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# Hegemonic Masculinity: Its Impacts on Men's Lives and Gender Relations in Britain (1990-2020)

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**HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY : ITS  
IMPACTS ON MEN'S LIVES AND  
GENDER RELATIONS IN POST-  
FEMINISM BRITAIN (1990-2020)**

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Mémoire de Master 2

Sous la direction de  
Florence Pellegrin, Maître de conférences

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*“Generally I find men a lot more concerned with limiting the freedoms of women than exercising personal freedom for themselves.”*

*Sally Rooney*

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

**MLM:** Men's Liberation Movement, a man-only organisation founded in the 1970s as a retort to the WLM, fighting to protect men's social rights and masculinity.

**NUWSS:** National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, also known as the suffragists, a feminist organisation founded in 1897, fighting for women's right to vote in the United Kingdom through petitions, public meetings, and pamphlets.

**WLM:** Women's Liberation Movement, a British feminist organisation mostly active during the 1970s, fighting to free women from male oppression.

**WSPU:** Women's Social and Political Union, a women-only feminist organisation fighting for women's right to vote in the United Kingdom from 1903 to 1918.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves.”*

*Mary Wollstonecraft*

In 1792, protofeminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft declared that women should be able to think for themselves, make their own decisions, and in short have control of their lives. Her statement was met with concern and hostility. Men in particular wondered how would women’s emancipation impact the future of Britain? What would be the uses for a woman to get married if she did not need the approval of her husband to sue, own lands, or inherit? Moreover, would women stop at that? What if they decided to take over men’s social status and impose their power over them? Despite Wollstonecraft’s attempt to reassure them that the emancipation of women would not dictate or negatively impact men’s lives, this concern is still present among men in contemporary Britain.

Before we delve deeper into this, let’s first focus on the term ‘women emancipation.’ Historian Estelle Freedman explains that the term changed into the single word ‘feminism’ in the nineteenth century. The word was coined in France (*féminisme*) and is a combination of the French word *femme* (woman) and the suffix *-isme*, which refers to a political ideology (3). Thereupon, historian Harold Smith asserts that feminism is “an ideology and a reform movement seeking to improve the status of women” (1). To this definition Freedman adds, “Feminism is a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth. Because most societies privilege men as a group, social movements are necessary to achieve equality between men and women” (7). Simply put, feminism refers to the fight for women to be considered equal to men in every aspect of their lives, be it political, social, economic or sexual.

Throughout British history, feminists have challenged discrimination against women to acquire gender equality. In the nineteenth century, figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Taylor fought for women’s rights to education and divorce. In the early twentieth century, the Suffragettes demanded votes for women.

In the 1960s, the birth control pill was introduced in the United Kingdom and the Abortion Act was passed, granting women control over their uterus. In 2004, the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act was passed, legally protecting domestic abuse victims. Most recently in 2020, Scotland made period products (such as pads and tampons) free and accessible in public buildings, erasing stigmas against female menstruation. Up to this day, feminists are still fighting to eradicate female oppression. On this point, Smith explains, “Feminists share a belief that women have been, and continue to be, oppressed because of their sex” (1). However, professor of philosophy David Benatar disagrees with this statement.

According to Benatar, although women do suffer from sexism,<sup>1</sup> men are more likely to be discriminated against in modern societies because of their gender. He argues that “across the world men are more likely to be conscripted into the military, be victims of violence, lose custody of their children, and take their own lives.” Comparing how differently men and women are treated, Benatar asserts, “When women are under-represented as CEOs of companies that is deemed discrimination. But when boys are falling behind at school, when 90% of people in prison are male, there’s never any thought given to whether men are discriminated against” [*BBC News*].

This statement presses a lot of questions. For centuries, men have benefited from privileges that women were deprived from, hence the need for feminism. According to feminist writer Emma Jane, even in contemporary Britain “men continue to hold a disproportionate share of the political, economic, and social power” (43). So why do men feel oppressed and unheard despite holding such power? If we were to agree with Benatar’s argument, could we assert that men are more prone to oppression in a post-feminist world? And if so, should we blame feminism for its role in male discrimination in today’s British society? According to Aoirthoir An Broc, founder of the International Association of Masculinists, the answer to these questions is yes [*BBC News*].

Sociologist Melissa Blais defines masculinism as an ideology that believes that “women, women’s values in general and feminists in particular, dominate men and contemporary society at large” (23). In other words, to masculinists, men are victims of women and feminists’ oppression. According to them, what was once a

<sup>1</sup>The *Merriam Webster* dictionary defines ‘sexism’ as a “prejudice or discrimination based on sex.” [retrieved on June 19, 2021]

world ruled by men has become a women's world. Blais adds that masculinists aspire "to rally in defence of a masculine identity that has been spurned" (23). According to An Broc, the negative portrayal of men by feminism is the cause of this 'identity crisis.' He argues that "there's an assumption that women are always innocent and men the aggressor" [*BBC News*]. Therapist Joe Kort adds to this argument that many men are victims of subtle insults that are too often brushed aside.

Kort confesses having personally come across misandrist<sup>2</sup> comments such as "Men only think with their dicks" (implying that men are so obsessed with sex that they are incapable of using their brain to think rationally), "A man wouldn't understand" (implying that men lack empathy and emotional intelligence), and "Really? You don't like sports?" (implying that every man should be interested in sports otherwise there is something 'wrong' with them). Kort denounces the double standard<sup>3</sup> between men and women when it comes to such hateful comments. He asserts, "I've even heard women say things like, 'Balls are gross. I hate them.' If a woman overheard men talking about vaginas being dirty and disgusting, she'd surely think this was misogyny and micro-aggression, but why not the other way around?" [*Psychology Today*].

As a counter-argument, feminist writer Emma Jane states that women have been victims of misogyny<sup>4</sup> for centuries, and the situation has been getting worse in the age of the internet. She states, "If you're not being called ugly, fat, and slutty on the internet, odds are you're a man. Or a woman pretending to be a man" (16). Jane recalls having been called a "filthy fucking whore" and a "dumb bitch" after voicing her opinion online (2). These hateful comments follow women in their real life, too. In its 2018 report, the British children charity *Plan International UK* revealed that two out of three girls in the United Kingdom have been victims of street harassment before they reach the age of eighteen. Sixteen-year-old Ambrin from London said, "Some of my friends are being catcalled on a daily or weekly

<sup>2</sup>The *Merriam Webster* dictionary defines 'misandry' as a "hatred of men." [retrieved on June 19, 2021]

<sup>3</sup>The *Merriam Webster* dictionary defines 'double standard' as "a set of principles that applies differently and usually more rigorously to one group of people or circumstances than to another." [retrieved on June 19, 2021]

<sup>4</sup>The *Merriam Webster* dictionary defines 'misogyny' as a "hatred of, aversion to, or prejudice against women." [retrieved on June 19, 2021]

basis.” Because of this unwanted attention, French feminist writer Pauline Harmange published a book in 2020 that caused an outrage in her home country for its daring title, *Moi les hommes, je les déteste* (“I Hate Men”). Harmange admitted, “I am married to a man, who is great and really supports my writing. But in general I mistrust men I don’t know (...) I can state for a fact that the majority of aggressors are men.” When accused of misandry, Harmange defended her book, saying, “What if women have good reasons to detest men? What if anger towards men is in fact a joyful and emancipating path when it is allowed to express itself?” [*The Guardian*].

Based on the previous statements, we notice some conflicts between men and women. Women (in this case, feminists) seem to think that they have been oppressed by men for far too long, and it is time for them to fight back. If we look back in time, women’s voices have always been silenced by men, and even in contemporary Britain, they often get insulted for expressing their opinion (as stated by Jane). As a result, some feminists seem to think that fighting misogyny with misandry is a form of liberation. Women get catcalled in the street, they accuse men of ‘thinking with their dicks.’ Women get accused of being ‘too emotional,’ they conclude that men cannot understand their struggles. According to Aoirthoir An Broc, the problem lies in the fact that when a woman gets assaulted by a man, in the majority of cases she is guaranteed to be protected by feminism, and therefore by society at large. Men, however, do not benefit from this privilege. An Broc points out that up until 2012, there was no domestic violence shelter in the United States for male victims, whereas the country has been offering shelters for female victims since the 1960s [*BBC News*].

Pondering on the conflict between men and women, we observe that some women are using feminism as a shield to fight back misogyny with misandry. On the other hand, some men accuse feminism of portraying them as abusive, and by doing so, causing male discrimination. Looking closer into this matter, we notice that feminism seems to be the common factor in these arguments. Therefore, should we suggest that feminism is damaging the relationship between men and women? Is feminism the cause of the gender conflict?

Before we delve deeper into these questions, we should first define ‘gender.’ According to sociologist Candace West, while sex refers to something that individuals “are” by biological criteria (male, female), gender refers to something

that individuals “do” by social and cultural demands (masculine, feminine) (127). West explains that gender is “constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means” (125). For instance, social ‘norms’ decide that masculine boys should wear blue, while feminine girls should wear pink. In doing so, these boys and girls perform their gender. The term ‘performance’ entails that gender is a role, something meant to be displayed. Thereupon, sociologist Amy Blackstone asserts, “Gender roles are based on the different expectations that individuals, groups, and societies have of individuals based on their sex and based on each society’s values and beliefs about gender” (335). In other words, gender roles refer to behaviours one has to display, depending on their sex, in order to fit in. These roles change depending on cultures, societies, and time periods. According to Blackstone, in Western societies (such as the United Kingdom) traditional gender roles expect men to work and provide for their family, while women are expected to stay home and care for their children (337).

Gender roles are the roles that men and women are expected to occupy based on their sex. Traditionally, many Western societies have believed that women are more nurturing than men. Therefore, the traditional view of the feminine gender role prescribes that women should behave in ways that are nurturing (...) Men, on the other hand, are presumed by traditional views of gender roles to be leaders. The traditional view of the masculine gender role, therefore, suggests that men should be the heads of their households by providing financially for the family and making important family decisions. (Blackstone 337)

As we can see, gender roles expect men to assume a dominant position not only in their family, but also in society. On the other hand, women are expected to be submissive and assume a subordinate position to men. These new findings bring us back to Blais’s definition of masculinism. According to Blais, masculinists believe that feminism has “spurned” their masculine identity. If by masculine identity they mean their traditional gender role, then it could be argued that feminism has indeed challenged their masculinity. Could this explain the presumed conflict between men and women? Has feminism reversed the gender roles by placing women in a dominant position and relegating men to a subordinate place? Could this be the reason for male alleged discrimination in today’s British society? Professor of philosophy Tom Digby has a different opinion on this matter. According to him, feminism is not to blame for men’s disadvantageous position. Instead, men should blame their fellow men (252). Digby argues:

It is primarily men who disadvantage men. It is almost entirely men, historically and in the present, who design and implement policies that are likely to lead to war, who decide that it will be men who will fight the war, who subject soldiers to demeaning hazing (including those crewcuts), and who send men off to do battle. It is primarily men who get aggressive and violent with men, and when men get violent with men, it is more likely to result in serious injury or death than when women are violent with men. It is primarily men who insist on saving the women and children first. Most judges who give custody of children to women are men (...) It is overwhelmingly men who not only discriminate against other men who are gay, but also intimidate, assault, and kill them. (Digby 252-3)

In short, Digby argues that men's privileged position in society entails that they are the ones deciding what should and should not be considered socially acceptable. Moreover, men pass the majority of laws and they are the primary leaders of the global economy. Thus, according to Digby, men can only blame themselves if the male gender role puts too much pressure on their lives. On this point, sociologist R W Connell clarifies that this particular male gender role is based on a model of masculinity that is unattainable, yet considered the 'norm' to men: hegemonic masculinity.

