desires, emotions, ways of being and ways of doing, and a symbolic-material system of hierarchical organisation of sexed bodies. The men in my study situated in the juncture of these two facts, between the plurality of expressions of masculinities and the hegemonic system that is still very well cemented.

My analysis was built from the notion that there are differentiated power positions, supported by the sex-gender system, which tend to benefit bodies that occupy the masculine position. However, this does not imply a structuralist determinism in which said

relations of power are inflexible; in other words, that men, as men, are always and in any situation exerting dominance, and women, as women, are always and in any situation the object of domination. Like power, privilege is not a thing to be possessed; it is not substance, but relation. It is through the maintenance and management of structured relations that one becomes capable of exerting and producing privileges. Privilege is a manifestation of power.

Without denying that bodies that align with the demands of masculinity can occupy privileged positions, the study of masculinity must be a situated one, that considers the phenomenological, as it unfolds in the interactions of sexed bodies. However, the previous affirmation does not suggest a sort of voluntarist individualism where the phenomenon would disregard the context in which it occurs. On the contrary, to undertake situated studies means to look at the territory as a starting point, to apply embodied methodologies, to take into account the action and the interaction while admitting that these phenomena are framed within specific and differentiated contexts. Situated studies would be found half way between phenomenology and post-structuralism, leaning on lived experience as much as on macro-sociological analysis, but acknowledging that between one and the other there will not necessarily be a clear correspondence.

During the research process, while working with my participants, I observed how the quest for more free, fair and horizontal relationships lived in the same discursive space as the products of a heteronormative matrix, grounded in a dominating masculinity. Even though all the participants occupied spaces of privilege in the social sphere (heterosexual, middle-class, light-brown skin and college-educated), at the same time, within their couple relationships, positions of power were shaped in specific contexts and became less clear. For men like Tizoc, the pressure to fulfil the expectations of a stable socioeconomic status was a constant reminder of the "traditional role" he had to play as a man. This pressure came primarily from external factors, such as social expectations, economic precariousness and family members, in such a way that a specific form of heterosexual

masculinity took shape from the teachings and obligations handed down the family line (Ward, 2015). Paradoxically, Tizoc's position allowed him easier access to the workforce and simultaneously brought him constant pressure to be up to par. This pressure, however, related to the benefits of being the one with economic power, which, in the event of a separation, would be more advantageous for him than for her.

In Mexico, only 43 per cent of women between the age of 15 and 64 have or are in the search of a job (INEGI, 2017), and only 32 per cent of their total work hours are destined to remunerated work, while their non-remunerated work comprises 15 per cent of the gross domestic product (Animal Político, 2014). Men have been taught that there is pride and honour in being the provider, in carrying the whole weight on their backs and in earning a living with blood and sweat. However, despite having clear benefits for being a providing man, there is also a physical and emotional cost that, in many cases, weaves into the relationships with their partners and children.

Although men occupy a position of power given by their sex and their gender, they can also find themselves in relations where their position is not a dominant one. A naïve understanding of Foucault's view on power would tend to simplify this approach, ignoring personal experiences, intersectional perspectives and the fluid character of social interactions. Masculinity as a system, grants privileges to biologically male bodies that find correspondence within the characteristics the system fosters, but that does not necessarily imply that those bodies cannot be vulnerable, subjects of other forms of oppression and emotional suffering, search for more free and fair ways of loving and question their own masculine practices. Power is not an "either/or" phenomenon, it is not a linear relation, nor is it something that can be abolished. Therefore, to do an analysis from a perspective of masculinity studies, the contradictions that an intersectional approach will make evident have to be assumed, not eliminated.

The three categories shown in the analysis best explain the contradictory character of masculinity and inform this conclusion. In the first category, Emotional Communication, the contradiction lies in the way culture of masculine reason has separated men from emotions deemed as "feminine" within the binary division of the sexes. Hence, despite the fact men are considered to be the rational sex, at the same time a lack of control over their anger and sexual drive is assumed. These emotions, however, still pass through the eye of reason; men usually justify their anger by separating it from themselves and turning it into an external object. Masculine representations of strength, temperance and aggression are still strong characteristics of dominating masculinity; however, men still have the need to love, receive love, express a wider range of emotions and receive emotional care.

