Communicative acts which promote new masculinities. Overcoming hegemonic masculinity in the work-place and school

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Abstract

Scientific literature has emphasized how the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity has led to several social problems, such as gender violence, criminality or bullying (Connell 1987, 2005, 2006; Kimmel 2000, Messerschimdt, 1993, Bourdieu 1998). There are several findings about the influence of this model in cases of sexual harassment suffered by women in the work-place (Mackinnon, 1979; Thomas & Kitzinger1997; Wise & Stanley 1987) as well as hegemonic masculinity and homophobia at the school (Mac an Ghaill 2007). In this paper we will present evidence on both issues but also on overcoming process derived from the research project entitled Impact of communicative acts on the construction of new masculinities funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. The research illustrates the influence of communicative acts on the promotion of new masculinities, far removed from the hegemonic one, which are based on values like equality and solidarity. We will present some data about how specific communicative acts can favour the recognition and visibility of new masculinities in the work-place and the School, specifically in a Small and Medium-sized Enterprise, an Adult Education centre and Vocational School.

Key Words: communicative acts, new masculinities, attraction, hegemonic masculinity.

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Introduction

The effect of hegemonic masculinity on different social areas, such as education or employment, is a reality the analysis of which has been extensively developed in scientific literature. We will demonstrate this in the following section. There is also a wide range of literature about which kinds of mechanisms men use to question the hegemonic model and also about how new forms of masculinity are defined. In any case, there is still a lack of research on interaction and communicative acts which favour new masculinities. In other words, even today we have no empirical evidence of how verbal, non-verbal language and social context could promote and make new masculinities more visible and infuse them with attractiveness at the same time.

Taking this lack of literature into consideration, we decided to start research project which led to the following paper: El impacto de los actos comunicativos en la construcción de nuevas masculinidades (2010-2011) [Impact of communicative acts on the construction of new masculinities] coordinated by CREA-UB – Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities – in the University of Barcelona and financed by the RTD National Plan within the Ministry of Science and Innovation. This research project involved an interdisciplinary team from five different Spanish universities: León, Santiago de Compostela, Jaume I, the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and the Camilo José Cela University in Madrid.

This research project is framed within two research lines that CREA-UB is developing: the analysis of communicative acts and the preventive socialization of gender violence. Both lines aim to overcome social inequalities. The first one is linked to the social conception of language and communication and how these factors influence people's socialisation processes. Austin (1971) approached this idea in his analysis of the impact of words on social situations. The second research line, connected to preventive socialisation, focuses on the study of those attraction models which are highly successful and the influence they have on affective and sexual relationships. In these analyses, a link between attractiveness and violence has been detected. Those men who are seen to be more attractive are viewed as such due to their aggressive attitude. For that reason, in order to prevent relationships based on abuse, the research line on preventive socialization insists on the

socialization process because it provides the opportunity to reflect on desire and attraction (Gómez, 2004; Valls et al., 2008; Duque, 2006).

In the following article we will present the preliminary results obtained from the project with an emphasis on the area of employment and education. Along these lines, the project involved carrying out six case studies in three different areas: education, employment and civil participation. In the employment area two case studies were undertaken, one in a SME and another one in a healthcare centre, and on education two case studies are carried out in an Adult Education center and a Vocational School. Professionals and other individuals involved in both spaces were interviewed.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first one contains a brief state of the art in which some contributions linked to communicative acts and masculinities are presented. Then, in the second section, a description is provided of the methodological paradigm and tools which were used for this project. In the third section, some of the results which were achieved are also described, and finally we set out some of the conclusions we reached.

State of the art

Scientific literature about masculinity has emphasised the negative consequences of hegemonic masculinity reproduction in different daily-life spaces (Connell, 1987, 2005, 2006; Kimmel, 2000; Messerschimdt, 1993; Bourdieu, 1998). Some examples of this reproduction process are labor inequalities, gender violence, sexism and criminality. In the employment area, some analyses have been undertaken on previous occasions. From a sociologic point of view, Kimmel (1996, 2000) argues that masculinity is fully influenced by the capitalist production process. Market economies place men in the main role in the public sphere, consigning women to the private one. This situation increases gender inequalities.

