# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MEN'S REFLECTIVE GROUP AND THE DECREASE IN THE RECURRENCE OF CASES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN[1]

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http://lattes.cnpq.br/4009370002161252

1. Article originally published in the event reports - VI Gender and Public Policy Symposium, held by Universidade Estadual e Londrina, 09/28 to 10/01/2020, in online format.

**Abstract:** Violence against women is related to gender inequalities present in society. This is because it is marked by patriarchy, which trivializes, legitimizes and generates society's omission in the face of the violation of women's rights. Given this scenario, specific public policies to combat violence against women become essential. Therefore, the Barra do Garças Front Network was built in order to improve public responses to domestic violence against women. In this context, an important measure emerged: the Men's Reflective Group (GRH). This is a treatment program aimed at those who commit aggression against women, in which participants reflect on their actions, as well as the construction of masculinity and its implications, aiming to change their behaviors, when possible. Thus, the present study aims to understand the relationship between HRM and the decrease in the recurrence of cases of violence against women.

**Keywords:** Violence against women, HRM, Masculinity.

> *Inequality, far from being natural, is posed by cultural tradition, by power structures, by the agents involved in the web of social relations. In relations between men and women, gender inequality is not given, but it can be constructed, and it often is (SAFFIOTI, 1999, p. 83).*

## INTRODUCTION

Focusing on research that involves violence against women is still of paramount importance in the fight against acts that corroborate the processes of subordination of women and for the consolidation of gender inequalities. Focusing on studies that involve masculinities as an object of theoretical reflection, in the social sciences, has gained ground in perspectives of studies of feminist currents. The problematization of the concept of masculinity and its socio-historical implications was systematically touched upon as the idea of the existence of a single hegemonic masculinity based on the domination and unquestionable power of the "patriarch" was established. The concept of masculinity was understood rather as a consolidation or a natural permanence than a gender construction that could be problematized.

Therefore, all parties involved need to be thought about and worked on, so that it is possible to achieve the true transformation of the violent relationship.

Based on the need for assistance for both parties, Law 11,340/06, Lei Maria da Penha, not only guarantees multidisciplinary care for women and their dependents in situations of domestic and family violence (Art. 35, I), but also determines the creation and promotion of education and rehabilitation centers for offenders (Art. 35, V).

In May 2013, in order to reduce domestic violence rates and implement a policy to protect victims, the Network to Combat Domestic Violence against Women — Rede de Frente — was created in Barra do Garças, Mato Grosso (which also encompasses the municipality of Pontal do Araguaia). The Front Network was made possible through an inter-institutional agreement between the Public Ministry, the Judiciary and the Public Defender's Office, but it also relies on the partnership of various bodies - such as the Civil and Military Police - from Barra do Garças and Pontal do Araguaia, added to the collaboration of public and private entities. Due to these partnerships, coping actions are not only aimed at women victims of violence, but also at aggressors, children and adolescents involved in cases of domestic violence.

Among these actions, the Men's Reflective Group - GRH was implemented, which is a fundamental measure for the reflection of perpetrators of violence on gender reactions,

masculinity and harmful behaviors. One of the most visible reflections of the behavioral change of aggressors who are members of the program is the rate of recurrence of violence against women among those who participated in the GRH. This is because, according to the Specialized Police Station for the Defense of Women, the recidivism rate was only 3.3% at the end of 2019.

This way, as addressed by Nascimento, the debate on men and gender made it possible:

> [...] to perceive men in their plurality, with different possibilities of exercising masculinity. This way, man and masculinity were transformed into men and masculinities to account for the diversity of human experience. Thus, masculinity is not limited to a hegemonic model that connects to a traditional version of patriarchy [...]. Therefore, masculinities are not granted, but constructed as the subjective and social experience they are. If they are socially, culturally and historically constructed, they can be deconstructed and reconstructed over the course of a man's life. (2001, p. 88).

Based on what has been presented, the objectives of the study of this theme are: to understand the actions carried out by psychologists, mediators and speakers who work in the Reflective Group of Men, to address the greatest difficulties of the participants in their respective processes of reflection and to elaborate a socioeconomic mapping of the perpetrators of violence in the GRH.

Furthermore, an analysis will be made of the construction of masculinities and the influence of sexist culture on gender violence, as this, according to Maria de Fátima Araújo (2010, p.19-28), "delegates to men the right to control and dominate their women, even with the use of violence". Finally, the research also aims to find strategic proposals for a solution to the greatest difficulties faced by perpetrators of violence during treatment.

