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Masculinities, gender and equality: What to do with men?

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ABSTRACT

This article sets out to explore contemporary masculinities, regarding men and masculinities as gender subjects and fundamental actors in achieving more egalitarian, democratic societies. Following in the footsteps of critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM), this article surveys the most significant theorisations in the field of masculinities, focusing specifically on hegemonic masculinity, hybrid masculinities and toxic masculinity, and viewing the "new" masculinities as alternatives to them. Finally, it relates these concepts with recent studies by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) (*Percepciones sobre la igualdad entre hombres y mujeres y estereotipos de género* [Perceptions of equality between men and women and gender stereotypes]) and the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió de Catalunya (CEO) (*Enquesta sobre valors a Catalunya* [Values survey of Catalonia]), to explore what these surveys tell us about men's relationship with feminism and gender equality today.

KEYWORDS

Masculinity, hegemony, privilege, equality, politics.

Introduction

In her TED talk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the celebrated author of the bestseller *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014), defines herself as a happy Black feminist who does not hate men. That is good to know, because this position contrasts starkly with that of the French author Pauline Harmange in her book *Hombres, los odio* (2020),[1] which also sold well.

Both women show that if gender is anything, it is relation: the relation between men, women and others, because all are part of the gender conglomerate, which is binary and oppositional in our cultural context. A man becomes a man through dense networks of relations in which his body is a node of those relations (Haraway, 2004) and a sounding board. Inter- and intra-gender relations also shape the type of man he is and define whether or not he is man enough (a real man/a man in full). As Beauvoir noted, a woman also becomes a woman enmeshed in dense networks of relations. In the words of the anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1975), a woman becomes a wife in a relationship; a woman becomes oppressed in a relationship. Biology is clearly a form of subjugation, but under no circumstances can it become, as Butler (2024) claims, a form of determination. Binarism and the opposition between male and female even today – despite many changes – give shape to an exclusionary framework which does not match our specific lived experiences. The idea that masculinity is one uniform thing which is radically opposed to femininity has to be abandoned both theoretically and in empirical analyses. Furthermore, until recently men and masculinities were invisible, and this invisibility is neither coincidental nor neutral: it is political and part of male privilege (Kimmel & Ferber, 2009: XIV).

As a social classification system, gender is relation; it organises production and reproduction; it is at the foundation of and permeates basic social institutions like the family, school and state; it (unequally) distributes rights, privileges and power; it hierarchises; it assigns more or less value to people; and it has even more effects which we shall not get into here. Our classifications of bodies, genders and sexualities are related to (and underpin) particular economic and social models. Howson (2008: 111) believes that there is a masculinisation of the hegemony of the West based on the hegemonic principles of heterosexuality, breadwinning and aggression.

What gender does and can do is equally or more important than what gender is. In fact, it is more important to understand its effects and consequences than to continue debating what it is, where it is located and what percentage of "reality" it contains, even though current anti-gender positions view sex as real – and natural – whereas gender is considered pure ideology and manipulation. We cannot understand gender without bearing in mind men and other gender positions. Gender is relation, classification, value, segmentation, body, identity and politics, among other things, but as Butler states in their latest book (2024), there has never been a single, unified position on what gender is.

1. This book was published in English with the title *I Hate Men* (London, 4th Estate, 2020).

Even though gender is not (only) women's "problem", nor does it only affect women, the priorities of the early feminist anthropologists were to shed light on and analyse the most pressing problem that gender relations produce, namely inequality, women's subordination and violence, in order to question their universality (Ortner & Whitehead 1989). Those first studies included an incipient study of men as genderised subjects. In the mid-1970s, social-role theories included roles related to masculinity; under the influence of feminist theories, they criticised the traditional explanations of gender differences. Some authors, like the social psychologist Joseph Pleck, began to consider the oppressions that gender roles conceal and the costs that the traditional male social ideals and roles entail for men on a physical and psychological level and in their relationships with women.

In the 1980s, the English-speaking countries started to veer away from the prevailing determinism of sex-role theories and other functionalist and psychological approaches. Sex-role theory, which was essentialist, deterministic and somewhat acritical, was replaced by social constructionism, which recognises that men are not a unitary category with identical power shares. Instead, there are multiple masculinities, but they are always permeated by power relations (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985).

Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) proposed studying the multiple masculinities in relation to power and introduced the idea of dominant or hegemonic masculinities, which are dynamic and relational. Masculinity is not a fixed, ahistorical and universal entity but instead incorporates possibilities of change in its conception and practices.

What we call *critical studies of men and masculinities* today originated in the late 1980s and gained traction in the 1990s.[2] Men, as a referent of everything that had been constructed, including reason, productivity, value and humanity (mankind), were as invisible as the air: modest, absent, silent testimonies (Haraway, 1997) based on an abstract masculinity (Hartsock, 1983), that is, a universal, disembodied masculinity that is omnipotent yet nebulous, even though it has been harnessed to organise Western societies, cultures, states and epistemologies. Hearn (1998: 787) claims that "one of the dominant ways in which men theorise (or do not theorise) men has been through absence". By not talking about themselves, they are reaffirmed, because absences conceal the implicit centrality of men, given that "the androcentric vision of the world is the commonsense of our world because it is immanent to the system of categories of all agents, including women (and thus feminist theorists)" (Bourdieu, 1994 in Bourdieu, 1996: 199).

The view of men as subjects of and with gender arose around 35 years ago, spurred by the critical and transformative impact of feminism and other liberation movements, like the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) movement. The problem is that many men still do not recognise that they are gendered or realise that they carry privilege and power differentials in

2. For more information on the genealogies and main ideas about masculinities, see Enguix, Nardini and Abril (2018).

relation to gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or age. Invisibility is one of the hegemonic features of dominant masculinity considered an unquestioned norm, which has to be criticised "in epistemological terms" as well as "ethical" terms (Braidotti, 2012: 22).

Therefore, studying masculinities is an urgent need in order to expose the gender dynamics permeated by power structures that operate simultaneously at different levels (personal, social, geopolitical and epistemological), and because male domination entails oppression and limitations on men themselves. Men and masculinities are necessary actors in the social shift towards fairer societies.

Masculinity/masculinities and its/their limits

Masculinity is in constant (re)construction and assessment, whereas femininity exists, is taken for granted and is not subject to tests or attainment rituals or feats (Vale de Almeida, 1996). This is why the anthropologists Elisabeth Badinter (1993) and David D. Gilmore (1994) believe that it is much easier to say what a man is not than what a man is. However, Raewyn Connell ventured to provide a definition of masculinity in her classic book *Masculinities*:

> Masculinity, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture (Connell, 1995: 71).

In *Gender and Power* (1987), Connell identifies three spheres as substantial in the social structuring of masculinity: production relations (sexual division of labour, in which the man is considered the provider and the woman the reproducer), power relations (subordination of women and of men who do not fit the system of social expectations about the hegemonic masculinity) and what we will call *affect* or *cathexis*, the emotional level. Masculinities are configurations of practice that occur in social action (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 836); they are organised at the intersection of power, production and emotion and give rise to a host of masculinities – hegemonic, subordinate, marginalised and oppositional – which coexist and interact simultaneously and all arise in specific historical circumstances (Connell, 1987). The emotional level is now considered an axis of change for toxic and violent masculinities, as the practice of caring and emotionally healthy masculinities (Elliot, 2015) is currently being promoted as an alternative.

Jeff Hearn believes that masculinity can refer to practices, configurations of practices, clusters of practices, identities, types, structures, institutions, processes, psycho-dynamics and other things (Hearn, 2004 and 2015), given his contention that the concept of *masculinity* or its plural, *masculinities*, is difficult to define.

Gilmore defined masculinity in a simpler way, as the "approved ways of being an adult male in a specific society" (Gilmore, 1994: 15), revealing how relational genders are. Masculine ideals and the accepted ways of being an adult man in a specific society are not easy objectives to achieve; instead, gender ideals operate as stereotyped mirroring mechanisms which in reality do not correspond to any specific reality:

> There is only one complete unblushing male in America: young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, a father, with a university degree, working, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports... Any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself – during moments at least – as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior (Goffman, 1963: 128).