According to Connell, the term hegemonic masculinity was coined in 1983, in Australia, by a high school field study of social inequality, and refers to a gender role that allows the domination of men over women to continue (*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* 832).

Hegemonic masculinity [is] distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity [is] not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it [is] certainly normative. It embodie[s] the currently most honored way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legiti[mizes] the global subordination of women to men. (*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* 832)

In other words, hegemonic masculinity represents an ideal that men aspire to be. Because it is a gender role, the hegemonic model might change depending on its society, culture and time period. Hegemonic masculine men, although extremely rare, are considered the 'norm' and display character traits praised by their society. But what are these traits? According to professor of psychology Alice Cheng, in Western contemporary societies, hegemonic masculine men are required to present the following character traits:

striving to win at all costs (winning), sexual prowess (being a playboy), controlling one's emotions (emotional control), engaging in risk-taking behaviors (risk-taking), inclination

towards physical aggression (violence), asserting influence over situations (dominance), proclivity towards independence (self-reliance), regarding work as the main priority in life (primacy of work), controlling women (power over women), aversion to being perceived by others as being gay (heterosexual presentation), and the desire to be important in society (pursuit of status). (Cheng 2)

Sociologist Sam de Boise adds to this description that only a certain group of men have historically benefited from hegemonic masculine privileges; “white, heterosexual, middle-class, men in Western societies” (10). According to De Boise, hegemonic masculinity has helped this group of men maintain their dominance not only over women, but also over other men (10). Thereupon, Connell explains that there is a “gender hierarchy among men,” with the ones displaying the most of hegemonic masculine traits being at the top and the ones displaying the least being relegated to the bottom (*Masculinities* 78). For instance, if hegemonic masculine ideals deem that men should be muscular, obese men will be placed at the bottom of the male gender hierarchy, while bulky men will be at the top. Going back to An Broc and masculinists’ arguments, we wonder if what really causes male discrimination in contemporary Britain is the pressure of performing hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, Connell asserts that in the context of hegemonic masculinity “terror is used as a means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions, for example, in heterosexual violence against gay men” (*Masculinities* 83). This statement entails that men who do not perform hegemonic masculinity correctly risk being rejected by their peers. This leads us to wonder, instead of feminism, could hegemonic masculinity be the reason why men are feeling discriminated against?

The purpose of this master’s thesis is to answer these questions. Feminism and hegemonic masculinity will be the main focal points of our study. More particularly, we are going to ask; how do feminism and hegemonic masculinity affect gender relations and men’s lives in contemporary Britain? The implication here is that gender discord, male discrimination and the reasons why all of these came to happen are linked. Therefore, we cannot discuss gender discord without discussing male discrimination. However, we should not vilify feminism in order to praise hegemonic masculinity, nor should we praise feminism and denigrate men’s struggles. This thesis hopes to take a deeper look at British men’s pressure and struggles to perform masculinity in contemporary Britain without blaming women for their troubles. To reach this goal, we will base our reflection on qualitative

inquiries and we will analyse our research topic through social phenomena and individuals' behaviour. Our analysis will be divided into three parts.

To begin with, we shall examine the gender dynamics in order to understand why some men believe that feminism is threatening masculinity. Firstly, we will study the concept of patriarchy to understand how men have resumed their dominance over women for centuries. Secondly, we will focus on feminism and why women feel entitled to retaliate against men's oppression. And finally, we will see how feminism opened the floodgates to men's studies, which in turn led to the creation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

This will lead us to our second part, in which we will argue that performing masculinity damages not only gender relations, but also relations within the male gender. First, we will focus on men's violence towards women, more precisely on domestic abuse. Then we will focus on the violence of men towards men. In this part, we will try to better understand the reason behind men's violence and why it is a necessity for them to perform their gender role.

Last but not least, we will centre our third part around men's struggles to perform masculinity in contemporary Britain. First, we will argue that hegemonic masculinity controls men's sexual lives. More precisely, we will see how important being potent, sexually active, and heterosexual is to hegemonic masculine men. Then we will focus on the effects of hegemonic masculinity on men's mental health. We will argue that men are pressured to repress their emotions in order to appear more masculine. We will see that constantly erasing feelings can lead to alcoholism, depression, and in worse cases, suicide.

## 1 - PART ONE: GENDER CONFLICT: PATRIARCHY, FEMINISM AND HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

*“Patriarchy also defines the identity of men. It is as much the enforced script of proper masculinity — how to be a real man — as it is that of proper femininity.”*

*Clementine Ford*

Archaeologist Peter McAllister writes, “masculinity is in crisis” [*Salon*]. It seems that since the emergence of feminism, men have been deprived of their role as the provider and the authority figure of the family. Consequently, there seems to be some confusion about what men’s new role in society is supposed to be in a post-feminist world. As McAllister explains, “Men are really searching for a role in modern society; the things we used to do aren’t in much demand anymore, and it seems we’re having a little trouble finding a way to establish ourselves” [*Salon*]. To support this argument, ecologist Jack Myers provides some data. According to Myers, in 2016 “a growing percentage of young men [were] being out-earned by young women, as women capture[d] 60% of the higher education degrees required for success in today’s economy” [*Time*].

Professor of political science Francis Dupuis-Deri counters that the masculinity crisis is a “rhetoric” and “not a fact” [*France 24*]. Dupuis-Deri points out that men are still privileged compared to women in today’s society. For example, according to the *European Commission*, in 2018 “women earn[ed] 14.1% on average less per hour than men.” Dupuis-Deri argues that the discourse of a “so-called” masculinity crisis exists because men need to blame someone for their loss of power, and in this case they choose to blame feminism. As Dupuis-Deri explains, “men have claimed to be suffering from a crisis because of women, because of feminists, and because of the feminization of society.” He goes further and states that men believe that “when women are not staying in their place, it’s outrageous, it’s scandalous [because] we are not having what we are entitled to have as men” [*France 24*].

Despite having different opinions on the masculinity crisis, both experts

assert that women and feminism play a part in this matter. Supposedly because of feminism, men have lost their privileged place in society and are resenting women for that. This presses the questions; is masculinity threatened by feminism in contemporary Britain? If so, how did this come to happen? What are the roles that men feel deprived from? And what is this place they feel entitled to have? In short, how did feminism trigger a gender conflict? We are going to answer these questions in this first part. Firstly, we will take a look at the concept of patriarchy to understand how men have dominated women throughout British history. Secondly, we will focus on British feminism and how women have retaliated against men's oppression. And finally, we will see how feminism opened the floodgates to gender studies, more specifically men's studies, which in turn led to the creation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

## 1.1 - PATRIARCHY AND MALE DOMINATION

Historian and professor of gender studies Florence Binard asserts that drawing a distinction between sex and gender is “crucial to the development of feminism” (6). Indeed, theorising gender roles has permitted the erasure of false beliefs that claimed that women are ‘naturally’ inferior to men. As Binard states, “Women became aware that their subordinate position to men was not determined by so-called natural traits but mostly due to conditioning through unequal social structures” (6).

Thus, to understand gender conflict, we shall first tackle the issue at its root. We will start by studying the concepts of gender and sex. Then we will focus on gender roles and how they led to a gender division. Digging deeper into the problem of gender division, we will finish this first part by analysing the concept of patriarchy and how it led to gender inequalities.

### 1.1.1 - Distinguishing Gender from Sex

In its definition of ‘gender’ and ‘sex,’ the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary indicates that the two words were interchangeable for a long time. If we were to trace the history of the semantics, up until the fourteenth century, ‘gender’ only defined a “grammatical subclass” of nouns (i.e. masculine, feminine, or neuter nouns). In the fifteenth century, however, the meaning “sex” was added to its definition, “referring to either of the two primary biological forms of a species.” It was not until the twentieth century that the words ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ acquired separate definitions.

Gender studies professor Laure Bereni agrees with the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary in her definition of the word ‘sex.’ To Bereni ‘sex’ refers to one’s genital, for instance penis for men and vagina for women. This also covers one’s gonad (testes or ovaries), one’s hormones (testosterones or estrogens) and one’s DNA (sex chromosome, such as XY for men and XX for women) (24). To this definition, the United Kingdom’s *Office for National Statistics* adds that ‘sex’ is “the biological

aspects of an individual determined by their anatomy.” This means that a baby born with a penis will biologically be male. However, gender is described as “a social construction relating to behaviours and attributes based on labels of masculinity and femininity.” Thus, going back to the example of the baby, if this baby develops behaviours viewed as masculine, he will be identified as a boy.

To better explain the difference between sex and gender, Thierry Hoquet, philosophy of science lecturer at the University of Nanterre (France), refers to the example of the children’s book *Barbapapa* (11-12). Hoquet argues that at first glance there is no way to tell apart male Barbapapas from female Barbapapas. Indeed, they don’t have sexual organs. Yet children can easily distinguish the males from the females in this family of blob-like creatures. How is that? Well, Hoquet points out the physical differences between the characters. If we look closely, we notice that male Barbapapas’ bodies are round, while female Barbapapas’ bodies are slender and curvier. Female Barbapapas also wear flower crowns, something male Barbapapas are deprived of. The sons and the daughters Barbapapas have specific hobbies. For example, Barbabravo, often represented with his dumbbells, is an avid sports fan, whereas Barbabelle, never seen without her mirror, loves fashion and taking care of her appearance (see annex, figure 1, page 128).

By using this example, Hoquet shows that what children learn from reading the *Barbapapa* books is not that boys have penises and girls have vaginas. Children are taught that girls like flowers and makeup, whereas boys like physical activities (11-12). We could also argue that the names of the characters are very specific and refer to their genders. It seems that in the *Barbapapa* universe, boys should be praised for their physical prowess (*Barbabravo*), while girls’ most important character trait is to be beautiful (*Barbabelle*). By designing these characters in such a way, authors Annette Tison and Talus Taylor have taught children from a very young age about genders, even before their audience could grasp the difference between men’s and women’s sexual organs.

Regarding sexual organs, sociologist Christine Delphy argues that it is gender that gives meaning to sex, and not the other way around. According to Delphy, society shapes boys’ and girls’ lives depending on their sexual organs. Society dictates what is suitable for a girl to say and what is shocking, what is allowed for a boy to do and what is forbidden (231). This concept is also known as

gender roles; a role dictated by society depending on one's sex that one has to perform in order to fit in (Fawcner 196). As such, just as children conclude that Barbabelle likes flowers and makeup, therefore she is a girl, and Barbabravo is muscular and likes sports, therefore he is a boy, these gender roles define their sexes. Delphy argues that when we compare sex to gender, we are not comparing a biological concept to a social concept, but we are comparing two concepts created by society (231). Building on Delphy's argument, we should look deeper into the concept of gender roles in order to understand better why women felt the need to emancipate themselves from men.