The research has a qualitative-quantitative character, being consolidated through interviews with some authors of violence against women - who participate in the Reflective Group of Men - with professionals working in the group (such as lecturers, mediators and psychologists) and also with the president of the Front Network. The interview carried out with the aggressors, which takes place individually, has a personal approach to the interviewees and is carried out through a questionnaire, which has objective and subjective questions — aimed at building a socioeconomic mapping with the participants of the HRM. In addition, the study has a theoretical approach to issues such as sexist culture and, therefore, the construction of masculinity, added to the analysis of gender violence.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY

*Masculinity* as a substrate for understanding the definition of "being a man" has been discussed in research in the human sciences in recent years, due to its importance in the quest to understand the changes that it has been undergoing in contemporary times.

Deconstructing the view of naturalization of sexualities and relationships between the sexes is to deconstruct the categories of action and thought that articulate masculinity. This is because the process refers to the understanding of social, political and cultural transformations, both with regard to women and men themselves. This way, deconstruction also interferes in the behavior of both sexes and in their conceptions related to masculinity.

Assuming that masculinities are socially constructed (CONNELL, 2016) and that they vary according to each culture and time period, it is understood that masculinities are composed of two fields, which make them fluid. These are interrelated and can be understood as: power relations of women with

men and of men with other men, with sexism and homophobia as the main constitutive elements in this field.

Masculinity as a construction immersed in power relations is often something invisible to men whose gender order is more privileged in relation to those who are less privileged by these relations and, in which, it appears more visibly due to to the oppressions suffered.

Given this, the role assigned to men in social life has lately been the subject of much debate. For a long time considered as the stronger sex, their roles in society began to be questioned since the emergence of the feminist movements, which gained momentum with the second wave of the movement, erupting in 1960. With women fighting for equal rights and despising the figure from the "macho", men began to feel that their masculine identities were being threatened and, consequently, the need to seek a new way of being a man occurred.

When proposing *masculinity* as an object of study, it must be considered based on perspectives that constitute it both in the theoretical field and in the field of social relations, but in order to see them intertwined, that is, without hierarchical determination between they. This is because the *masculinity* category cannot be seen in isolation, but with a relational context (SCOTT, 1990), and therefore cannot be separated from the **femininity** category, as both complement and oppose each other in their constructions.

And also regarding relational context, it is relevant to conceive *masculinity* not in its singular, but in its plural representation - masculinities, in the sense of moving through a variety of possibilities that arise from a dominant model, which will structure the others. Finally, it is important that *masculinity*, in contemporary times, moves away from the patriarchal category that is established as a social order, but no longer corresponds to the desires and model of social organization in the face of the transformations that are underway in gender relations.

We emphasize that in the theoretical descriptions of genders (CHODOROW, 1990; OLIVEIRA 2004; WELZER-LANG, 2009) masculinities are integrated into the concept of patriarchy, that is, talking about this concept makes masculinities a critical part of the order of genders and that cannot be understood outside of that order, nor of the femininities that accompany them. This order reflects how social power, held by men, creates and sustains the gender inequality present in the context of society and which is denounced by feminists. Thus, gender relations result from social interactions with everyday practices, but also from the actions and behaviors of ordinary individuals in their personal and interpersonal lives, which are linked to collective orders within society.

For the anthropologist and researcher Miriam Pillar Grossi (1995), the study of gender that goes back to the European and North American tradition assumes, nowadays, several theoretical currents that see gender not only as an analytical category for the study of men and women , but that goes beyond these possibilities as an object of analysis. In her reading of the genre, the author highlights two theories that she considers to be the main ones: the structuralist and the poststructuralist.

In the structuralist perspective, gender, according to Grossi (1995), implies alterity, which means that the masculine only exists in opposition to the feminine and, therefore, the formation of masculine gender identity will occur in the recognition that there are identical people. and different from ourselves. This way, gender is constructed on the basis of a biological conception and a sexed body, which characterizes the condition of male and female.

In the case of the post-structuralist strand, Grossi states that the genre is constituted by language, that is, by discourse. The "discourse is not just words, but language, acts that have meanings" (GROSSI, 1995, p. 5), therefore, it will permeate a whole set of social relations, in which masculinities and femininities are present.

Judith Butler, in "Problemas de gênero" (1993), which aggregates aspects of the thought of Foucault and Laqueur, states that gender is always a performative act, which is constituted only and from the symbols created for the feminine and the masculine, being the genre: *performance*. Therefore, it is far from developing freely, as it is regulated by a matrix that presupposes coherence between biological sex, gender actions, desire and sexual practice.

Raewyn Connell (1995), one of the pioneers of masculinity studies, presents three aspects that interact to form a gender order of society, in which the paradigms of power relations between masculinities and femininities, widely spread in society, come from the triad : *work, force and cathesis —* personal/sexual relationships (CONNELL, 1995). For the author, these three categories are distinct but interrelated parts that change in relation to each other and represent the fundamental places in which gender relations are constituted and consolidated.