This statement is still valid despite the years that have gone by, the many social changes that have transpired, the advances in feminisms and the gender rights acquired, because surely when we think about and imagine masculinity (not masculinities), the "male identity" we think about – presented in an essentialist, reductionist and universalising way – is actually "hegemonic masculinity": a masculinity that seeks to reproduce the patriarchy by repudiating the feminine; a masculinity that is measured by power, monetary success, wealth and social standing, some of whose attributes are emotional control, boldness and aggressivity (Enguix, Nardini, Abril, 2018: 10).

As mentioned above, Badinter and Gilmore believe that it is easier to say what a man is not than what a man is: basically, a man is not a boy, a woman or a homosexual. Femininity (effeminacy or the limp wrist), sexuality (homophobia) and age serve as markers of masculinity. Age, sexuality and gender mark the boundaries of an omnipresent, ubiquitous, relational and slippery category that learns what it cannot do before it learns what it should do:

> The idea of masculine identity has primarily been constructed as a rejection of femininity and the values that stereotypically shape it. This is why it scorns sensitivity and tenderness in men, rejects the values of care and compassion and stands against all expressions of weakness and the need for psychological support (Alberdi & Escario, 2007: 69).

On hegemonies, hybridisation, purity and toxicity

In their article "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity", Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) began to shape the concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, which Raewyn Connell refined years later. It is unquestionably the most important, widely used and famous concept related to masculinities.

Based on Gramsci's concepts of *hegemony* and *historical blocs*, hegemonic masculinity sets out to explain how and why men maintain social roles that are dominant over women and other gender identities perceived as "feminine" in a given society (Connell, 1987; 1995: 77). It is defined

as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 1987; 1995: 77): "It is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (1987: 183). The concept of *hegemonic masculinity* is broadly used to capture patriarchal power dynamics among men and in relation to femininities and non-hegemonic masculinities. Because it is based on practices that enable men to maintain collective dominance, hegemonic masculinity may include toxic practices like violence, even though that is not always its defining feature because hegemony comes in many forms (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 840).

Messerschmidt believes that the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* has been the driving force behind critical studies of men and masculinities, that it has become omnipresent, has proven crucial for the conceptualisation of masculinities all over the world and has had a great deal of influence on the interdisciplinary understanding of masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2019: 85).

Hegemony, relationality, the legitimation of the patriarchy and the subordination of others are the essential features of hegemonic masculinity. However, we should not forget that it is not a fixed, unvarying characteristic but a practice or patterns of practices which remain in place thanks to another factor Connell deems essential: both women and men's complicity in upholding the patterns of hegemony, a complicity that can easily be understood as symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2012).

As Goffman hinted, the culturally idealised hegemonic model fits a small percentage of men (white, educated, heterosexual and wealthy, according to Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985: 552). Just as gender relations intersect with gender, class and ethnicity (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985: 590-592), hegemonies can shift and change; in fact, some women may even become hegemonic. Nonetheless, men, as men, always benefit from the subordination of women and other groups, a notion that Connell calls the *patriarchal dividend*, i. e.

> the advantage to men as a group from maintaining an unequal gender order. Money income is not the only kind of benefit. Others are authority, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power, emotional support, and control over one's own life. The patriarchal dividend, of course, is reduced as overall gender equality grows (Connell, 2009: 142).

By coining the concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, Connell (1995) broke down the category of *man* and showed that men make particular discursive choices based on an available, acceptable cultural inventory of masculine behaviours.

In the opinion of Vale de Almeida (1996: 5), hegemonic masculinity is a central, ideal model that is unattainable by men individually and exerts a controlling effect over all of them through their internalisation of it, the ritualisation of everyday sociability practices and a discourse that excludes the full range of emotions, which is considered feminine. Masculinity should be seen as a constructed and fragile, not uniform process. There are subordinated and hegemonic

masculinities, always intersected by age, job, status, wealth, social class, education, sexual orientation, ethnic background and other factors. At any point in history, different masculinities are competing against each other (Connell, 1987) because men share the fruits of the patriarchy very unequally, most to the benefit of a hegemonic masculinity that is white, middle or upper class and heterosexual.