American manhood is also studied by Kimmel (1996). He explores the industrialisation process in American society in depth. The transformation of industrial society and immigration from rural to urban

zones are two key events which help to understand changes in masculinity. Technology in the work-place and in the urban context are elements which have changed men's lives. Kimmel states that in American industrial society men become "human machines" due to the nature of their working day which was imposed by Taylorism. On the other hand, there is a large amount of literature on the sexual harassment that women above all suffer in the work-place (Mackinnon, 1979; Thomas & Kitzinger, 1997; Wise & Stanley, 1987). Some explanations insist on the idea that these types of practices are natural in some organisations. There are certain interactions and communicative acts which are conditioning these aspects, such as socialization processes and gender relations. These elements also help us to obtain more information to solve problems such as sexual harassment. For this reason we believe that it is necessary to look deeper into language studies in order to identify the type of male model which is being reinforced. We start of based on the premise that the ways in which we communicate and interact have an impact on strengthening the attractiveness of egalitarian masculinities.

In reference to the concept of communicative acts, not only speech acts are analyzed here; we look at verbal and non-verbal language as well (Searle and Soler, 2004). Depending on the nature of people's interaction, these can be dialogic, based on equality and dialogue, or based on power. In other words, in order to identify what kinds of human interaction take place, it is necessary to differentiate between interactions which promote power relations, or interactions that encourage egalitarian and transformative relationships.

Jürgen Habermas (1981) is one of the most quoted authors in the area of communicative acts. Throughout his work he expounds the necessary aspects as concrete speech acts as well as the conditions involved in people's understanding. Habermas points out that agreements should be rationally based on validity claims. In this way, people's relationships should also be based on argumentation and not on power. In other words, it is necessary to start off based on agreements in order to reach a consensus. Austin (1971) is another relevant author in relation to the analysis of communicative acts. He undertook a conceptual analysis of

communicative acts, differentiating between three types. The first is illocutionary acts, which are defined as the intention that speaker has behind his or her words at the moment of emission. Perlocutionary acts aim to provoke an effect on the person listening to them. Finally, there are elocutionary acts, which are set out when people say something.

Searle (2001) is another exponent of communicative acts. In his analysis of language he takes an in-depth look into illocutionary acts but he adds intentionality to the emission process. He argues that intentionality establishes speech acts. That is, the idea that language is developed through people's intentions. Apart from his analysis of intentionality, Searle provides a thorough description of the intentionality background.

CREA-UB has undertaken analyses of communicative acts. Based on the same conceptual basis initiated by Austin (1971), and followed by Habermas (1987) and Searle (2001), CREA-UB (Flecha and Soler, 2010) distinguishes between communicative acts of power and dialogic communicative acts. Taking this perspective into account, communicative acts of power are connected with perlocutionary acts because their intention is to provoke action from the people receiving the emission and to develop a power act. On the other hand, at the same time, it is possible to identify illocutionary communicative acts which are connected to dialogic communicative acts. These kinds of communicative acts are based on dialogue and consensus, always on the basis of the same argument.

In masculinity studies, there are two different types of analysis. On the one hand we can find research focused on male behaviour and its traditional characteristics such as power and domination. On the other hand, there is also research aimed at studying new forms of masculinity.

From the first perspective it is important to highlight the work developed by Simone de Beavouir in 1949. In her work, Beavouir (1949) carries out a deep analysis of male and female socialization processes. This analysis states that men are more subjected to pressure than women. This situation is caused by the promotion of manhood which society continuously reinforces. Promoting manhood implies the reproduction of gender inequalities that consolidate hegemonic masculinity as well (Mackinnon, 1989).

   This is the origin of masculinity studies, and after that, the scientific community started to pay more attention to the social effects of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1983; 2005; Seidler, 1994; Kimmel, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). The hegemonic concept of masculinity was initially used in 1985. During that year research was carried out in different Australian high schools (Kessler, 1985). Two types of behavior patterns were identified among boys and girls in this research: "hegemonic masculinity" – traditional masculinity – and "emphasised feminity" which is a kind of feminity which is accommodating to men. Both concepts prove the existence of other typologies of gender models but those aforementioned are the ones most accepted by society.