### 1.1.2 - Gender Roles and Gender Division

According to anthropologist Luc Brisson, ancient Greek civilisations believed that men lived in the *polis* ("city") whereas women lived in the *oikos* ("house") (4). The Greek put a lot of importance on the human body, and as a consequence women were defined by their abilities to bring children into the world. Because children have to be weaned and educated before becoming dependent members of society, women were to stay in the *oikos* (which Brisson defines as the "private sphere") to raise their children (5). Contrariwise, males' bodies were considered stronger and more muscular than females. Thus, men were in charge of manual labour and of protecting the city. As such, men spent the majority of their time outside in the *polis*, which Brisson refers to as the "public sphere" (5).

Centuries later, we find the same concept of public and private spheres in the Victorian era. As professor of lifewriting Kathryn Hughes explains, men and women were thought to live in separate spheres in the nineteenth century, as they would spend their day apart and only meet for breakfast and dinner. Just like ancient Greek women, a proper Victorian woman was to stay at home and attend to her domestic duties, while her husband was at work, fending for his family. Once again, we notice a gender division as women were to live in the private sphere while men lived in the public sphere. Hughes argues that these separate spheres were a result of the gender roles imposed on men and women in the nineteenth century [*British Library*].

Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem *The Princess* describes perfectly well the gender roles of the era. Written in 1847, his poem tells the story of a prince who, after a series of adventures, finds himself fighting a battle for his beloved princess, but he unfortunately loses against his rival and gets injured. Despite his defeat, the princess tends to him and they eventually get married. These following verses highlight the Victorian era's gender roles: "Man for the field and woman for the hearth. Man for the sword and for the needle she. Man with the head and woman with the heart. Man to command and woman to obey" (part V, stanza 25).

As we can see, according to Lord Tennyson men are made to work outdoors ("for the field") while women are to stay inside ("for the hearth"). Men are physically built to go to war and protect their countries ("for the sword") while women's 'nature' makes them virtuous and humble ("for the needle"). The "needle" also represents a first step towards the household chores the princess will eventually have to do once she marries the prince. We notice that Lord Tennyson associates women with "the needle," a smaller and less dangerous weapon than "the sword," whom he links to men. We can also argue that in this context "the sword" is a metaphor for the phallus while "the needle" represents the vagina. If we go by this interpretation of the verse, there seems to be a gender hierarchy in which men are placed above women. Indeed, Lord Tennyson ends his verse by stating that men should "command" and women should "obey." Not only is there a gender division because of the vastly different gender roles men and women have to perform, but this separation has also led to a dynamic of power imbalance where men are considered superior to women.

In 1998, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu drew the same conclusion in his book *Masculine Domination* when analysing the differences between male's and female's bodies. If we look back at Lord Tennyson's verse about "the sword" and "the needle," Bourdieu asserts that the male's body is associated with the "upward movement (...) through erection or the upper position in the sexual act," contrary to the female's body which is associated with the downward movement. As such, Bourdieu remarks the following oppositions: "up/down, above/below, in front/behind, right/left, straight/curved (and twisted), dry/wet, spicy/bland, light/dark, outside (public)/inside (private)" (7) (see annex, figure 2, page 129). These descriptions of the male and female body highlight the hierarchy between men and women. Men, placed as a 'superior' being to women, are described as

being “above” and at the “front” (shielding women who are placed “below” and “behind” them). Moreover, men think “straight” and are enlighten, while women are “twisted” and in the “dark” (which implies that men think rationally, whereas women are too emotional).

Regarding Bourdieu’s diagram, we notice once again that men embody the external world (the public sphere), while women fall into the category of the internal world (the private sphere). According to Bourdieu, men have to “perform all the brief, dangerous and spectacular acts,” such as hunting, going to war, or governing countries (30). These tasks are viewed as valuable and praise-worthy. Men hunt (and risk their lives by doing so) to feed their families, they go to war to protect their countries, and they become politicians to ensure that peace is not disturbed. On the other hand, women “are assigned all domestic labour,” such as raising the children, cooking, or cleaning the house (30). These tasks are considered easy and dishonourable because they are supposed to come ‘naturally’ to women, as women are all supposed to have a maternal instinct. It is “natural” for females’ bodies to give birth, therefore they are ‘naturally’ urged by their maternal instinct to feed their children, and ensure that their families live in salubrious houses. Bourdieu points out that female gender roles are performed in secret (in the private sphere), thus no one can witness and truly appreciate them (30).

If we take a look at all the gender roles mentioned above, we can see glaring similarities between the male gender roles in ancient Greece, in the nineteenth century and in the late 1990s. Men are always seen as strong and dominant. Similarly, female gender role barely changes at all throughout these centuries. They are always kept at home and in charge of the children. Bourdieu argues that this is the result of a “habitus.” According to the sociologist, these roles are passed on from one generation to the next. Mothers teach their daughters that “it is vulgar to sit with the legs apart,” and that they should “smile, look down, accept interruptions,” etc. Thus, these girls are encouraged to shrink themselves in order to let boys rise above them, and eventually dominate them (28).

On this point, feminist writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argues in her 2013 speech entitled *We Should all Be Feminists* that girls are taught “to cater to fragile egos of men.” According to Adichie, girls are pressured to get married from a young age. The older they get, the more urgent this pressure becomes, as the end

goal is to have children. Thus, it is important that they get married before they reach the menopause. As a consequence, girls “see each other as competitors (...) for the attention of men.” Adichie argues that society encourages women to fit into the image of the ideal wife in order to appeal to men (i.e. being an obedient and maternal wife). On the other hand, ambitious and successful women are seen as a “threat” to men because they risk emasculating their partners. This begs the question, why would a woman’s success be a threat to men? And why would a man feel emasculated (deprived of his masculinity) because of a woman’s success? Well, if we take a look at the gender roles we studied above, Bourdieu argues that the superiority of men, and therefore the inferiority of women, is viewed as “natural” and “in the order of things” (8). Everything that goes against that would thus be considered unnatural. This concept is also known as ‘patriarchy’.

### 1.1.3 - Patriarchy and Gender Inequality

Professor of philosophy Aparna Dixit asserts that the word ‘patriarchy’ is composed of the Latin words *pater* (father) and *arch* (rule). Thus, a literal definition of patriarchy can be “rule of the father” (87). Thereupon, professor of politics Elizabeth Meehan argues that in the context of feminist theory, ‘patriarchy’ refers to the “domination of men, not only in the family but also collectively in public matters” (191). To this definition, historian Katie Barclay adds that patriarchy is “a term used to explain gender inequality.” According to her, patriarchy is a “social,” “political,” and “ideological” system which places men as the dominant ones and oppresses women (6). We have already reviewed the social aspect of patriarchy in the previous part. Indeed, gender roles created by society favour men and position women as their inferior. To go further into this study, we shall now analyse the political and ideological aspects of patriarchy. Let’s start with the ideological aspect.

Professor of political science Maurice Cranston defines ideology as a system “in which practical elements are as prominent as theoretical ones” which “aspires both to explain the world and to change it” [*Encyclopædia Britannica*]. In the context of patriarchy, ideology is a collection of ideas taken from sacred texts<sup>5</sup> to

<sup>5</sup>In this thesis, we will focus on Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hindouism.

explain the superiority of men over women. Could religion contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchy? According to columnist Nishat Amber, the answer is yes. She argues that if patriarchy is viewed as “the social normal” it is because “it derives its legitimacy from religion, the most important rule book pertaining to societal do’s-and-don’ts in any community” [*Feminism in India*].

Indeed, if we take a look at the sacred texts, we notice a gender inequality where men are constantly portrayed as superior to women. In the Bible<sup>6</sup> for example, God says to Moses, “set the value of a male between the ages of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels” but “for a female, set her value at thirty shekels” (Leviticus 27:3-4). The superior worth of men is not without significance. The biblical tale of creation makes it clear that God created Adam (men) “in his own image” (Genesis 1:27), whereas Eve (women) was created “from the rib [God] had taken out of [Adam]” (Genesis 2:22). If Adam was created to rule over the world (Genesis 1:26), the purpose of Eve’s creation was to serve Adam and make him less lonely (Genesis 2:18). Plus, it was Adam who named Eve and decided to call her “woman” (Genesis 2:23). Thus, from the beginning of time men were placed as the ruler, and women were perceived as their servants of lesser value. This justifies the gender inequality in Christianity.

Historian Estelle Freedman remarks that “most cultures imagine a male divine force as the origin of life” (19). On this point, Dr M H Maltz argues that God (“Elohim”) is always referred to as ‘He’ in the Torah (188). Freedman goes further and points out that in Christianity and Judaism, “a male symbol for God [is] the Father” (20). As we saw earlier in this study, in a patriarchal society the father represents the sole authority figure in his family. Because there is such proximity between God and men, it could be argued that men also share this almighty power. Maltz points out that the most crucial revelations in the Old Testament were addressed to men (“to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, and to Moses”) (190). It is as if women were considered less worthy of hearing or transmitting the divine words of God. Indeed, they are often excluded from exercising important religious roles.

Nishat Amber points out that “women priests in Hindu temples are extremely rare because women are ‘biologically’ unfit for the job as menstruating women are deemed impure and unfit for ‘sacred’ duties pertaining to God”

[*Feminism in India*]. About menstruation blood, religion teacher Fatima Ustazah states that Muslim women “cannot pray, cannot fast, cannot read the Quran” when they are on menstrual or post-partum periods because they are viewed as impure (Hanami 77). As a consequence, they are “physically segregated from society or customarily restricted from certain [religious] activities” (Hanami 78). Ustazah explains that the blood coming out of a woman’s body during her periods is considered filthy, and as one must be clean to pray, fast, or read the Quran, Muslim women who are on their period are exempted from these activities. She argues that “the fact that women stay away from Muslim duties for longer periods than men place them as a whole at a lower position than men in Islam.” Indeed, only men can be imams in Islam (Hanami 78). And as for Catholicism, Freedman explains that women are perceived as “closer to nature and less capable of spiritual growth than men,” therefore they do not have access to priesthood, which is exclusively reserved to men (20).

Women are not only placed at a lower position in their religious roles, but also in their everyday lives. Indeed, the Bible explicitly orders, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church” (Ephesians 5:22). Again, we see a comparison between God and men. Not only should a wife obey her husband, but she should also worship him as a god, the justification given that “man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Corinthians 11:8-9). In other words, God himself has ordered women to serve men, this power has been given to men ‘naturally’ by God, thus this is irrevocable. This is similar in Islam as the Quran states that, “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, as God has given some of them an advantage over others” (Surat 4, verse 34). Thus, it is a husband’s duty to look after and provide for his wife, which makes her under his responsibility. This will be the keystone of British marriage laws from the 11th to the nineteenth century.

The 1632 juridical text *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights, or the Lawes Provision for Woemen* itself justifies the submission of married women to their husbands by using the story of Eve’s original sin: “Eve because shee had helped to seduce her husband hath inflicted on her, an especiall bane” therefore “in sorrow shalt thou bring forth thy children, thy desires shall bee subject to thy

husband, and he shall rule over thee.”<sup>7</sup> On this point, historian Maureen Waller asserts that “the law of marriage in England (...) was essentially the Church’s law” (2). As a consequence, a woman legally became her husband’s property once married. Not only physically, but her whole personhood and her properties also became his.