The contradiction found in the second category, Social Mediations of Desire, speaks about how heterosexual men foster a desire that is a constant search for satisfaction; however, the social mediations constructed from a heteronormative matrix of sexuality create a series of unequal and contradictory sexual-affective practices. The former does not mean that every form of desire aimed towards the opposite sex is, by definition, an exercise of domination and therefore contradictory (to desire by dehumanising the object of desire), but that men's heterosexual desire has to be comprehended from an analysis of a political and normative regime. This starting point will give new answers to the way in which the heterosexual man expresses and satisfies his desire and will also provide alternatives to challenge that regime.

Finally, the third category, Masculine Pantomimes, brought performativity theory (Butler, 1990) to a situated analysis, specifically in the discourse of these seven men. The concepts of discursive dissidence and structural complicity help to explain how sometimes the discourse of emancipation and equality can be used strategically to fit into certain comprehensions of what is expected of men in the 21st century, without necessarily carrying out radical transformations, both structural or quotidian. It would seem that

radical change is hindered by the overwhelming weight that the social and economic structure brings upon these men. This supports the idea that men do not necessarily exert total agency and control within social systems, just by account of their biological characteristics. Again, it is necessary to state that the former does not deny or minimise women's own history of oppression. What it is being stated here is that, in certain spheres and occupying certain social positions, men are also subjects of oppression and loss of agency (Coston and Kimmel, 2012). However, this does not have to mean passivity; the men who participated in this research have made conscious efforts to change their practices in hopes of an embodied *otherwise* masculinity, which is not a reality yet, but it also does not mean the actions taken towards it (whatever *it* might come to be) are in vain. The concept of identity practices sums up this effort to carry out quotidian actions aimed towards an identity that it is not yet materialised.

This thesis was an effort to understand these contradictions, not to overcome them. One of the privileges of the middle-class, straight, white male is the advantage of always being the one who looks, not the one who is looked at (Berger, 1972), the one who takes his position in the world for granted, who can see himself as the generic human being (Kimmel, 1993). This invisibility of privileges makes social transformation even more difficult, for it installs the belief that men are entitled to those privileges while detaching their benefits from the system that reproduces them. In this research, that generic person was placed in the spotlight; the gaze was placed upon them (Nader, 1972). They were pushed to look at themselves, to reflect on their practices and to situate themselves in a wider sociocultural frame. In this research I was also pushed to go through this process; I also became my subject of research and was profoundly affected by it, that is, traversed by affects.

Throughout this study, I demonstrated the influence that feminist epistemology has had in the studies about men and masculinities, by considering them as necessarily contingent, profoundly political, immersed in power relations and driven by affect and desire. My

methodology showed these same efforts as it unfolded through co-production, situated knowledge and ethics, while questioning the distance between the artificial figures of the researcher and the participant. This thesis was not born from a hypothesis, but from an exploratory motivation to understand Mexican men and masculinities in the 21st century and the sexual-affective heterosexual relationships they maintain. However, it has not been overlooked that this thesis was also a constant mirror, which reflected the contradictory image that I too have of myself as a heterosexual man.

CONCLUSION

Researching emotions, desire and identity in sexual-affective relationships with heterosexual men has a theoretical, political and practical value. The topic of men and masculinities has gained more popularity in social research over the last years; this is also the case in the area of sexual-affective relationships of heterosexual men. As Peretz (2017) advises, an increasing number of researchers point out that men's involvement in the efforts to end sexual and domestic violence is key. This involvement implies not only the creation of social policies and programmes that consist in actively working with men, but also doing research where men's relation with women and other gender identities is put in the forefront.

In this regard, there has also been growing research regarding the alliance of men in the fight against violence and in favour of gender equality, with early works dating only as far as the 1970s and 1980s (Peretz, 2017). Bishop (2002), Casey (2010) and Flood (2011) are just a few examples of the shift that has occurred in academia where the possibilities of engaging men into the process of ending violence and oppression has proved to be fruitful and indispensable. Messner, Greenberg and Peretz (2015) do not shy away from the difficulties that acknowledging men as allies in feminist and anti-violence movements would bring, like the institutionalisation of activism or the reproduction of traditional gender roles in spaces where the goal is to steer away from them; however, they also recognise the efforts and achievements that male individuals and groups of men have made in recent history to try and change the conditions of inequality and violence that other groups are subjected to.