   Taking this research as a starting point, Raewyn Connell (1983, 2005) created a theoretical framework for masculinities. She used Gramsci's concept of hegemony (1971) considering cultural reproduction of dominant classes, in different settings such as the educational system, religious institutions and the mass media. She highlighted the fact that hegemony does not only imply the use of force. Hegemony implies reproducing men's supremacy through institutions. In this case, hegemonic masculinity appears when a specific model of male behaviour becomes dominant and creates inequalities.

   Michael Kimmel (1996, 2000) is one of the most quoted authors in masculinity studies. His conceptual basis of hegemonic masculinity is linked to the cultural construction of masculinity. He defines four characteristics that hegemonic masculinity should follow:

- "Not faggot stuff", any attitude linked to feminity is forbidden, to be a man means rejecting any feminine aspects.
- To be important, with greater status, with greater power. These aspects are synonymous with masculinity.
- To be hard like an oak tree, not showing feelings is a male's prerogative.
- "Fuck them", risk and aggressiveness are synonymous; being faithful to both aspects is a male cultural pattern – for those men who follow hegemonic masculinity.

Within sociological studies on masculinity, another significant author is Anthony Giddens, who argues that masculinity is becoming harmful to men (Giddens, 1992). According to this idea, the development of masculinity is not only harmful to women at a social, physical and moral level, but it is also harmful to men. In line with Giddens, masculinity begins with the social construction of the phallus, an ideological representation of the male sexual member. The development of the "hegemonic masculinity" concept is described in his analysis of pornography. Giddens states that pornography is a reflection of the male impulse to subordinate and humiliate women.

Bourdieu (1998) is one of the most highly quoted sociologists in recent years. He undertook a deep analysis of hegemonic masculinity, which he called "masculine domination". In his study, Bourdieu confirms that masculine domination is a historical concept accepted from the beginning of society through body differentiation. This differentiation has implied a normalisation of the male condition, and consequently a disfigurement of the female condition. Within increasingly complex societies the role of women has been translated to the domestic economy. Today this androcentric perspective highlighted by Bourdieu is reproduced in social structures. The state, the church and schools are responsible for this cultural reproduction. In fact, people are not removed from this reproduction, therefore social structures reproduce sexuality via the unconscious.

The other approach to masculinity studies focuses on "new masculinities". Seidler (1994) is one of the main recognised authors in this field. He considers negative conduct in men to be connected to specific lifelong learning processes. Additionally, he argues that the male identity can have different characteristics: Masculinity was no longer expected to be one thing; it could be many things, for it could now allow for diversity. (Seidler, 1994, p. 116). David Gilmore (1991) has produced work which is closely connected to the aforementioned analysis, as he studies different masculinity models and male cultural patterns. Masculinity models and manhood are conditioned by factors that are connected to culture. At the same time culture is created by the social context. Therefore his theory is based on the idea that in a hostile

context, manhood should be constantly demonstrated. That is, manhood is directly linked to social context, and not exclusively to mental projections or psychological fantasies.

On the other hand, Kimmel (2000) moving along the same lines as Gilmore, points out that there are different cultural variables that allow different masculinity models to exist. Some of these variables are: age and country of origin. Kimmel affirms that these are key elements in the configuration of male identity. From the perspective of "new masculinities" a critique of heterosexualism is also highlighted. Approaches from a homosexual or transsexual perspective demonstrate the need to include new sexual identities into daily life, assuming that all kinds of sexual identity should be respected and valued. Apart from the contributions of homosexuality to the interpretation of masculinity, there are other contributions from men's groups that promote alternative male models. Therefore, it is possible to come across profeminist men, and cultural associations which men are involved in, etc.

Finally, regarding communicative acts and their connection to masculinities we would like to underline the studies carried out by Klein (2006), Stobbe (2005) and Korobov & Thorne (2006). Stobbe (2006) made a significant contribution through research carried out in two Argentinean companies. Within this context she worked using questionnaires, interviews and observations, and se concluded that the discourse of "hegemonic masculinity" is based on images of power and the abuse of women. Social pressure drives men to reproduce communicative acts which perpetuate "hegemonic masculinity" values. There are gender stereotypes which reproduce discourses asserting that men are better leaders than women. The study states that men and women internalize this discourse and make the reproduction of this model possible.