In her 2018 podcast *Dig: A History Podcast* historian Marissa Rhodes explains that under the doctrine of coverture, married women’s legal status merged with their husbands’. Coverture was part of the many legal concepts that constituted English Common Law. The word is derived from the French epithet *femme couverte*, which means ‘covered woman’ in English. This is quite fitting considering that married women could not sue, be sued, divorce, or testify in a trial. If she wanted to sue somebody, her husband had to represent her in court (Rubenhold 106). Rhodes explains that because “husband and wife [were] one legal entity,” married women were sentenced to jail with their husbands if the latter had committed a crime. Now, if a wife was accused of a felony (the most common crimes she could be accused of being “treason, brothel-keeping, and murder”), her husband would have to be held “legally responsible for [her] crimes.” Waller explains that wives were viewed as “lunatics” and “idiots.” Therefore, they were not considered intellectually capable to know better (2). Plus, as Rhodes points out, it was the responsibility of husbands to educate their wives (i.e. to make sure that they followed the law). As we can see, married women were treated as children, and their husbands took the role of their fathers. On this point, Rhodes adds that if a wife killed her husband, she would find herself “guilty of treason as well as murder” because she had basically killed her protector and her educator.

Not only did women not have legal status, but they were also deprived of the right to inherit. As the 1632 juridical text *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights, or the Lawes Provision for Woemen* states, “because women lose the name of their ancestors, and by marriage usually they are transferred *in alienam familiam*, they participate seldome in heireship.” However, Waller explains that when they did inherit property, it would legally go to their husbands upon marriage (2). Because property was the main reason why one would get married in the eighteenth century,

<sup>7</sup> “Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate [the fruit].’ [...] To the woman [God] said, ‘I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.’” (Genesis 3:13-16)

the question of legitimacy was crucial. Therefore, “a man’s infidelity was winked at, but a wife’s severely condemned, since a man needed to be sure that his heir was his own” (3).

According to historian Hallie Rubenhold, if a wife found herself charged with infidelity, her life was basically ruined. Lady Seymour Fleming, for example, was the granddaughter of the Duke of Somerset and heiress to several lands. She married Sir Richard Worsley in 1775, but as we explained earlier, women were not legally allowed to hold property. Therefore, Seymour’s legacy went to her husband upon marriage. Years later, she fell in love with Captain George Bisset. As the law prohibited her to ask for divorce, Seymour eloped to London with George. In doing so, she had hoped that Richard would agree to divorce her and set her free to marry the man she truly loved. However, Richard decided to ask for a “Separation from Bed and Board” which would “strip his wife of any comfort and future happiness” (Rubenhold 79). As Rubenhold explains, Separation from Bed and Board was a legal separation that forbade either parties to remarry. This means that Richard “condemned his separated wife to a ruinous state of limbo where she remained neither respectably wedded nor free to remarry and salvage her damaged reputation” (56). Not only that, but the law stated that it was a husband’s right to keep his wife’s property even after their separation. Rubenhold explains that “in the eventuality of [a husband’s] death these possessions would be restored to [his separated wife] and she would be able to nominate another male trustee to safeguard her interests in place of him” (57). In the meantime, separated wives had to rely “on the favours of other men for a livelihood” (79). In other words, a noble lady who committed adultery could go from being part of the aristocracy to becoming a prostitute.

In 1735, *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives* was published anonymously to denounce the inequity of the law for married women. The author stated that wives lived in “the most deplorable” condition and were “the most exposed to oppression.” The author went as far as to say that “the estate of wives [was] more disadvantageous than slavery itself.” This might be considered overdramatic at first, but the comparison is fair considering that at this time wives could “be made prisoners for life (...) at will and pleasure” of their husbands, in addition to having “no property, neither in their own persons, children, or fortunes.” Indeed, if cheated on, a husband “may recover damages of any man who shall

invade his property in her,” whereas a wife could not “recover damage from a woman.” If abused, a wife was legally allowed to report her husband, however this was extremely difficult to do as “the husband [had] it in his power to lock up his wife, and so prevent her complaint.” Even if the husband ended up jailed, she and her children would starve to death as they would lose their source of income. According to the author, young women were “extremely ignorant” in the eighteenth century. Indeed, “their education and way of life [shut] them out from the knowledge of their true interest in almost all things.” Everything in their upbringing was designed to make them dependent on men and lead them to accept the fact that they were no better than slaves in the eyes of the law.

Bourdieu states that “recognition of domination always presupposes an act of knowledge, this does not imply that one is entitled to describe it in the language of consciousness” (40). In other words, knowing that one is being dominated is the first step. An oppressed person must first place a name on their oppression to engage with it, and only then can they work towards their liberation. The reassessment of wives’ poor status in this pamphlet was just the beginning. To challenge men’s authority, women would first need to educate themselves, then fight for their liberation.

## 1.2 - FEMINISM AND THE THREAT TO MASCULINITY

After centuries of being abused and subordinated, British women decided to retaliate against men’s oppression in the late nineteenth century. This led to the creation of feminism. As explained in our introduction, feminism works towards the political, social, and economic equality of the sexes. Yet, according to journalist Cathy Young, feminism today is often perceived as a synonym for “man-hating.” Young asserts, “a lot of feminist rhetoric today does cross the line from attacks on sexism into attacks on men, with a strong focus on personal behavior: the way they talk, the way they approach relationships, even the way they sit on public transit” [*The Washington Post*]. In the 1970s, radical feminists were already accused of misandry. This led men to fear and then hate feminism, which in turn made the gender conflict more significant.

In this section, we are going to focus on the reason why feminism could be considered a threat to masculinity. First, we will focus on the fight for women's education, which triggered the start of the feminist movement in Britain. Then, we will study the fight between the women's suffrage and the anti-suffrage movement. And finally, we will see how radical feminists triggered the creation of the men's liberation movement during second wave feminism, in the early 1970s.

### 1.2.1 - The Fight for Women's Education

According to naturalist Charles Darwin, "man is more courageous, pugnacious, and energetic than woman, and has a more inventive genius" (301). Thus, man achieves "a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than woman can attain" (311). This was the justification given in the nineteenth century to explain why men's education was more valuable than that of women. However, this makes us wonder, were women given equal opportunities as men to reach this "inventive genius" state?

Protofeminist writer Mary Astell pointed out that men viewed women as irrational beings, yet by denying them access to a proper education men prevented women from having a chance to improve their characters. According to Astell, the Church saw women as more likely to be "liable to a thousand seductions and mistakes," but this was expected if they did not have the tools to know any better (17). Astell went as far as to say that "even the men themselves, if they have not a competent degree of knowledge, are carried about with every wind of doctrine" (17). To put it another way, if men were in women's position, they would be equally subject to irrational mistakes. In 1792, philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft joined Astell's argument and blamed the eighteenth century educational system for making women frivolous and incapable. She argued that women were "confined to trifling employments," and thus "they naturally imbibe[d] opinions which the only kind of reading calculated to interest an innocent frivolous mind inspires" (196). In other words, it is not surprising that women were not capable of grasping theories that men prided themselves on knowing if the only activities women practised all day long did not stimulate their mind.

This makes us wonder if the lack of intelligence was inherent to women or was it a consequence of their gender role? Astell built her argument on the Christian belief that every soul is equal. She questioned, “since God has given women as well as men intelligent souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them?” (18). To put it another way, if men’s souls are capable of being literate, women’s are as well. To say the contrary would be going against the words of God.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we could argue that women were not inherently less capable than men, but their lack of intellectual prowess was a result of their social status.

As for men who feared female capabilities, Wollstonecraft warned that these “trifling employments” and the lack of challenging reading materials were not without consequences. According to Wollstonecraft, they created “meek wives” and “foolish mothers” (160). She argued that “meek wives” want “their children to love them best, and take their part, in secret, against the father, who is held up as a scarecrow” (160). On this point, Dr Mai Stafford of the University College London (England) states that overbearing parents are toxic to their children. According to Stafford, “psychological control can limit a child’s independence and leave them less capable to regulate their own behaviour.” This psychologically controlling behaviour includes “invasions of children’s privacy,” “an unwillingness to let children make their own decisions,” and “fostering dependence upon one or both parents.” As a result, these children are more likely to suffer from lifelong psychological damage, such as low self-esteem and depression [*The Independence*]. Thus, not only do “meek wives” damage their children’s mental health, but according to Wollstonecraft they also wind them up against their father. Because they have never been taught to think for themselves and be independent, “meek wives” centre their whole personality around motherhood, and as a result feel the need to monopolise their children’s love. They were raised to think that without motherhood they do not exist. Wollstonecraft argued that women “have not a road open by which they can pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence” (237). This leads to several “disputes” between husband and wife, and creates a poor family dynamic (160). According to Wollstonecraft this could have been avoided if the wife had had a proper education in her young age. She asserted that without education “[women] will never have sufficient sense or command of temper to manage [their] children properly” (161). Simply put,

<sup>8</sup>“There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 5:21)

educated girls make good wives, who will later on become good mothers.

We notice that Wollstonecraft's justification for women's education remains patriarchal. According to the English writer, education's ultimate goal should be to produce rational wives and level headed mothers; these are roles that patriarchy has locked women into for a very long time. Plus, according to Freedman, Wollstonecraft's theories were only applicable for "elite women" who "had the leisure for education and servants to help with their domestic labor" (52). On this point, historian Catherine Hall argues that "the exclusion of middle-class women from the public world of politics is hardly surprising" considering that Victorian women in general had never been "involved in the political sphere" before (52). As we saw earlier, women were expected to stay in the private sphere, that is in their household, and never interfere with the public sphere. Therefore, it should not be surprising that they were not aware of these social class issues. However, this should not diminish Wollstonecraft's works as her theories helped move the fight for women's education forward. Indeed, by the late nineteenth century several "academies for girls, teacher training schools, and later colleges for women" were created (Freedman 52).

As more women had access to a proper education, they began questioning their status quo. One of these activists is philosopher John Stuart Mill. If Wollstonecraft used patriarchal ideals to support her theories, as a man, Mill benefited from the comfort of tackling the subject from an abolitionist point of view. In 1869, he published *The Subjection of Women* and demanded social equalities for every individual, including women.

But if the principle [of equal opportunity] is true, we ought to act as if we believed it. We do accept that someone's being born black instead of white, or born a commoner instead of a nobleman, shouldn't fix his position throughout life, barring him from all the more elevated social positions and from nearly all respectable occupations. Well, we should accept the same thing regarding someone's being born a girl instead of a boy. (Mill 11)

In this statement, Mill pointed out the hypocrisy of liberals' thoughts on equal opportunity. Indeed, philosophers preached about equality between all individuals, yet they put white men above black men, and noblemen above commoners. Plus, they viewed women as meek and irrational beings who do not deserve to have legal personhood. Mill encouraged to truly seek equal freedom for

all. He argued that this could be obtained if black men and commoners had access to tools that would help them rise above their current social positions. However, women did not have this luxury. According to Mill, “the disabilities of women” were one of the rare cases in which “laws and institutions take persons at their birth and ordain that they shall never in all their lives be allowed to compete for certain things” (11). As women’s education was very limited, their only option in life was to become a wife, and later on a mother. Mill went as far as to blatantly accuse men of manipulating women in order to make them dependent and obedient. He argued that men used means to keep women in “subjection” by telling them that “an essential part of sexual attractiveness is meekness, submissiveness, and delivering all individual will into the hands of a man” (10).