Although the focus of this thesis was not to study men as allies, there are several connections that can be made between the comprehension of heterosexual men's experiences of their sexual-affective relationships and the policies and strategies for intervention aimed at anti-violence campaigns and gender equality. These bridges become

clearer when we understand, for example, the ways in which men can inadvertently place their partners in a space of otherness, relating mainly with the representation of women produced from a hetero-masculine thought; or the way in which men can tend to solve emotional conflicts from the monopoly of reason. Moreover, and following the experiences of the men in this study as well as the proposal of Coston and Kimmel (2012), men are also traversed by forces of control and domination, they have deep wounds that they are unable to verbalise, and they are constantly in a struggle to prove they embody what hegemonic masculinity defines as a "real man". This, of course, does not mean that male privileges are not operating, what it means is that these privileges have to be rethought from an intersectional and situated perspective.

 Men are also subjected to social forces that transcend them, whether they are economic, cultural, or cemented in strongly fixated gender roles. The experiences of the men in this study showed that, although the "will to change" (hooks, 2005) has to come from men that wish for it, it is also true that will alone faces an uphill battle against social structures. In other words, without the understanding that men can exert power and at the same time be subject to technologies of power within an intersectional system of control, categorisation and production of sexed bodies, walking towards equality will be a much slower process.

An unforeseen outcome of this research was that dominant/oppressed relations of power are not confined to concrete bodies in strict sense, but to discursive positions that materialise in bodies that are loaded with meaning. In other words, the bio-male body does not intrinsically carry a dominant quality; but more accurately, specific socio-historical conditions have created the possibilities for that quality to be more accessible to the bio-male body. At the same time, by de-essentialising domination, the concept of intersectionality is expanded. Understanding this opens a gate to introduce a political/practical value to this study. To create more free, diverse and just relationships, a critical gaze is necessary, one that questions that which has remained assumed. As men

begin to practice a more reflexive and active role in their sexual-affective relationships, more measures of change will be implemented in the specific contexts of each relationship.

The study and work around men and masculinities needs to assume the contradictions that are generated between masculinity understood as a system of domination and differentiation, which grants privileges to some in detriment to others, and masculinity that is experienced as performance, as identity practices that are in continuous motion, that are an expression of aesthetic choices, desires, affects, attitudes and so on. One way to tackle this contradiction is to show the breaking points between the effects of hegemonic masculinity and the lived and concrete practices of men. In this sense, to continue with the discussion proposed by Azpiazu (2017), it was the posture of this thesis that efforts should not be directed at the abolishment of masculinity as a general and abstract concept. Rather, it should be understood that the dominant ideology has generated its own cultural representations, symbols, rituals, and institutions. Within this system a masculine identity has been shaped, that certain individuals adopt, and it informs how they present their *selves* in everyday life. At the same time, masculine identity is constantly being contested and reshaped in such effect that it stops being a singular entity and becomes multiple.

This research also supports the argument that the creation of spaces where men can display emotions and talk about intimate issues, can help with change and healing. One of the outcomes of the methodological work of this research is that it created a particular affective relationship with these men, where they could generate new conclusions about themselves (Knudsen and Stage, 2015). Furthermore, the narratives that resulted from the recording of the video diaries can create empathy in the reader, re-humanise the participants and expose them with their flaws, challenges and learnings, but also with energy, will to change and accomplishments.

Collaborative methods confront the postulates of positivist objectivity in social sciences, creating at the same time other type of knowledge, which aim towards a greater responsibility from the researcher and focus on situated and relational positions of the participants involved, while destabilising the power relations given by the research hierarchy (Biglia & Bonet-Martí, 2009). This does not mean that a complete agency, horizontality and openness is achieved *de facto* (Jones, et al., 2014), but it is an important step. In this case, video diaries and narrative productions intertwined organically, as both of them were elaborated from a narrative sequence and a constant feedback between the participants and the researcher. However, there are still many challenges that arise from the implementation of these methods: one revolves around the issue of representation, particularly the way in which the participants talked about their partners when constructing their narratives, showing their own one-sided perspective of a complex mutual relationship. Another challenge is the delimitation of the topic of study, as the research methods focus on more broad topics and not so much on a specific question or hypothesis.

Nonetheless, collaborative and affective methodologies from a feminist approach can show different processes and dynamics, which tackle power relations, amorous ethics and performativity within a socio-historical paradigm. Studying affect cannot happen without also considering the affective process that occurs in the context of the research itself; which in the study of masculinities, becomes even more relevant for it helps to show and delve into the contradictions that come with a sex-gender identity that is, at the same time, a system of privilege and differentiation.