The concept of *hegemonic masculinity* has often been misinterpreted or used in a biased way, precisely because it is so famous. In a 2005 article now considered seminal in this field, Connell and Messerschmidt reassessed the concept in an effort to fine-tune it. They acknowledged its essentialising undertone and the fact that it was initially framed only within a heteronormative conception of gender. They claimed that hegemonic masculinity is not a single pattern but a "historical bloc" in which many patterns are intertwined, and that this hybridisation is the outcome of a constant process of negotiation, translation and reconfiguration because that is the best strategy to ensure external hegemony (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 844). These processes of negotiation, translation and reconfiguration take place both inter-gender and intra-gender, and sexuality and the performance of gender are essential factors in the construction of the blocs. They also caution that "it is desirable to eliminate any usage of hegemonic masculinity as a fixed, transhistorical model. This usage violates the historicity of gender and ignores the massive evidence of change in social definitions of masculinity" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 838).

Years later, Messerschmidt spoke about "inconsistent applications" of the concept when discussing approaches that "primarily concentrated on who and what type of man actually represents hegemonic masculinity". These approximations are focused on a fixed or dominant type of masculinity at particular times and places. They do not take into account the relational nature of hegemonic masculinity or the fact that all the participants in unequal gender relations are "collective orchestrators" of hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2019: 87).

Instead of focusing on fixed male features or certain groups of men – like politicians, executives or celebrities – simply because they occupy positions of power, hegemonic masculinities should be viewed as patterns of practice and dynamic elements in a social web of gender relations where inequalities and the legitimation of unequal gender relations are fundamental (Messerschmidt, 2019: 88). They are dynamic, fluid, provisional processes based on practices that require the subalterns' complicity in order to ensure that hegemonic positions are maintained. Therefore, we have to understand the ever-changing, relational and intersectional nature of the concept (class, ethnicity, nation, gender, age, sexuality, etc.). In order to fine-tune future analyses, Messerschmidt (2019: 89) proposes distinguishing between "hegemonic" and "dominant" masculinities and analysing their relationships and co-construction, a suitable way to work with specific male practices, affects, discourses and materialities.

In recent years, there has been a veritable explosion of terms in the field of masculinities, and apart from the famous *new masculinities*, concepts like *hybrid masculinities* (Demetriou, 2001;

Bridges & Pascoe, 2014), *polyhegemonic masculinities* (Scheff, 2006), *inclusive masculinities* (Anderson, 2009; Anderson & MacCormack, 2016), *the hegemony of men* (Hearn, 2004), *toxic masculinities* (Boise, 2019; Harrington, 2021), *caring masculinities* (Elliot, 2015), *alternative masculinities* (Carabí & Armengol, 2014; Gutmann, 2014), *egalitarian and alternative masculinities* (Téllez, Martínez & Sanfèlix, 2019), *multiple hegemonic masculinities* (Jefferson, 2002), *multiple dominant masculinities* (Coles, 2009), *traditional dominant masculinities* (Flecha *et al.*, 2013), *positive masculinities* (Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018), *saturated masculinities* (Mercer, 2017), *porous masculinities* and many others have appeared.[3]

Many of these labels are defined by the absence of or alternative to hegemonic features, such as egalitarian, caring and alternative masculinities, which are part of the spectrum called the *new masculinities*.[4] Others are characterised by the multiplication of hegemonic and/or dominant practices (as shown by Jefferson, Coles, Flecha, and others) or by the expansion of the base of hegemony, including the disappearance of homophobia and especially homohysteria as major axes of change in contemporary masculinities (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). Yet others are focused on the saturation of masculinities trapped among meanings that are often contradictory and in conflict (Mercer, 2017).

Among the many labels available, the concept of *hybrid masculinities* stands out and has become increasingly popular in recent years. As they are conceptualised, hybrid masculinities consist not in the mixture of disparate traits and practices – as is often believed – but in the incorporation of disparate elements – care of one's own and others' bodies, homoerotic practices and others – with the purpose of ensuring male hegemony and the reproduction of the patriarchy. Drawing from Gramsci and Bhabha, Demetriou (2001: 337) was one of the earliest critics of the first definition of hegemonic masculinity by considering hegemonic masculinity a hybrid bloc that associates practices from different masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of the patriarchy. The process of forming blocs of hybridisation operates more through negotiation than negation, that is, through attempts to articulate, appropriate and incorporate (more than negate, marginalise or eliminate) different or apparently opposing elements (what Demetriou calls *dialectical pragmatism*) (Demetriou, 2001: 349). Connell and Messerschmidt incorporated these aspects in their 2005 review of the concept.