This statement seems to be accurate as in 1832 the Reform Act was passed. *Inter alia*, the Bill was to make it easier for small farmers and shopkeepers to own lands. However, what is remembered from this law is that for the first time in British history it was explicitly stated that a voter has to be male, thus formally excluding women from voting [UK Parliament]. According to Hall, it was always assumed that women could not vote, but the Reform Act made it official. She argues that the Bill aimed to help the middle-class (i.e. the disadvantaged minority) to better their social status. Yet, women were not included in this group. As Hall points out, “in naming the propertied as those with the vote it was men of property who were being demarcated, not women” (52). To put it another way, the Reform Act stated that voters would have the possibility to become landowners, but if these voters could only be male, this means that women officially could not own lands.

To justify why women could not vote, statesman Charles James Fox declared that “nature and convention had made women dependent on men and, therefore, ‘their voices would be governed by the relations in which they stand to society’.”<sup>9</sup> Simply put, because it is ‘natural’ that a woman belongs to her father and later on to her husband (as dictated by patriarchy) she should also be represented politically by these men. In 1839, the mayor of Birmingham added to Fox’s argument that women are too morally superior to get involved in politics.

<sup>9</sup>‘Gentlemen’, he cried, ‘we live in times of great political strife and exasperation. We sometimes forget in the animosity of our contentions, that differ as we will, we are still of the

same kind and of the same country, kith and kin one of another, united by one common bond of mutual dependence and of mutual interest. We often forget this. Woman's gentle nature never forgets it. She knows no hatred, nor will let us know any, if we but appeal to her. Let us then, gentlemen, whenever we feel our hearts hardening towards each other, or towards our political opponents, let us fly for counsel to those whose province and whose dearest task it is to soften, to bless, and to purify our imperfect nature. Then, believe me, we shall ever find a store of charity, large as our deficiencies, and learn how easy a thing it is to conciliate, without the sacrifice of independence, and to content without the bitterness of animosity. [*Birmingham Journal*, 23 February 1839]<sup>10</sup>

In this speech, the mayor stated that men are dominated by strong feelings, such as “animosity” and blind hatred for their “political opponents,” which inevitably leads to a hardened heart. Women, on the other hand, are described as “gentle,” pure, and level-headed enough to not forget that this is just politics. They seem more capable than men of keeping in mind that the end goal is the unification of the country. This seems to be the perfect mindset one should have when voting, yet women are deprived of this right. However, men, who are led by their hard feelings, were considered competent enough to vote for both him and his wife. The nineteenth century gender roles favoured men and praised them for being led by their mind, whereas women were kept in the private sphere because they were led by their heart. It seems that the roles have been reversed here, possibly in an attempt to gaslight the female audience.

As Hall points out, even though the mayor admitted that “candidates in Parliamentary and council elections relied on their women to soften, bless and purify their imperfect, and political, natures,” this praise was tainted by the “marginalization of women in the political world” (62). Indeed, by praising women in this sort of way, the mayor portrayed them as angels too pure or too fragile for the dirtiness of the political world. This infantilisation of women was heavily rejected in the wake of the fight for women's education. Thus, in the late nineteenth century, the fight for women's right to vote became a national movement known as the women's suffrage.

### 1.2.2 - Women's Suffrage and the Anti-Suffrage Movement

Historian Patricia Dolton explains that the word ‘suffrage’ is derived from

<sup>10</sup>*Birmingham Journal*, 23 February 1839. Found in HALL, Catherine, p.54.

Latin *suffragium*, which means ‘right to vote’ (31). As stated by the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the suffrage movement started in London, more precisely in Kensington. In 1865, a women’s discussion group, known as the Kensington Society, gathered to discuss women’s legal status. Rubenhold describes this kind of gathering as a “philosophical society” aiming to increase its participants’ knowledge through conversation. Members were invited to debate “a number of rhetorical points,” which often included “well measured philosophy with feminist undertones” (180). During this particular gathering, the question of women’s right to vote was raised. Unanimously, the assembly decided that “something should be done.” John Stuart Mill, who was now a member of Parliament, agreed to help in the fight for women’s suffrage provided that the Kensington Society was able to gather one hundred signatures [*Encyclopedia Britannica*].

In 1866, the newly founded Women’s Suffrage Committee organised the “Petition to the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in Parliament Assembled” and gathered around 1,500 signatures, surpassing by far the required goal [*UK Parliament*]. The petition was presented to the House of Commons in July 1866. Mill delivered a fervent speech in favour of women’s suffrage, making him the first member of Parliament to ever defend women’s cause publicly. In order to give women the opportunity to vote, Mill suggested replacing the word “man” with the word “person” in the Reform Act of 1832.

When the complaint is made that certain citizens of this nation, fulfilling all the conditions and giving all the guarantees which the Constitution and the law require from those who are admitted to a voice in determining who shall be their rulers, are excluded from that privilege for what appears to them, and for what appears to me, an entirely irrelevant consideration, the least we can do is to ascertain what number of persons are affected by the grievance, and how great an addition would be made to the constituency if this disability were removed. [...] And I rejoice in the knowledge that in the estimation of many honourable Gentlemen of the opposite party, the proposal made in the petition is, like many of the most valuable Reforms, as truly Conservative, as I am sure it is truly Liberal. I listened with pleasure and gratitude to the right honourable Gentleman who is now Chancellor of the Exchequer, when in his speech on the second reading of the Reform Bill, he said he saw no reason why women of independent means should not possess the electoral franchise, in a country where they can preside in manorial courts and fill parish offices—to which let me add, and the Throne. [*Online Library Of Liberty*]

In his speech, Mill asserted that women are “citizens of this nation,” that is, of the United Kingdom, and participate in the betterment of its society. Indeed, women worked (“manorial courts”), they served the Church (“parish offices”), and

there have been remarkable queens in British history, such as Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth (access to “the Throne”). Consequently, every Bill passed in Parliament affected women, too. Thus, Mill insisted that women should have the right to vote. However, his proposal was rejected with 73 votes in favour and 196 votes against [*Encyclopedia Britannica*].

Frustrated by the slow progress in the suffrage movement, groups of women (such as the Women’s Social and Political Union and the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies) decided that it was time to change their approach if they wanted to be heard. Petitioning and distributing pamphlets was not enough any more. We will focus on the WSPU in this thesis. Led by Emmeline Pankhurst, the WSPU was founded in 1903 with the motto “Deeds, not words.” They were among the first feminist militants, favouring more direct (and sometimes violent) actions, such as setting buildings on fire, chaining themselves to railings, and even detonating bombs (Holton 8-12). According to historian Camila Ruz, WSPU militants also took a liking to martial arts, and by 1910 most of them were trained in Jiu-Jitsu in order to defend themselves against “angry hecklers in the audience who got on stage [during their street demonstrations]” and policemen if arrested [*BBC News*].

WSPU members were perceived as controversial. According to historian Sandra Stanley Holton, the public disorder they provoked earned them several prison sentences. Indeed, between 1913 and 1914, Sylvia Pankhurst (Emmeline Pankhurst’s daughter) was imprisoned nine times. Because imprisoned WSPU members were denied the status of political prisoner, which would remove the label ‘criminal’ from their judicial record, they “resorted to the combination hunger, thirst and sleep strike” (7). A friend visiting Sylvia to the nursing home where she had been taken to recover after one of her imprisonments stated, “the sight of two great gobs of blood in the thin drawn face moving restlessly from side to side on the pillow is a memory which even the horrors of war – and I saw many in France in 1914-15 – have not had the power to dim.”<sup>11</sup> Policemen had to resort to force feed WSPU militants, and in 1913, the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act was passed. The Bill stated that “suffragettes who went on hunger strike were released from prison as soon as they appeared weak or ill,” but they were to be re-imprisoned once recovered. The Act was referred to as the ‘Cat and Mouse’ Act by

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in HOLTON, Sandra Stanley, p.7.

the general public as the police and the imprisoned suffragettes reminded them of “a cat playing with a mouse” [*UK Parliament*].

By the mid-1910s, the suffragettes started to gain a lot of attention, and with that came hostility. On this point, historian Julia Bush asserts that there was “widespread public support for anti-suffragism,” and by 1914 a group of male conservationists had formed the National League for Opposing Women’s Suffrage. They instantly gained over 42,000 members, and their petitions against votes for women collected an overwhelming 500,000 signatures. According to Bush, they started a propaganda against women’s suffrage and distributed posters and postcards portraying suffragettes as ugly and violent women [*British Library*] (see annex, figure 3, 130).

According to Bush, the motive behind the anti-suffrage movement was the fear that women would eventually become “masculinised by their entry into the political life,” which was a place reserved to men. As stated earlier, women were to stay at home (i.e. in the private sphere). Men opposing women’s suffrage warned of the danger of female militants. They argued that a woman who was too involved in politics would neglect her household duties. If a woman spent all her time in street demonstrations, how would she find the time to care for her children? Men feared that if women refused to perform their gender role, they would have to fill this spot. The gender roles would then be reversed. According to Bush, men were afraid that radical feminism would “eventually subvert the entire social order by undermining the gendered foundations of domestic life” [*British Library*].

Another concern, and maybe a more pressing one, was that if women obtained the right to vote, they would be considered equal to men from a political standpoint. This means that the gender hierarchy would be erased, and men would no longer benefit from their superior social status. According to Bush, “most of the argument against women’s suffrage drew upon this fear.” Indeed, in 1910, during a Trafalgar Square meeting, a speaker claimed that women’s suffrage would “make England the laughing stock of Europe.”<sup>12</sup> Reading between the lines, we can assume that what this speaker truly meant was that European men would ridicule English men for sharing an equal political status with women if the latter got the right to vote. Because it would be considered humiliating to lose their superior political

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in BUSH, Julia, *British Library*.

status, men felt threatened by suffragettes [*British Library*].

However, Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the WSPU, assured that suffragettes did not hate men. She declared, “It is the Government that is our enemy; it is not the MPs, it is not the men in the country; it is the Government in power alone that can give us the vote.”<sup>13</sup> In 1918, women were finally given the right to vote. The Representation of the People Act was passed on the 6th of February 1918, allowing women over the age of thirty to vote [*UK Parliament*].

With the emergence of the suffragette movement, women started to be perceived as a threat to men and their masculinity. As we will see in the next part, the gender discord was as severe in the 1970s during the second wave feminism.

### 1.2.3 - Radical Feminism and the Men’s Liberation Movement

According to historian Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, the Women’s Liberation Movement was created in Oxford, in 1970, on the crossroads of other revolutions, such as faster communication through television, consumer society and materialism, and better medical care (introduction to the contraceptive pill, legalisation of abortion, and thus a better control of fertility). It was in this context that university students started to question the traditional gender roles of their time period, and some of them decided to fight against capitalism. They challenged social hierarchy and the older generation’s traditional values. Instead, they favoured freedom and the absence of leadership (Barret-Ducrocq 119). Thereupon, historian Florence Binard adds that the WLM took place within several other contestation movements, such as the “Student Revolution, Sexual Revolution, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), Civil Rights Movement, Hippie Movement, [and] Gay Rights” (1).

The first WLM conference took place in Ruskin College (Oxford) and was attended by more than six hundred women. They discussed women’s issues and patriarchal oppression, and they demanded “equal pay, equal educational and job

<sup>13</sup>Quoted in HOLTON, Sandra Stanley, p.15.

opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand, [and] free 24-hour nurseries.” Sheila Rowbotham, one of the conference’s organisers, admitted that this last demand was “controversial because people imagined that the demand was that we would place our children into some kind of state nanny care for 24 hours, whereas the purpose of it had been perhaps women are working funny hours and they don’t need a nursery just nine to five” [*British Library*].