The objective of this thesis was to study the group that occupied certain power positions and privileges in various social spheres (Nadir, 1972), with the goal of unpacking how power is exerted and through which means of domination; nevertheless, it is acknowledged that it is imperative for future research to place these findings in dialogue with other research that tackles more diverse subjectivities, such as the work that Coston

and Kimmel (2012) undertook by looking at marginalised masculinities and their differentiated access to the patriarchal dividends (Connell, 1995), specifically disabled, gay and working-class men. Another example is the work of Saez and Carrascosa (2011), in their book "Up the ass: anal politics" they explain how the anus has become a space where inequality, marginalisation, homophobia and machismo come together. At the same time, the anus is a genderless cavity that it is also a producer of pleasure. Dominating masculinity is both questioned and affirmed by its relation to the anus.

In the specific context of Mexico, future lines of research would have to consider how masculinity has been transformed in the turn of the century, where the State's corruption and the violent power of the drug cartels collude in a way never experienced before in Mexico. These studies would have to tackle the question of what type of masculinities are being produced in a Narc-State (Valencia, 2017), which has not only placed most Mexicans in a generalised precarity but has also generated a collective trauma as product of violence, fear and impunity. Finally, how do these men of the 21st century relate with their partners, with other vulnerable identities and with other men? Authors like Nuñez and Espinoza (2017) have already began researching on these lines, but there is no doubt that the problem of the drug cartels in Mexico is developing in present time, and its complexity will require extensive interdisciplinary work.

This thesis showed that studies of men and masculinities have to be relational and intersectional. This study entails a double movement between the systemic and the performative; the meeting points of these two areas revealed forms of domination and privileges, but also conflicts and contradictions. Using collaborative methods, through an affective and feminist methodology, the relationship between researcher and participant shifted and became intrinsic to the production of knowledge. Finally, by standing between structure and agency, it was possible to be critical of current power relations, but also to recognise the transformations towards other ways of understanding gender identity and the interactions that traverse them.

APPENDICES

Apendix 1. Ethics approval

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Phone 0-4-463 5480
Email susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz

MEMORANDUM

TO	Ricardo Quirarte Martinez
COPY TO	
FROM	AProf Susan Corbett, Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	18 May 2016
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	**Ethics Approval: 22663** Practices of masculinity in heterosexual relationships

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved from the above date and this approval continues until 31 March 2018. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

Kind regards

Susan Corbett

Convener, Victoria University Human Ethics Committee

Appendix 2. Consent form

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Practices of masculinity in heterosexual relationships

CONSENT TO RECORD SOLICITED VIDEO DIARIES

This consent form will be held for 3 years.

Researcher: *Ricardo Quirarte, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, VUW*

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from this study up to six weeks after the research has started. If, after the six weeks, I choose to withdraw, the information I have given might still be used for the project.

- The information I have provided will be destroyed *3 years* after the research is finished.

- Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisors. I understand that the results will be used for a PhD and a summary of the results may be used in academic reports and/or presented at conferences.

- My name will not be used in reports, nor will any personal information that would identify me.

- I would like a copy of the transcript of my interview: Yes ☐   No ☐

- I would like a summary of my interview: Yes ☐   No ☐

- I would like to receive a copy of the final report and have added my email Yes ☐   No ☐
  address below.

I agree to take part in a solicited video diary consisting of six entries.

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

Appendix 3. Suggested topics for the video diaries

First video: Public sphere	Second video: Private sphere
Hooking up • Practices • Machismo • Implications of hooking up Family • Paternity: expectations, roles, difficulties • Sharing: what gets shared: decisions, house economy, chores, secrets, time, etc. Feminisation • Feeling like a man: masculinity threatened • In your relationship: gender differences Learning • How did you learn about relationships? • Influences • Change and transformation	Your partner • What can you say about your current/past partner? • How do you see yourself/act in a relationship? • How do you think your partner sees you? The relationship • Description of their relationships • Emotional investment with current partner • Worst moment or memory of the relationship • Ongoing problems. Ways of deeling with them Oneself • Relationships and equality • Process of transformation/learning
Third video: Intimate sphere	**Fourth video: Sexual sphere**

Emotions
• Sharing and concealing
• Ways emotions are expressed: specific moments
 	
Everyday life
• Personal and shared changes in the relationship
• Difficulties of being in a relationship
  o In general
  o With yourself
  o With your partner
 	
Negotiating necessities
• Living together
• Conflict management
	Pleasure and desire
	• Pressures, pleasure, equality
	• Role of sex in the relationship
	• Difficulties, issues, worries
	
	Sexual expectations
	• Negotiation, silence, assumptions
	• Anxiety
	
	Feelings about sex

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