According to Bridges and Pascoe (2014: 246 and 247), hybrid masculinities both reproduce and conceal systems of inequality based on gender, ethnicity and sexuality and have consequences that give rise to, reflect and shroud inequalities. They may distance certain groups of men from hegemonic masculinity; they coexist with the idea that white, heterosexual masculinity is less important than other more subordinate or marginal forms of masculinity and reinforce the

3. To avoid overloading the references section I have only included the most prominent citations. The others can easily be found through a search of authors and concepts.

4. For a critical analysis of this category, see Enguix (2021).

existing social and symbolic boundaries and inequalities in ways that often serve to conceal systems of power and inequality in historically new ways. The three strategies used by hybrid masculinities are discursive distancing, strategic borrowing and fortifying gender boundaries (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

Hybrid masculinities selectively incorporate elements of male and even female identity associated with subordinate or marginalised groups. In his analysis of the presidential discourse of the two Bushes on the "war on terror", Messerschmidt stresses that the "appropriation of traditionally defined 'feminine' traits (sensitivity, empathy and humanitarianism) blurs gender differences but does not undermine gender dominance" (2010: 161). In fact, it actually reproduces the existing power and authority systems. The current popularity of the term may distance us from practices of hegemony and the subordination of others and even lead us to believe that the adoption of egalitarian practices offsets hegemonic practices: gender flexibility in the postmodern patriarchy is dangerous because it creates the illusion that the patriarchy has disappeared (Hennessy, 1995: 172). Therefore, we have to question the hybrid masculinities' capacity for change and for eradicating systems of power and inequality. The fact that hegemonic masculinities occur in specific circumstances and are open to historical change implies that there may exist a struggle for hegemony in which the old forms of hegemonic masculinity are being displaced by new forms, which are, however, also hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2019: 87). Likewise, we have to question where power, subordination and privilege lie in relation to the new masculinities (Enguix, 2021).

Another label that has recently become popular is *toxic masculinity*: it is a somewhat blurry affective category that has been insufficiently defined and is always about someone else because "by distancing themselves from such 'toxic' elements of masculinity, men may represent heterosexual masculine privilege as a thing of the past even as it continues to structure institutions" (Harrington, 2021: 350). Harrington (2021) believes that condemning toxic masculinity enables men to take a stand against misogyny, homophobia and violence while also accepting that masculinity is related to these problems but that violence and sexual harassment are a thing of the past or of other men with mental problems. The celebrated hashtag #notallmen illustrates this position. In Spain, one example of the ultra-right-wing Vox party's discourse on gender violence is when Macarena Olona stated that "men don't rape; rapists rape", thus disassociating men from these acts of violence and denying the existence of structural violence (Pichel Vázquez, 2024: 151) and the patriarchal dividend. The idea of toxic masculinity is post-feminist (Gill, 2007), because it relegates the patriarchy to the past and "individualizes sexism as a question of personal attitudes. Feminist scholars should thus be wary of using toxic masculinity as an analytic category" (Harrington, 2021: 350).

According to Sam de Boise (2019), the concept of *toxic masculinity* was created in the 1980s and first spread among groups of men such as the mythopoetic movement and the Promise Keepers, originally to go back to a "timeless" masculinity based on care, compassion and power. However, it ultimately led to "strongly antifeminist politics and overtly reactionary notions of a return

to gender roles through promoting a vision of the 'benevolent patriarch' as the (nuclear) family's economic and spiritual provider" (Boise, 2019: 147). Toxic masculinity seems to say that what is problematic is just certain aspects of gender and not men themselves. Unlike structural concepts such as *hegemonic masculinity*, it condemns a series of behaviours under an ahistorical, decontextualised label, thus individualising societal problems (Boise, 2019: 149). In fact, masculinity itself may well be what is toxic (Boise, 2019: 150).