Methodology

The Critical Communicative Methodology (CCM) has its origins in contemporary social theory. Authors such as Beck, Searle, Chomsky and specifically Habermas' communicative action theory provide scientific knowledge for this methodology. The main principle of the CCM is that all subjects are capable of language and communication, and for this reason the interpretative hierarchy of knowledge is eliminated. This methodology has been recognised by the European Commission like the best methodological approach to analyse vulnerable groups and combat inequalities[1], in fact it has been used in several projects of the European Framework Programme[2]

Based on the idea that social construction is supported by communication, the CCM is successful because it approaches reality using communication and common understanding as a basis. Both elements facilitate the comprehension of reality. The CCM states that social situations depend on meanings constructed through social interactions, and therefore reality does not exist independently of the subjects who experience it (Gómez et al. 2011, p. 236). We define our methodological strategy by taking these premises into account.

The CCM aims to transform social contexts through communicative action. Moreover the researched subjects are not treated like research objects, in the CCM they are egalitarian participants in the research process. Likewise the research team is focused on achieving an egalitarian dialogue which is able to transform reality. Therefore, the relationship between both (researched subjects and researchers) is based on egalitarian dialogue and intersubjective reflection. This procedure contributes to breaking the epistemological gap because egalitarian dialogue is established between both parties.

Another characteristic of this methodology is the creation of an advisory council. This council helps the research team to carry out an "Ad Hoc" analysis of the research results. The presented research project has an advisory council containing people directly linked to masculinity issues in the previously described social areas. They include a male teacher from secondary education, a male working in a company, a woman involved in a social movement against gender violence, a teenager, and a young woman involved in women's associations.

As we mentioned in the introduction, two case studies were carried out in the area of employment: one focused on the field of business (a SME) and another on a healthcare centre. We interviewed both women and men. In both cases qualitative tools were used in accordance with the critical communicative orientation. The techniques used out in the employment area were: two daily life stories with men and two with women working in a SME, two daily life stories with men and two with women working in a healthcare institution, two communicative focus groups with men in both places, two communicative focus groups with women and two mixed communicative focus groups. Two communicative observations were also carried out for each case study.

Simultaneously, one in depth interview with a person in charge of a syndicate specializing in the subject of gender equality and one interview with a person in charge of public administration in the department of work in the area of gender equality were undertaken.

In the area of education two case studies were carried out, one in a vocational school and another one in an Adult education centre. It has interviewed both men and women. The techniques used have been: eight daily life histories (four with boys and four with girls), six communicative focus groups (two men's, two women's and two mixed ones) and four communicative observations

Results

In this section, we present some of the preliminary results of the analysis carried out in the SME case study and in the case study developed in the education area (Adult education centre and Vocational School). In accordance with the orientation of CCM, on the one hand we identified the exclusionary elements which favour the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, and on the other hand, we collected some data on the transformative elements which promote egalitarian and attractive masculinities. Both elements are observed from the perspective of communicative acts, that is, we focus on verbal, non-verbal language and interaction which influences the social construction of masculinity.

Regarding the exclusionary elements, it was corroborated that hegemonic masculinity still persists in the work-place. In our analysis we identified how this model is reproduced through communicative acts of power which simultaneously create power relations. For instance, one of the women involved in the fieldwork explained the bad language and shouting that a male colleague used in their relationship.

> *It happened to me…My boss at that time, he was not my boss, if my bosses were not in the office he would act like them, and if he needed something I would help him. Well, he shouted at me from his office, far away from where I was sitting.* (Female interviewee. SME).

In companies, those men who follow hegemonic masculinity use their power to despise women or take advantage of their position to start affective and sexual relationships. At the same time, the women who maintain these relationships are looked down on by other women and they start to say bad things about them.

> *I worked in a company and there was a man like that, I don't know if he was considered to be attractive or not, but he was arrogant with one of the female employees of course, he flirted and so on. (…). In the beginning, friends and colleagues started to say bad things about her, but she was promoted, and people said bad things about both of them, thinking that he was despicable and that she was also, because of her interest in climbing (the ladder) in that way.* (Male interviewee. SME).