According to Barret-Ducrocq, members of the WLM appeared very optimistic, and almost naive, during the first years of the movement (123). Indeed, the majority of them were left-wing students raised into bourgeoisie, who were influenced by the hippie movement, but who had never been confronted with political issues before. On the other hand, the country was facing an alarming rise in unemployment due to mass immigration, on top of having to deal with the apparition of AIDS (Barret-Ducrocq 123). Binard comments that “the fact that the [WLM] started with a conference that took place at Ruskin College in Oxford is quite significant regarding the socialist stance of British feminists” (3). Just as we saw earlier with the fight for women’s education, the WLM members appeared somehow out of touch when it came to social and race issues, but thanks to the mass media and the development of technology, Black feminists were able to voice their opinion this time, and in 1973, the Black Women’s Movement was created (Binard 5). Feminist activist Lynne Segal would later comment on the matter and say, “Black women, working-class women, Jewish women, lesbians, younger, older, disabled and many other women began to speak, write and organise around their specific oppression.”<sup>14</sup> As we can see, the mid-1970s saw the emergence of several feminists groups, one of them being the radical feminists.

According to professor of politics Elizabeth Meehan, if liberal feminism believed in “the possibility of sex equality” and that “differentiation in society need not, and should not, be based on gender,” radical feminism believed that men were “the primary source of oppression” and as such, women should centre their fight against them. Their goal was to erase patriarchy as a whole. They criticised liberal feminists “for placing too much hope on the capacity of legal reform to lead to the full emancipation of women” (190-1). To radical feminists, passing new Bills was not enough. As Barret-Ducrocq explains, to win the fight against men, radical feminists believed that they needed to change the world completely. This included

<sup>14</sup>Quoted in BARRET-DUCROCQ, Françoise, p.122.

not only eradicating gender roles imposed on women by patriarchy, but also changing the sexist way in which the English language was spoken, according to them (121).

In 1968, American feminist Valerie Solanas published a manifesto against men titled *SCUM Manifesto*. Solanas stated, “Every man, deep down, knows he’s a worthless piece of shit. Overwhelmed by a sense of animalism and deeply ashamed of it” (39). She went as far as to say, “To call a man an animal is to flatter him; he’s a machine, a walking dildo” (37). As we can see, Solanas took the patriarchal stereotype of the man who cannot be sexually satiated because of his higher sexual drives (compared to women’s non-existent one)<sup>15</sup> and used that to her advantage. According to Solanas, men are less than animals for letting themselves be led by their basic instincts. In Solanas’ context, sex is used to shame men instead of praising them. Radical British feminists appropriated Solanas’ anti-men stance, and fiercely proclaimed, “Yes, we are angry! Yes, all men are fuckers! Yes, we like women! Yes, we hate men! Yes, women are a social class! Yes, all men are raging rapists! Yes, we are emasculating bitches! Yes, we are extremists! Yes, we are revolutionists!”<sup>16</sup> As we can see, the conflict between genders became very apparent. To radical feminists, men were the oppressors (and thus the enemy), while women were the revolutionists fighting to free the oppressed ones (thus, making them the hero).

According to Barret-Ducrocq, the hatred for men was so pronounced that some radical feminists went as far as to advise pregnant women to get an abortion if their baby happened to be male (126). On this point, Freedman argues that radical feminism helped bring to light “once-unmentionable topics such as abortion, rape, and prostitution,” on top of encouraging women to explore their sexuality (126). Radical feminists believed that men sexually exploited women, and in order to free themselves from this oppression, women should not conform to the patriarchal expectation of having heterosexual relationships. According to Freedman, they promoted “the rejection of male dominance and the assertion of sexual love for other women” (88). To radical feminists, not only did marrying into a heterosexual relationship equal to accepting the gender role imposed on women which claimed

<sup>15</sup>We will develop this argument later in this study.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in French in BARRET-DUCROCQ, Françoise, p.125. Translated into English by Claudie Pajanie.

that they should all become wives and later on mothers, but it also meant that they accepted the authority of their husbands over them. According to Meehan, radical feminists believed that “homosexual relations [were] based upon a real equality of autonomous individuals” (192). In other words, if a woman was in a relationship with another woman, the social hierarchy would be erased within this couple. Lesbianism was promoted to such extent that the ‘angry lesbian feminist’ became a stereotype. Although, as Freedman points out, “not all radical feminists became lesbians” (88).

The WLM also helped bring to light the struggles faced by the gay community. As Meehan states, radical feminists demanded that “lesbianism be considered not merely a matter of freedom of choice but as essential political practice for feminists” (192). As a consequence, three other demands were added to the WLM’s request list. The demands for “legal and financial independence for all women,” and “the right to a self-defined sexuality” in an attempt to put “an end to discrimination against lesbians” were added in 1974, and in 1987, “freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion regardless of marital status; and an end to the laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and aggression to women” was demanded [*British Library*].

With the rise of radical feminism, tension between men and feminists arose. Professor of politics Nicholas Owen argues that this discord was caused especially because “men were excluded from direct participation in the British WLM” (803). If first wave feminism benefited from the help of notorious male activists, such as John Stuart Mill, second wave feminism chose to fight without men’s help. As Owen explains, they valued “the principle of autonomy,” and as a consequence the WLM conferences (where the majority of feminists thoughts and demands were discussed) were “women-only” (810). This presses the question; how did feminists expect to eradicate patriarchy if men could not access information that would help them correct what they were doing wrong? According to Owen, a counter-argument to this point is that some feminists believed that “women needed their own space” in order to speak freely about men’s oppression (811).

Not only were men prohibited from attending WLM conferences, but they were also banned from feminist marches. Owen explains that marches were

“demonstrations of women’s identity and empowerment” and as such, “the presence of men gave contradictory signals” (813). Indeed, how could women express their refusal of patriarchy when the exact representation of what they were fighting against (men) were marching by their sides? Thus, in 1975, when a group of men decided to join a march, some feminists shouted at them “men out,” while others defended “men in” and “men are human too” (813).

According to Owen, the rejection of men from the WLM became so intense that by the end of the 1970s, some feminist journals, such as *WIRES*, stamped “women only” on their covers to prevent men from buying them. Feminists started to question, “Should books by men be sold on the bookstall?” and “Should their music be played at the disco?” As Owen notes, cries of “Turn this shit off and play some women” were often heard in nightclubs (811). On top of that, men were being mocked and accused of being rapists by radical feminists, as we saw earlier. It could be argued that feminists went from being oppressed to being the oppressors. As a response to the vilification spread by the WLM, a group of men gathered and formed the men’s liberation movement in the early 1970s.

According to sociologist Michael Messner, some men (mostly male college students) took an interest in feminism at the beginning of the WLM. They started to question, “What does this all have to do with us?” (Messner 256). The question was not asked disdainfully. MLM members genuinely studied feminist theories and came to the conclusion that women were indeed victims of sexism, and the cause of their suffering was patriarchy. As Messner states, “movement leaders acknowledged that sexism had been a problem for women and that feminism was a necessary social movement to address gender inequities” (256). Members wanted to help feminists erase patriarchy, but the problem was how could they attract fellow men to feminism? According to Messner, the main argument they used was that male gender roles were “impoverished,” “unhealthy,” and even “lethal” to men. As Messner asserts, they emphasised the “importance of the high costs” of male gender roles “to men’s health, emotional lives, and relationships” (256). Simply put, the MLM aimed to demonstrate that patriarchy and its gender roles were as harmful to men as it was to women.

However, Messner notes that there was some tension within the movement from the very beginning. A group of MLM members, whom Messner refers to as

“pro-feminist,” focused on the “importance of joining with women to confront patriarchy” (256). Pro-feminists argued that patriarchy was damaging to men as well as women, but men were not innocent either. They admitted that if patriarchy existed in the first place it was because of “men’s power” (Messner 256). On the other hand, some members, whom Messner refers to as “anti-feminist,” refused to take the blame for the wrongs of patriarchy. As Messner explains, they “disputed feminist claims that patriarchy benefited men at women’s expense” (256). Anti-feminists argued that men did not benefit from patriarchy at all. Instead, they were pressured to perform a role too big for them. As sociologist Ruth Hartley explains, patriarchy dictates that a man is “supposed to be rugged, independent, able to take care of himself,” and if he does not meet these expectations, he deserves to be shamed.<sup>17</sup> To anti-feminists, men’s situation was as bad as women’s, but the difference was that no one was fighting for them. On this point, sociologist Herb Goldberg notes that if women have obtained their freedom from patriarchy, men are still caged into their gender roles.

The liberation of the female has freed her almost totally to pursue and indulge in any of what was once considered traditionally masculine behavior or style. The male however, is still role-rigid, afraid to give expression to the female component in him. Role rigidity makes life precarious. In a changing world where women are increasingly taking traditionally male jobs it leaves him with few alternatives.<sup>18</sup>

According to Goldberg, not only are men trapped in their gender role, but because women allow themselves to perform outside of their assigned gender role, men are left confused and with no duty to fulfil. Indeed, if wives worked and brought money to the house, what would husbands’ role be in the family? And what about men who were fine with staying at home and taking care of their children? Should these men be shamed for that? These questions revealed that women’s liberation was a tricky situation for men.

With the rise of the MLM, it became clear that the traditional male gender role (active, dominant, and protector) did not apply to every man. According to historian Christopher Forth, in the aftermath of the movement, sociologists started to question male gender roles and their place in society. They concluded that there

<sup>17</sup>Quoted in MESSNER, Michael, p.257.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted *ibid*, p.255.

was a plurality of masculinities, and this was the birth of men's studies (133).

### 1.3 - THE EMERGENCE OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN MEN'S STUDIES

When professor of masculinity studies David Buchbinder decided to teach the topic of masculinity for a final-year undergraduate class in 1987, the first question he asked his students was why they choose to enrol in a unit focused on men. He received various answers, from curiosity to know how the topic of masculinity would be approached in a time mostly centred around women's issues and feminism, to some genuine concern that the class would be "an attempt to licence men to beat their chests, look hairy and make misogynistic, crude remarks" (8). This reluctance about the men's studies field, particularly about the concept of hegemonic masculinity, is not unique to Buchbinder's students. Indeed, throughout the years, hegemonic masculinity has been a controversial topic among researchers.

In this part, we are going to study the diverse transformations of men's studies in order to understand how the concept of hegemonic masculinity was created. Firstly, we will see how the work of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung helped open the doors to this field of study. Secondly, we will focus on the place of hegemonic masculinity in men's studies. And finally, we will analyse how hegemonic masculinity's ideals are spread through education and the media.

#### 1.3.1 - Psychoanalysis: First Step into Men's Studies

In 1899, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud theorised that all boys from the age of three to five are unconsciously sexually attracted to their mothers and thus feel threatened by the presence of their fathers. This rivalry between father and son results in a desire for the child to usurp his father's place and become his mother's sexual partner. Freud names this theory the Oedipus complex, a reference to the Greek king Oedipus who unknowingly murdered his father and married his mother. Freud explains, "It is as though –to put it bluntly– a sexual preference were making

itself felt at an early age: as though boys regarded their fathers and girls regarded their mothers as their rivals in love, whose elimination could not fail to be to their advantage” (274).