(Some) men and equality

In 1995, Bourdieu wrote:

> The feminist revolution seems to be a done deed. Women can list many successes and occupy many social positions which were previously off-limits to them. This new power seems to be viewed as a threat to men, to such an extent that movements to defend men's interests are being founded. *The dominant always have a tendency to overestimate the conquests of the dominated and to take credit even when these conquests have been wrested from them* (Bourdieu, 2012: 1). (The italics are ours.)

After *#MeToo* and other feminist political actions, we tend to believe that the "feminist revolution" is unstoppable. The media and academia report on the recent advances of feminism. However, back in 1995, the feminist revolution seemed like a "done deed" that already mobilised men against it.

Sánchez Cuenca has stated the following about the results of the European elections scheduled for 9 June 2024:

> [...] the so-called "culture wars" have effects that are difficult to anticipate. The advances in feminism, environmentalism and the like have prompted a bristly reaction in certain population sectors, which is more noticeable among men than among women and is particularly visible among young men (Sánchez Cuenca, 2024).

According to different analyses, young men are the main voters of the political group led by Luis Pérez Fernández, AKA Alvise Pérez, called Se Acabó la Fiesta (The Party is Over), which has managed to win more than 800,000 votes and three seats in the European Parliament with its anti-migratory and anti-feminist discourses (Viejo, 2024). According to Grady (in Echarri, 2023), men no longer aspire to stop the advances of the feminist agenda as much as possible but instead aim to regain initiative, monopolise the public space and silence dissenters. Echarri states that in the USA, 62% of Republican men and 46% of Democratic men believe that feminism today is more negative than positive for society as a whole, whereas three years ago almost 60% of all men believed that the progress of the feminist agenda was "hopeful".

In Catalonia and Spain, two surveys have been published in recent months that provide us with clues about what the population feels about his issue. The Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió de Catalunya (CEO) conducted the *Enquesta sobre valors a Catalunya*[5] (Values survey of Catalonia) which was published on 21 February 2024. Prior to that, on 15 January 2024, the results of the first survey by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) *Percepciones sobre la igualdad entre hombres y mujeres y estereotipos de género* (Perceptions of equality between men and women and gender stereotypes) had been published. These results caused a significant stir in society, because many of the country's media, if not all of them, reported that the data showed that 44.1% of men believe that the promotion of equality has gone too far and that now men are facing discrimination. Other findings reported were that women continue spending twice as much time as men on childcare.[6]

Question 26 on the CEO's survey asks about the inequalities between men and women that currently exist in Catalonia and measures responses on a scale of 1 to 10. As Table 1 shows, only 18.9% of the respondents believe that there is equality between men and women (rating of 5 on the scale), 2.1% believe that there is a great deal of inequality that favours women or that men are at a disadvantage (rating of 1 on the scale) and 10.2% believe that there is a great deal of inequality that favours men or that women are at a disadvantage (rating of 10 on the scale). The majority position is that there is some degree of inequality that favours men (53.1%, ratings of 6-9 on the scale), while only 14.2% of the respondents believe that there is some degree of inequality that favours women (ratings of 1-4 on the scale).

If we look at the data by gender, men respond affirmatively more or much more than women on all the positions that claim a male disadvantage, as well as on the perception that there is equality in society today, whereas women respond affirmatively more to the opposite positions; in fact, a significant number of them are of the opinion that there is a great deal of inequality. Even though the most predominant position by far is that there is inequality that favours men, men are more likely to claim a male disadvantage and are more likely to believe that there is already equality.

5. The CEO's study can be found at the following link: *https://ceo.gencat.cat/ca/estudis/registre-estudis-dopinio/estudis-dopinio-ceo/societat/detall/index.html?id=9088* (retrieved: 1 March 2024).

6. For example, see *https://elpais.com/sociedad/2024-01-15/un-441-de-los-hombres-cree-que-se-ha-llegado-tan-lejos-en-la-promocion-de-la-igualdad-de-las-mujeres-que-ahora-se-les-discrimina-a-ellos.html* (retrieved: 20 April 2024). The CIS study may be consulted at the following link: *https://www.cis.es/es/detalle-ficha-estudio?origen=estudio&codEstudio=3428* (retrieved: 20 January 2024).