On the other hand, we would like to highlight the reactions of some women when faced with attitudes linked to hegemonic masculinity. They reject male shouting and stand up to men who act in this way. Sometimes, women oppose these practices – based on power relations- that men tend to use, such as closing the door when there is a meeting between the two.

> *He is the same person who shouted at me and the next day he shouted at me again, and at that moment I said:" You know what? You will not shout at me again. If you need something you can phone me".* (Female interviewee. SME).

> *And I said to him "What do you need? You can send me an email, but don't shout at me again!". "But S., come into my office and close the door, I have to talk to you!" And I said "I am going to come into your office but I will not close the door".* (Female interviewee. SME).

Concerning transformative elements, we found there are some dialogic communicative acts that promote egalitarian and attractive masculinities. Thus, it is possible to note that women appreciate men who use verbal and non-verbal language based on egalitarian dialogue. Additionally, if men have a self-confident attitude women start to feel attracted to them, that is, attractiveness and kindness are linked together in these men.

> *He was a nice person with me, that is, (he would say) "Susana something…" and every day that he could (he would say) "Come here I am going to show you this", and he trained me to do things in his department. If my bosses were not in the office, then he would say to me (…) "If you want to learn, go on!" (…) And I thought he was handsome. When my bosses told me that we must go to another office because we were going to have a new office….It was then that you said ok, if I don't need to stay here with that man who despises me, but I can stay with the one who is very nice, who I feel does his work well, I feel he is   "terrific". I never saw him despise people.* (Female interviewee. SME).

Men who have leadership skills become more attractive to their colleagues, especially women. These men are perfectly aware of how to establish an emotional link with them.

He is skilfully able to establish emotional links with female workers, obviously leaders attract others and he should attract them, and this aspect is part of their characteristics. The relationship he maintains with women is professional but it is personal as well; he has the ability to create emotions of attraction. (Male interviewee. SME).

  Additionally men who instead of shouting at women use other kinds of skills in the work-place, who are decisive in difficult situations, are perceived differently by women. Women start to see them as men they can feel attracted to.

R: No, when I started the job I thought "This man is very intelligent, he is "terrific", he provides solutions, and he is not awful" , then, at that moment, I hadn't looked at him as a man, (but) I kept seeing him and I started to think: " He is not awful", he has wonderful eyes.
Q: Well, we are also asking about attractiveness.
R: Of course, then he seemed handsome to me. Ok! I said; I don't know…I think there is something (that makes me) believe, he can like me. (Female interviewee. SME)

   In the education area, as we formerly mentioned, it was no previous findings on how verbal and non verbal language and the whole social context could promote new masculinities from the attraction point of view. In the present article it has been presented some results that make an innovative contribution regarding this reality. From the interviewed words a change of attitude is foreseen facing the equality based masculinities. In the way that many boys are struggling in this new model. It is about boys who dialogue more quietly and tranquil with the girls. They are valued for being empathetic and dialogue based. On the other hand and according to some interviewees they are newly valued but not enough, thus they do not expect sufficient attractiveness for the girls in terms to start an affective relation.

Even though, it is still persisting exclusionary elements which reproduce the hegemonic masculinity in the school context. In the case studies we have been able to identify verbal and non verbal acts and interactions which promote this model but others which arise the alternative egalitarian one as well. As an example of criticizing the hegemonic model we may consider the following comment identifying and condemning the homosexual collective.

> *In the High School, when I was younger, the comment, you know what, faggot, is the typical one which everyone does at class, I mean.* (Male interviewee. Adult Education Centre)

In some occasions egalitarian masculinities are discriminated for being far from the hegemonic model, sometimes virtually associated to homosexuality. These kinds of remarks don't provoke attractiveness to such boys but exclusion and invisibility.

> *Then you see they call him "faggot" it take away points from him, you see something else, they add, they subtract. Is like everything.* (Male interviewee. Adult Education Centre)

Another observed aspect which is reproduced within the hegemonic model is the double standards. In this sense the women and girls from the vocational school and the adult education centre argued that the "good boy" talking does not arises any interest, talking of him from an ethics language perspective (Flecha, 2008; Rios & Christou, 2010) which subtracts all the attractiveness.