In the first aspect, *work* refers to the sexual division of work, both within the home, where it is possible to observe the division of domestic responsibilities and the care of children, which has undergone considerable changes nowadays, as well as in the labor market. , in which it is possible to observe occupational segregation and unequal pay.

The *power*, as a second aspect, occurs in the form of power that operates on the basis of social relations such as authority, violence and ideology in institutions, in the State, in military and domestic life.. The third, *cathesis*, concerns a dynamic within intimate, emotional, and personal relationships, which include marriage, sexuality, and child rearing (CONNELL, 1995).

The author shows that these three aspects refer to a gender regime in which masculinities and femininities are its expressions. At the societal level, these versions are opposed and are ordered in a hierarchy whose defining premise is the domination of men over women. At the top is hegemonic masculinity, which is dominant over all other masculinities and femininities and which will be the basis of heteronormativity.

The adjective "hegemonic" is linked to the concept of hegemony, having its meaning and legitimacy based on the domination of one social group over another. This occurs not through the use of brute force, but through a social and cultural dynamic that extends to the domains of private and collective life. In society, there are several channels through which hegemony is established, examples of which are: the media, education, ideology and, more recently, the internet, as we will see and discuss in our empirical research.

Thus, in the author's conception, there is a type of ideal man - in the Weberian sense - that is directly and mainly associated with heterosexuality and marriage, however with other indicators of social conduct, such as authority, sexual division of labor , strength, and physical endurance. This leads us to think that hegemonic masculinity presents itself as an ideal form of masculinity that only a few men can achieve. As for the direct possibilities in the face of hegemonic masculinity and its relationship with the masculine gender, we have that: in the first, many men continue to benefit from these possibilities, even though they do not reach the ideal type of masculinity; and, in the second, that men are victims of the very construction of masculinities.

Karen Giffin (2005) also shares this logic. According to the author, studies on masculinity, whether homosexual or heterosexual, demonstrate that the issue of "power" is central. Nevertheless, it emphasizes the existence of constant changes in the patterns of domination, of the internalization of the social structures of oppression and power, and that, going further, makes it possible to understand the interrelation of oppression at the individual level, but also of the great social structures, political, economic and ideological. Furthermore, without denying the domination of men, Giffin proposes to see the construction of masculinity within the assumption that men are marked and brutalized by the same system that provides their privileges and power.

For men, the construction of masculinity, in most cultures, is regularly subjected to the challenge of peers and must be uninterruptedly manifested by the rejection of so-called feminine or effeminate behaviors, as well as through permanent virility in sexual performance, the in order not to leave room for suspicions of homosexuality, the ability to procreate, the jealous surveillance of women, the family and relationships with other partners (BOZON, 2004).

This way, we can consider hegemonic masculinity under a triad of violence: a man against a woman, a man against other men and against himself, which demonstrates the daily violence of a hierarchical, authoritarian, sexist, militaristic, racist, impersonal society. and troubled, channeled through an individual man.

## THE HRM IN THE FIGHT AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women can be conceptualized, according to the United Nations (UN), as any act of violence, motivated by gender, that has or will have as a consequence physical, sexual or psychological harm, or suffering to women. women — including threats of such acts — and also coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, which may occur in the public or private sphere. However, it must be noted that it was not always understood that these actions were forms of violence.

The concept results, according to Miriam Grossi (1994), from a historical construction of the feminist movement. This is because, until the end of the 1970s, mistreatment and "punishment" inflicted on women were not understood as forms of violence. It was only with the opposition and struggle of the women's movement and the feminist movements in relation to the acquittal, or application of a minimum sentence, to husbands or partners who murdered women with justification of legitimate defense of honor, that these behaviors came to be considered as violence.

When it comes to violence against women, two Conventions stand out: the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" (CEDAW), adopted by the UN in 1979; and the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women — Convention of Belém do Pará — adopted in 1994 by the Organization of American States (OAS) and ratified by Brazil in 1995.

In this scenario, we highlight the case of Maria da Penha Fernandes against the Brazilian State, which was brought to the OAS in 1998, based on the Convention of Belém do Pará. This case expressed Brazil's tolerance of domestic violence, thus, in 2001, the State was held responsible for negligence, omission and tolerance in relation to domestic violence against Brazilian women. This way, the story of Maria da Penha did not mean an isolated case, but the retraction of what happened, and still happens, systematically in Brazil. Based on this, the Inter-American

Commission on Human Rights presented several recommendations to our country.