TABLE 1 **Perception of inequalities between men and women in Catalonia (by gender)**

	Total	Men	Women
There is a great deal of inequality that favours women, or men are at a disadvantage (rating of 0)	2.1	3.1	1.2
There is some degree of inequality that favours women (ratings of 1-4)	14.2	21.3	10.6
There is equality between men and women (rating of 5)	18.9	22.6	15.5
There is some degree of inequality that favours men (ratings of 6-9)	53.1	54.6	58
There is a great deal of inequality that favours men, or women are at a disadvantage (rating of 10)	10.2	6.7	13.4

SOURCE: Author, based on data from the CEO.

If we look at the data by age, the idea that there is a great deal of inequality that favours women or that men are at a disadvantage (rating of 0) is in the vast minority at all ages, with the percentages fluctuating between 3.3% of the respondents[7] between the ages of 16 and 29 and 0.5% of those over the age of 65. However, it is interesting to note that the percentages drop as the respondents get older (3.3% at ages 16 to 24; 3.2% at ages 25 to 34; 2.9% at ages 35 to 49; 1.6% at ages 50 to 64 and 0.5% among people aged 65 and older). Age does not affect the belief that there is already equality between men and women.

Question 27c asks if "the feminist movement has gone too far", without any further elucidation; 15.7% of men and 11.4% of women strongly agree with that statement, while 20.5% of men and 17.6% of women say that they somewhat agree with it. Those who agree and somewhat agree with it together account for 36.2% of men and 29% of women. By age, the highest level of agreement can be found among people aged 16 to 24 (38.9%),[8] but there are no substantial differences with the other age groups. More people disagree with the statement than agree with it at all age brackets,[9] but these two positions are only separated by 0.3% in the 16 to 24 age group, the smallest gap in the sample.

The survey also includes data crossed by party sympathy. The highest percentages of agreement with the idea that there is inequality that favours women is found among voters for the Partido Popular (PP) (4.4%) and Vox (12.4%), while the highest percentages of agreement with the idea that the existing inequality favours men is found among the voters of the CUP (17.6%) and ECP-Sumar (14.2%). The belief that there is equality between men and women reaches the

7. This survey provides no data crossed by age or political sympathies by gender.
8. Age 16-24, 38.9%; age 25-34, 31.8%; age 35-49, 34%; age 50-64, 28.2%; 65 and over, 32.5%.
9. Age 16-24, 39.2%; age 25-34, 43.9%; age 35-49, 38.3%; age 50-64, 42.5%; 65 and over, 38.4%.

highest levels of agreement among PP (40.6%), PSC (22.7%) and Ciutadans (36.8%) sympathisers, far from the rates among the sympathisers of the other parties. Political sympathies are also relevant regarding opinions on whether the feminist movement has gone too far: the strongest support for this statement comes from PP (37.5%) and Vox (70.6%) sympathisers. We find the highest level of disagreement with the statement among CUP (59.2%) and ECP-Sumar (47.4%) sympathisers.

The CIS shows the results of the survey broken down by sex, so we shall solely focus on men's responses. The data reveal that the lowest level of sympathy with the feminist movement (8.8%) is found in the youngest segment of the sample (ages 16-24), while the highest (19.9%) is among men aged 65 to 74. Around 12.7% of the respondents believe that the inequalities between men and women in Spain are very large, 35.5% believe they are fairly large, and the percentages go up as the age increases (40.9% among men aged 65 and older and 40.1% among men over the age of 75); 30.6% believe that these inequalities are minor and 18.6% believe there are no inequalities. Precisely young men aged 16 to 24 are the most likely to believe that there is no inequality (27.8%), while men aged 65 and older are the least likely to believe this (11%).

The idea that feminism has gone too far and now discriminates against men (44.1% of men agree or somewhat agree, but 54.6% disagree) coexists with the idea that men also have to struggle for gender equality (74.2% of men strongly or somewhat agree) and with the idea that equality between men and women contributes to making a fairer society (96% of men strongly or somewhat agree).[10] By age (Table 2), 51.8% of young men between the ages of 16 and 24 believe that they face discrimination, while 48.2% do not. The idea of discrimination against men reaches the highest percentage in this age bracket, the only one where more respondents agree than disagree.