To support his theory, Freud used the case of Little Hans. Professor of psychological therapies Nicholas Midgley reports that in 1908, four-year-old Little Hans (whose real name was Herbert Graf) woke up from a nightmare, crying that “he wanted to ‘coax’ with his mummy” (537). The next day, Hans went on a walk with his nursemaid and suddenly started to cry again, insisting on being taken home to his mother. When his mother asked him why he had acted in such a way, Hans answered, “I was afraid a horse would bite me” (538). Little Hans’ father wrote to Freud about his son’s newly developed horse phobia, and Freud published his study of the case in 1909, in a paper entitled *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy*.

According to Midgley, Hans’ nightmare was “a vital clue” to Freud (540). It was reported that prior to this nightmare, Little Hans started to show a fascination with his “widdler” (penis). His mother threatened to send him to Dr “A” and “have his ‘widdler’ cut off when he didn’t stop touching himself at night.” On top of that, Hans had just discovered that “little girls –and women– don’t have a penis.” Freud concluded that this was the reason for his “fear of castration” (540). He stated, “It was this increased affection for his mother which turned suddenly into anxiety – which, as we should say, succumbed to repression.” Simply put, Little Hans sexually desired his mother and thus became anxious at the idea of being separated from her. Plus, because he had been threatened to have his “widdler” cut off, he feared that his sexual longings would never be satisfied.

According to Midgley, Freud went further into his study and asserted that Hans’ fear of a horse biting him represented “a displaced fear of his father” (540). Thus, Freud came to the conclusion that Little Hans had an Oedipus complex which displayed through his fear of horses. What Little Hans really feared was not horses, but it was that his father (represented by the horse) would castrate him (“bite him”) as a punishment for desiring his mother. According to Freud, Little Hans was aware that his father represented a threat. Indeed, his father was more powerful and had a larger penis (just like horses) and this was the source of Little Hans’ horse phobia. As Midgley explains, “The intensification of his libidinal longings, when faced by the threat of castration, led to a sudden repression of libido and its transformation

into anxiety” (541).

The fear of loss of the penis or, as Freud calls it, the castration complex, is among one of the psychoanalyst’s earliest theories. Fellow psychoanalysts Irving Sarnoff and Seth Corwin explain that, set in an Oedipal complex, Freud believed that once boys become aware of the differences between male and female genitals, they assume that the female’s penis has been cut off and thus they develop a fear of damage being done to their own private parts by their fathers as a punishment for desiring their mothers (574). As we will see further in this study, the penis represents one’s virility and dominance over someone else. By losing it, boys fear of being made weaker and being emasculated.

Because of these theories, sociologist R W Connell believes that Freud was the first to attempt a scientific approach to the concept of masculinity. Even though Freud never wrote explicitly about masculinity, Connell argues that his research was a starting-point of modern men’s studies. She observes that “Freud opened more doors than he walked through. But the opening he supplied for the analysis of masculinity was remarkable enough. He provided a method of research, ‘psychoanalysis’ itself; a guiding concept, the dynamic unconscious; a first map of the development of masculinity; and a warning about the necessary complexity and limits of the idea” (*Masculinities* 10).

A few years after Freud, in 1921, psychoanalyst Carl Jung came up with the anima and animus theory. According to fellow psychoanalyst Marie-Louise Von Franz, Jung believed that the anima was the unconscious feminine side of a man, while the animus was the unconscious masculine side of a woman (177). Von Franz explains, “The anima is a personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in a man’s psyche” such as “receptiveness to the irrational, capacity for personal love, feeling for nature, and –last but not least– his relation to the unconscious” (177). According to Von Franz, a man’s anima is shaped by his mother during childhood. If he had a negative relationship with his mother, his anima takes the form of a hunted depressive feeling. He will have negative thoughts about himself, such as “I am nothing,” “Nothing makes any sense,” and “I enjoy nothing” (178). This negativity can lead to insecurity, depression, aggressivity, and in worse cases, suicide. Von Franz notes that twisted remarks about how effeminate a man is can impact him in the worst way. She states, “Remarks of this sort always contain a

cheap twisting of the truth and are in a subtle way destructive” (179).

However, the anima and animus theory suggests that if a man had an intensely close relationship with his mother, he can grow up being effeminate and submissive to other women. This man will have difficulties adapting to the adult world and the dynamic he will have with his future partner will resemble a son/mother relationship rather than a relation between spouses. As Von Franz puts it, this sort of man “either becomes effeminate or is preyed upon by women and thus is unable to cope with the hardships of life” (179). But there is also a positive aspect to the anima. Von Franz explains that according to Jung’s theory, men who manage to tame their anima can reach the heights of wisdom and spirituality.

This positive function occurs when a man takes seriously his feelings, moods, expectations, and fantasies sent by his anima and when he fixes them in some form for example, in writing, painting, sculpture, musical composition, or dancing. When he works at this patiently and slowly, other more deeply unconscious material wells up from the depths and connects with the earlier material. [...] Only the painful (but essentially simple) decision to take one’s fantasies or feelings seriously can at this stage prevent a complete stagnation of the inner process of individuation, because only in this way can a man discover what this figure means as an inner reality. Thus the anima becomes again what she originally was – the ‘woman within’, who conveys the vital messages of the Self (Von Franz 186).

Simply put, to reach happiness and wisdom, men need to undertake several steps. Firstly, they need to be in line with their feelings (that is, to acknowledge them). And secondly, they need to work on these feelings by expressing them through artistic hobbies (such as “writing,” “painting,” or “dancing”). As we can see Jung’s theory about the anima raises two important points. It suggests that unless men accept that their feelings and fantasies come from the “woman within” (and not from their masculinity) they cannot reach happiness. Plus, it implies that by nature men cannot express their feelings and control their fantasies. This brings us back to the patriarchal belief that men are by nature led by their head and their muscles, while women are led by their heart and their softness.

Thereupon, Rutherford argues that although the anima and animus theory cannot “provide a definitive account of the construction of masculinity,” it cannot be denied that Jung “produced theories of masculinity that suggest that men repress emotion which cannot be expressed in social practice” (28). Thanks to Jung’s theory, the gender studies field started to call men’s stoical behaviour into question. Is it in men’s ‘nature’ to act in such a way? Or is it a result of the gender role

imposed on them by society? Plus, the fact that the anima comes in different forms supposes that the way that men express their stoical behaviour varies from person to person. As Rutherford observes, Jung's theories brought "elements of the psychoanalysis of a historically constructed range of masculinities" in the gender studies field (28).

Although Freud and Jung provided important research studies about masculinity, it was only during the mid-1970s that their theories resurfaced through the Men's Liberation movement. It was this movement that pushed gender studies experts to focus on the field of men's studies.

### 1.3.2 - Men's Studies and Hegemonic Masculinity

According to sociologist Jean-Yves Le Talec, the first published men's studies researches were written in a feminist context. In the United Kingdom, Kate Millet published *Sexual Politics* in 1970. Le Talec explains that Millet's goal was to denounce the influence of patriarchy in sexual relationships, and prove that patriarchy was the cause of sexist behaviours in our society (4).

In France, George Falconnet and Nadine Lefaucheur published *La Fabrication des mâles* in 1975. According to Le Talec, the authors explored the result of their study conducted on thirty-two men. The study was divided into three parts. First, the men were asked to give their opinions on male privileges in a patriarchal society. Second, they were questioned about their sexual and familial relationships. And finally, they were asked to detail their upbringing and how their masculinity had been constructed. According to Le Talec, the results showed that men felt trapped and attacked by feminism. Indeed, Falconnet and Lefaucheur observed two outcomes in their study. All interrogated men believed that traditional masculine behaviours (being stoic and in charge, for example) were inherent to men. As a result, part of the interrogated men became hostile to feminism, and they chose to stay sexist because they believed that it was "natural" for men to act this way. The second group admitted that feminists' arguments against patriarchy were right, and they felt guilty for being the cause of it. However, they also felt lost as they did not know how to change a behaviour that was "natural" to men (5).

In the United States, Shere Hite published *The Hite Report on Male Sexuality* in 1983. According to Le Talec, Hite studied the relations between men and women, but more importantly the relations between men themselves. Hite explored the relationship between father and son, and she questioned its impact on boy's education and their view on masculinity (6). Hite concluded that men felt pressured to perform their masculinity, and they held women responsible for it. According to them, women had too high expectations for men. Indeed, men are to work, provide for their family and be present as a father. This pressure leads to feelings of anger and frustration against women. However, as Le Talec points out, these men refused to give up on performing their masculinity, even though it made them miserable (9).

According to Le Talec, these three books illustrate perfectly well the men's studies field of the time. Indeed, the focus was put on men's reaction to feminists' accusations. In most research studies, men were being pitted against feminism. The results were almost always identical; performing masculinity was damaging and put pressure on men. Sociologists hoped that this would cause men to join feminists' fight against patriarchy in order to free themselves from this pressure (10). According to Le Talec, it is with this background of knowledge that sociologist R W Connell published *Masculinities* in 1995, and created the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" (13).

As explained in our introduction, the term 'hegemonic masculinity' refers to the domination of a group of men over women, but more importantly of a group of men over other men. As Connell explains, hegemonic masculinity distinguishes itself from "other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities," thus "only a minority of men might enact it." Although the majority of men do not present traits of hegemonic masculinity, Connell argues that it is "certainly normative" as it is the embodiment of "the currently most honored way of being a man" (*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* 832). In other words, the hegemonic masculine man represents what society deems as 'the real man'. This man shows traits of "independence" and "competitiveness," and he is the "primary provider" for his family. On top of that, he shows "physical characteristics such as muscularity and a deep voice" [*Oxford Dictionary*]. As Connell states, "only a minority of men" enact these traits, but because they are considered as the norm, the majority of men feel pressured to reach these expectations. This explains the results of the three studies we saw earlier.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was met with a lot of controversies. In 2004, sociologist Jeff Hearn argued that hegemonic masculinity is “ultimately unnecessary to the task of understanding and contesting the power of men” as it “tends to deemphasize issues of power and domination” (*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*” 836). As we saw earlier, the original purpose of men’s studies was to analyse the negative impact of patriarchy on women, but more importantly on men. The goal was to raise awareness among men and make them realise that they needed feminism as much as women did, in the hope that they would join the battle against patriarchy. However, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is based on the fact that men need to assert their power and perform their masculinity, otherwise they risk falling into the submitted category of men. This could cause them to be an outcast among other men. As Hearn observed, this gives an excuse to men to be violent and dominant. Hearn argued, “there is the place of consent in theorizing men’s power within patriarchies” as the concept of hegemonic masculinity “involves both the consent of some men, and, in a very different way, the consent of some women to maintain patriarchal relations of power” (*From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men*” 52). As we can see, not only does the concept of hegemonic masculinity help maintain patriarchy, but it also makes women accomplice in accepting the domination of men over them.

In 1998, historian Richard Collier criticised the concept of hegemonic masculinity for being focused exclusively on men’s negative character traits, stripping them from any positive behaviour. According to Collier, “hegemonic masculinity came to be associated solely with negative characteristics that depict men as unemotional, independent, non nurturing, aggressive, and dispassionate” (*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*” 840). However, Connell counters that there are some positives to the concept of hegemonic masculinity that should not be ignored. She states, “Most accounts of hegemonic masculinity do include such ‘positive’ actions as bringing home a wage, sustaining a sexual relationship, and being a father.” She goes as far as to say that “it is difficult to see how the concept of hegemony would be relevant if the only characteristics of the dominant group were violence, aggression, and self-centeredness” (*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*” 840).