Faced with the need for legal measures and effective actions for the protection of women, there were tireless demands from feminist NGOs and women's movements and, only then, on August 7, 2006, law 11,340, known as the Maria da Penha law, was enacted. This important law does not consist only of the State's responsibility to punish, but also to prevent, assist women in situations of violence and carry out the re-education of perpetrators of violence, since law 11,340 acts to reduce gender inequalities.

Among the provisions contained in the Maria da Penha Law is the creation of education and rehabilitation centers for aggressors (Art. 35, V). This is because, in order for cases of violence against women to be reduced, in addition to offering support to women, it is essential to implement measures aimed at re-educating the aggressors. Within this context, in 2013, in the city of Barra do Garças, Mato Grosso — which is also responsible for the cases of Pontal do Araguaia — the Grupo Reflexivo de Homens, together with Rede de Frente, emerged in 2013.

The Frente Network, which has its nucleus in the Specialized Police Station for the Defense of Women (DEDM), is an institutional articulation with the aim of improving public responses to domestic violence against women. For this, the Network has the support of other institutions, such as the Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance (CREAS). This, in turn, promotes psychosocial care for women, aggressors, children and adolescents involved in cases of domestic violence, seeking to help victims and raise awareness of perpetrators of their acts.

Regarding the treatment of aggressors, the Reflective Group of Men (GRH) stands out: an educational treatment for perpetrators of violence. This program takes place through weekly meetings, in which lectures are held interspersed with conversation circles, thus creating a space for awareness and evolution.

During the lectures and conversation circles, professionals address topics such as: emotional addictions; the way society determines to be male and female, influencing behavior; the Maria da Penha law; the way jealousy can alter the view of reality; the consequences of violent acts, among other relevant issues. By approaching and questioning these issues, it becomes possible for aggressors to learn from their mistakes, reflect and, thus, become more conscious people.

However, not all aggressors participate in the Men's Reflective Group. This measure is mandatory in the following situations: when the victim has a protective measure against the aggressor, who must then participate from 4 to 6 meetings; and for those sentenced to a non-restrictive sentence of liberty — or a restrictive sentence that can be converted, so that the aggressor, in this case, must participate in 12 to 16 meetings. Although the presence of perpetrators of violence is mandatory in some cases, any man who has an interest can attend the group.

It is also important to emphasize the fact that the HRM has proved to be effective in the context in which it has been developed, that is, in the region of Barra do Garças - Mato Grosso, and through the Rede de Frente, since the current rate of recidivism (2019) among group participants is 3.3%, according to the Specialized Police Station for the Defense of Women. Based on this, we can see the importance of having a program that leads to reflection and behavioral changes, which will oppose the construction of a masculinity that is harmful to all.

## INITIAL EXPERIENCES WITH HRM

Field research on the Reflective Group of

Men is in progress and, at the time of writing this article, suspended - due to the need for social isolation imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this, it is already possible to present some preliminary considerations, using observations prior to isolation.

Among the participants of the HRM, there is a predominance of aggressors with low education and who carry out work activities with few technical requirements, having, consequently, low remuneration. This context may come to corroborate the hypothesis that the sum of the historical, cultural and masculinity construction processes leads these aggressors to have difficulties in understanding their mistakes.

However, through the Reflective Group of Men, the perpetrators of violence become inserted, many for the first time, in a process of reflection about their acts, as well as in questions about the patriarchal society, providing and enabling behavioral changes. in the group participants. This way, during the meetings, a greater understanding of violent behaviors, the search for improvement and the desire to learn by most members can be seen.

The understanding that society has of gender violence and, more specifically, of violence against women, is a reflection of historical and social constructions in relation to the feminine and the masculine. This way, since masculinities have sexism and machismo as their main constitutive elements, we affirm the need for public policies that promote political and cultural transformations, both with regard to women and men.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Our study shows that masculinities, in contemporary times, go through a positioning conflict. This is because sometimes they are centered on the posture of a traditional masculinity, sometimes they are faced with the necessary deconstruction for the very survival of the Being, as possessors of identities.

Thus, it was possible to establish some connections between the theoretical fields worked on and the reality observed in the HRM. When talking about the power of masculinity in Foucault's (2002) conception, we enter the sphere of institutions. However, not in the repressive sense of these, but in taking possession of the power relations that are established between the masculine and the feminine, to show that historically the problem of machismo and sexism continues to permeate the 21st century in a condition of trivialization, maintaining in the traditionally constituted molds.

In view of this, the Reflective Group of Men as an educational measure seeks to break with some barriers of masculinities, which were constructed historically and culturally. The group as a promotion of the deconstruction (DERRIDA, 2011) of male identities, which previously belonged and transited only within the individual, now allows aggressors to externalize their masculinities and reposition themselves as men. It is certain that this path proposed by the GRH does not reach all the men who attend it, but it leaves a sliver of hope.

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