TABLE 2 **Degree of agreement with the idea that promoting women's equality has gone so far that men are now facing discrimination (by age)**

	Total	Age 16-24	Age 25-34	Age 35-44	Age 45-54	Age 55-64	Age 65-74	Age 75 and up
Strongly or somewhat agree	44.1	52.8	40.2	46.2	45.7	43	40.8	38
Strongly or somewhat disagree	54.6	48.2	58.4	52.6	53	55	57.6	59.2

SOURCE: Author, based on data from the CIS.[11]

10. All three questions are part of question 6.

11. We have eliminated the responses "I don't know" and blank responses in order to facilitate our analysis.

The CIS survey also reveals the importance of ideological self-identification: men who lean more to the right believe that there is little or no inequality (72.9%), while men who lean to the left believe that the inequalities between men and women are somewhat or very large (71.8%). Likewise, the idea that women will not achieve equality unless men fight for women's rights is also conditioned by the respondent's political stance: 42.6% of right-leaning men strongly or somewhat agree with this, while 86% of left-leaning men do. In contrast, there is little difference regarding the belief that equality between men and women contributes to making a fairer society: 99% of left-leaning men and 85.1% of right-leaning men believe this.

As the CEO survey already showed, the further to the right the respondents are, the more they tend to believe that feminism has gone too far and that now men are the ones who face discrimination (78%), while the opposite trend is found among left-leaning men (84% somewhat or strongly disagree). We should add that the highest percentage of Vox voters – a far-right party that is clearly anti-gender and anti-feminist – can be found among young men aged 16 to 24 (19.6%).

Coda

The good news is that these surveys tell us that equality is a democratic ideal that is deeply embedded in our society. They also show a surprising degree of unanimity regarding equality as a value and necessity in fair and democratic societies and point to the fact that men must be involved in the fight for equality. The bad news is the discrepancies between whether or not equality exists, to what extent it exists and its repercussions – in the guise of disadvantages or discrimination – in gender relations according to the gender and ideological self-affiliation of the interviewees, more than their age. We cannot interpret the questions on gender or equality independent of the respondents' gender and political sympathies, yet nor can we ignore age, especially among the youngest group.

The anti-feminist positions of far-right populism in Europe and the United States seem to be taking root significantly among men, particularly among young men, who are more likely than other age groups to believe that feminism now discriminates against men. Even though it is good news that it is no longer possible to think seriously about democracy and politics while ignoring gender issues, as Graff and Korolzcuk remind us, it is bad news that the political right is successful in its bid to "capture the word 'gender', to redefine its meaning and demonize it, making gender equality appear like an enemy of the people" (Graff & Korolzcuk, 2022: 4); anti-gender/anti-feminism and far right-wing populism have many points in common and easily connect back and forth. Political capitalisation of the fear of losing male privilege is nothing new, but it is recalcitrant and has found a powerful mechanism of amplification in the social media.

In light of these surveys, the situation in our country does not seem to be as extreme as elsewhere in Europe. Hybrid, new and toxic male practices coexist and struggle to maintain hegemony, and seemingly contradictory positions coexist. While men have fewer problems than ever self-identifying as feminists, claiming that equality is a value, that women face the most discrimination and that men should get involved in the fight for freedom, some men also believe that equality already exists and that feminism has gone too far and now discriminates against them. The data point to a gap between equality and feminism which is larger among men than women, although it is also significant among women and connected to age and right-wing ideological positions. Individuals seem to be seeking à-la-carte politics and rights to avoid "men's aggrieved entitlement" (Kimmel, 2017) and are cherry-picking only the pieces from feminism and equality that fit and/or interest each of us.

Connell thought that as gender equality gained traction, the patriarchal dividend and hegemonic masculinities would lose ground. Perhaps she did not predict how one can affirm and deny equality at the same time with affirmative discourses within a framework in which structural changes to achieve effective equality are sometimes perceived as an attack on the profound, traditional and hegemonic meanings of masculinities, their supremacism and their privileges. Masculinist ideologies – the manosphere (Ging, 2019), the Red Pillers, etc. – that promote male victimisation (Botto & Gottzén, 2023: 3) are not only the expression of an anti-feminist reaction but also proof of male resistance to change. Some masculinities incorporate discourses of equality but resist losing privileges, creating a male bond that we can call *hegemonic*, *hybrid*, *toxic* or *new*.

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