> *What a good boy, just that. Yes because you could see him as a good, quiet, and so and so. The typical good one, what a nice boy.* (Female interviewee. Vocational school)

About positive communicative acts which foster egalitarian masculinities are those related to security which is an attribute that generates attractiveness among girls and boys. That was the comment of a young participant in a focus group from the Vocational school:

He has to be someone who stands out, who claims your attention, not just a stereotype but a... Yes, somebody who is self-confident and who inspires, so that, confidence and security. (Boys' Communicative Focus group, Vocational school)

When boys and men act like that their context start valuing them very positively. They are in the conversations linked to desire and therefore they are given attractiveness.

Do you remember how did they talk about you? What did they say? What remarks made on you?
Well you are awesome, you laugh a lot, and so on. But not because I earned by laughing at someone, not insulting anybody. I tell you it has been what you commented just before, my experiences tell me that is being a forwarded man, open minded, make people laugh in a sane sense, of course, but not laughing at anybody, nor ridicule nobody. (Boys' Communicative Focus group, Vocational school)

Another transformative element identified in the results is the importance of the conversations among girls to generate attractiveness through those egalitarian boys. This kind of conversations could determine if these girls start some relations with this kind of guy.

Because that happens, may be you are not really up to it, with a boy you know there is some feeling and so on... and then somebody convinces you."Try it, because you don't know him". And then it happens, and the timid boy we were talking about from whom we said at the very first moment he is not attractive to me, you notice he wants to get to know you and   someone encourages you. Someone encourages you and you decide". (Girls' Communicative Focus Group, Vocational School).

Women get aware of the importance of such conversations and from the power they could get to stress an image of the egalitarian boys and give them their attractiveness. This can contribute to overcome the double standards just seen before.

> *May be this kind of men we were talking about are just peer to peer with women... is like a friend, then what you can say about him to the friends, the way you can talk about him, and the way you talk directly to him, that is different. It is not the same because is just peer to peer on equal status in that relation.* (Mixed Communicative Discussion Group. Adult education centre)

Conclusions

Research on masculinity has obtained several achievements that have involved the inclusion of the male perspective into gender policies. It has provided deeper knowledge of the basis of social problems such as chauvinist violence, harassment in the work-place, criminality, school failure, peer to peer violence and bullying. At the same time these studies have also contributed to accumulate knowledge about how men are questioning hegemonic masculinity, how they are more strongly involved in family matters, how they are using their daily time, and how their sexuality is being defined, etc.

All these previously presented aspects are highly significant with regards to the continuation of research on masculinities, but there are still some elements pending which we need to look at more in depth in the field of employment, education and other related areas: What type of men are most successful? Which of them are considered most attractive? In what way do we talk about egalitarian boys/men? What kind of language do we use to describe them? Are egalitarian men described with desire or exclusively with respect?

Through the research we are carrying out we aim to try to answer to these questions. The final results that we get from the employment and education area will give us the opportunity to fill in a gap in masculinity studies: the identification of those communicative acts which encourage

egalitarian masculinity in the work-place, and the school or learning centre, discovering the language which allows equality and respect to be linked to desire and passion. Our objective is to go beyond previous findings in masculinity studies. On the one hand we want to create proposals from children, boys and men who are far removed from hegemonic masculinity to be promoted. It is important to create referents, to study the speech of ethics and that one of desire joining both to create a coherent and successful discourse and practice to eradicate problems caused by hegemonic masculinity in the school and in the work-place. We have showed some evidences on this line in the present article. On the other hand, we will make several proposals and orientations that will contribute to eradicate problems such as violence against women, sexual harassment in the work-place and the academic centre, and discrimination due to gender or sexual orientation.

Notes

1. Conclusions on the Conference: Science against Poverty, 8-9th April 2010. La Granja. Spain. Retrieved from:

http://www.scienceagainstpoverty.com/Resources/documentos/resultados/Conclusions_230610.pdf

2. http://creaub.info/includ-ed

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