We notice that Connell uses the term “dominant group” even though, as we

saw earlier, only a minority of men depict traits of hegemonic masculinity. Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity requires “all other men to position themselves in relation to it” (*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* 832). Simply put, even though hegemonic masculinity is rare, the majority of men do aim to acquire its traits. We shall then question; what are the tools used by non-hegemonic masculine men to reach this position? Using Bourdieu’s theory about the habitus, it could be argued that hegemonic masculinity’s character traits are taught to boys from a very young age, and passed on from generation to generation.

### 1.3.3 - Hegemonic Masculinity in Education and the Media

Fathers are the first representation of manhood that boys get in contact with. Thus, boys build their personality around their father, whom they consider as their role model. As reporter Christopher Dickey explains, “Any boy is going to tend to model his ideas of what a man is on the image that he has of his father.” Indeed, if a father values courage and bravery, there is a high chance that his son will share the same principles. Just like if a father puts a lot of importance on knowledge and academic achievement, there is a high chance that his son will choose to pursue a higher education later in life. However, this is not always the case if the father/son relationship is strained. According to Dickey, some boys do use their father as a role model on which to build their masculinity, “but not always by emulating it, sometimes by rejecting that image” [*BBC News*]. If the father was violent or left the mother when she was pregnant for example, the son will grow up resenting him. Thus, the son will try his best to be different from his father.

Building on this last argument, reporter Jon Swain asserts that instead of fatherhood, schools are “one of the principal sites where masculinities are fashioned” as they play a “prominent role in the construction of [one’s] identity” (331). Indeed, because boys are surrounded by same gender peers in school settings, they are going to interact with other boys their age, and forge their idea of masculinity around these relations. As Swain explains, “This is the place where boys get their information about how they are supposed to be and how they are supposed to act as a boy (and future man)” (334). According to how they choose to perform their masculinity, boys are put into categories, such as the “geeks,” the

“footballers,” the “party animals,” the “cool guys,” or the “wimps” (335). Swain points out that this “range of masculinities” found in school settings prove that not only is masculinity plural (as Connell theorised) but it is also “organized” (336). There is a hierarchy between these groups, and the group depicting the most hegemonic masculinity character traits is on top of the pyramid. According to Swain, the traits required are *inter alia* “athletic skill,” “fitness,” “strength,” “competitiveness,” “courage,” “self-reliance,” and “adventurousness” (337).

We notice that these traits rely heavily on the male body. If being athletic and physically strong is so important, this means that being overweight and weak is frowned upon. We shall then question; what influences young boys’ opinion on the male body? Professor of criminology Richard Sparks argues that blockbuster Hollywood action films play a huge part in shaping boys’ ideal of what a male body should look like.

According to Sparks, male actors such as “Mel Gibson, Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Bruce Willis” were named as favourite role models among boys in the early twenty first century (355). The common point between these actors is that each of the roles they played put a lot of emphasis on their muscular bodies and their physical strength. Sparks explains that these actors “are not just male heroes: their pumped up bodies” determine what a ‘true’ masculine body should look like “by presenting it in excess” (356). For example, if we take a look at Sylvester Stallone’s oiled body in the *Rambo* franchise (1982–2019) we note that his muscularity is exaggerated, or as Sparks puts it, “hyperbolized” (356) (see annex, figure 4, page 131).

Likewise, if we take a look at Arnold Schwarzenegger’s roles in *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) or in *Twins* (1988), we notice that compared to the protagonist, the other male characters are not as muscular or physically strong as him. In *Twins*, for example, Danny DeVito’s character is shorter, larger, and plays the role of the comic relief (see annex, figure 4, page 131). According to Sparks, these secondary characters, also referred to as the “Buddy,” are there to bring a touch of femininity as “women are ‘ejected’ from these movies” (356). In other words, being the strongest and the most muscular person gives one access to the role of the hero. However, being weak and overweight relegates one to the role of the “Buddy,” who represents the woman of the film, thus removing any kind of masculinity from

them.

Sparks goes further and points out that if the “Buddy” is the comic relief, the hero showcases very few emotions. These emotions are “grief (for lost love or slain partners) and rage (for the same reason)” (356). Indeed, going back to the example of *Conan the Barbarian*, Arnold Schwarzenegger’s goal in this film is to avenge his dead mother. We notice that love in action films is rarely a source of affection, but always something that the hero has to protect or avenge. This goes again to show that action films heroes exhibit traits of hegemonic masculinity, such as being stoic and being the protector of their loved ones.

The climax of action films always focuses on the hero’s fight against the villain. According to Sparks, the hero’s “transcendence” is shown “through battle” (353). In other words, victory can only be obtained through the use of the hero’s physical strength and muscles. However, this win is not tainted by the pejorative aspects of violence. Indeed, violence becomes a form of honour as the hero fights for what is right. Sparks asserts, “the hero is inherently an overcoded image: he tears meanings about justice, morality, and law, and about being a man” (354). To put it another way, through his victory, and thus his body, the hero is able to reach these honourable values. These values (“justice, morality, and law”) are at the heart of masculinity, more precisely hegemonic masculinity, and consequently represents what it is to be a ‘real’ man.

By watching these films, male viewers identify with the protagonist, and the hero becomes an ideal toward which to work. As Sparks states, “the appeal of narrative cinema is provided by an imagery of desire, identification, and pleasure in looking” (352). Film theorist Laura Mulvey goes further and adds, “the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, male viewers desire to be the hero (i.e. to be muscular, strong and always the winner). Consequently, they reject their own person and project their look onto the actor they see on their screen. As the actor becomes the spectator in this fantasy, his body, his prowess, and every action he makes become that of the viewers. Thus, by the end of the film, male viewers learn

<sup>19</sup>Quoted in SPARKS, Richard, p.352.

from the hero's journey and feel the need to emulate his masculinity in real life. As Sparks explains, "masculinity has become an increasingly self-conscious performance" (355).

The word 'performance' is very important here. Going back to Jon Swain's study, Swain argues that the goal for male pupils in school settings is to be included in the highest class on the masculinity scale. Thus, they need to "achieve an acceptable form of masculinity" (334). The action film hero being the ideal form of masculinity, male pupils are going to use him as an example, and emulate his persona in their daily lives. As Swain explains, this achievement is "earned through negotiation and sustained through performance, sometimes on an almost daily basis" (334). Hegemonic masculinity is a gender role, and roles are meant to be performed. Admittedly, this performance is not always genuine, but it is a necessity, as we will see in the second part of this dissertation.

In sum, in this first part saw that although feminism has made gender conflict more obvious, it seems that some discord was already present between men and women before its emergence. In antiquity, men and women already lived in different spheres, with the men's sphere being considered more valuable than that of women's. If we take the issue from a religious point of view, men have been considered superior to women since the creation of the world. Even in contemporary Britain, men are placed in a superior category than women in the gender hierarchy. This gender hierarchy is called patriarchy, and is arguably the source of the gender conflict.

In the late nineteenth century, women fought against patriarchy, thus posing a threat to accepted norms of behaviour and the very concept of masculinity. Feminist triggered a movement which aimed at a reversal of roles. Women were now reclaiming their power by denouncing men's supremacy. In return, men felt targeted and oppressed by feminism. Many men feared they would lose their masculinity to feminism, and consequently be relegated to the bottom of the gender hierarchy.

In the wake of feminism, gender experts started to focus on men and how they express their masculinity, thus creating the field of men's studies. Sociologist R W Connell concluded for instance that patriarchal societies shape boys from a

very young age to behave a certain way (to be brave, physically strong, and to never show weakness). Men are pressured to live up to this role or they might be stripped from their masculinity. Connell coined the term 'hegemonic masculinity' to define this behaviour. This behaviour is a gender role, thus a performance that men have to do in their everyday lives. As we will see in the next part, this performance often results in severe consequences.

## 2 - PART TWO: WHEN PERFORMING MASCULINITY DAMAGES GENDER BALANCE

*“Men weren’t really the enemy — they were fellow victims suffering from an outmoded masculine mystique that made them feel unnecessarily inadequate when there were no bears to kill.”*

*Betty Friedan*

According to sociologist R W Connell, hegemonic masculinity manifests itself through different aspects of men’s lives, such as through their education (in school settings), their sexuality (sexual relationship with women), violence (domestic and sexual abuse, fights between men, war), and fatherhood (men’s relationship with their children and family) (*Masculinities* 5). Among these characteristics, two are constantly called into question: domestic and sexual violence. These traits are also coincidentally the most prominent ones in hegemonic masculine men. As explained in the first part, gender study theorists feared that by tackling the issue of domestic and sexual violence from a male point of view, the focus on women (the actual victims of the abuse) would be forgotten. However, Connell argues that studying these two traits is “necessary if theories of masculinity are to connect with wider theories of gender and are to have any grip on practical issues such as the prevention of violence” (*Masculinities* 8). Simply put, to eradicate domestic and sexual violence we must examine the roots of the problem in order to understand why it is occurring. As such, these two aspects of hegemonic masculinity will be the focus of this second part.

In the previous part, we saw that hegemonic masculinity is first and foremost a gender role. As we argued, roles are meant to be performed. In this second part, we are going to study how performing this role through acts of violence not only furthers the discord between genders, but also within the male gender. In order to reach this goal, we will first focus on men’s violence towards women. More precisely, we will study how and why domestic abuse has been an occurrence for centuries and is still happening to this day. This will lead us to our second part in which we will deal with the violence of men towards men. In this section, we will try to better understand the reason behind men’s violence, and why is being violent

one of the principal traits of hegemonic masculinity.

## 2.1 - MEN'S VIOLENCE AND WOMEN'S DOMINATION

Before we delve into this first section, we should define 'violence.' According to sociologist Jeff Hearn, four conditions have to be met in order to qualify an act as violent: "the use of force, physical or otherwise, by a violator or violators," the intention "to cause harm," the act must be "experienced by the violated, as damaging and/or violation," and finally the act must be recognised "as 'violent' by a third party, for example, a legal authority" (*The Violence of Men* 16). Thereupon, feminist activist Tina Hill argues that the "use of violence collectively serves to maintain male control of women" (54). The aspect of control should thus be added to our definition. Since Hill specifies that this control is "male," should we also use the term 'male' violence in this part? On this point, Hearn argues that "the term 'men's violences' is preferred to 'male violence' for several reasons" (*The Violence of Men* 4). Firstly, it makes it clear that we are dealing with "the violence of men." Secondly, it refutes the claims that deem violence as a "biological inevitability," that is, as 'natural' to men. And thirdly, "it removes the ambiguity that there might be a special form of violence that is 'male'" and another one that is 'female' (*The Violence of Men* 4). For these reasons, we will use the term 'men's violence' in this part.

Going back to Hill's argument, in this section, we are going to question how men use violence to control women. First, we will focus on domestic abuse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Then, we will compare it to modern day domestic abuse cases in order to see if the situation has improved since then. Finally, we will reflect upon domestic abuse cases in which women are the perpetrators.

### 2.1.1 - Domestic Abuse in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

In 1622, clergyman William Gouge published a textbook entitled *Of Domesticall Duties* in which he offered advice on how to be a good spouse. According to Gouge, in the seventeenth century, a good wife was to show

“obedience” and “acknowledgment of [her] husband’s superiority.” She was also expected “to dwell where he will, to come where he calls, or to do what he requires.” As for the husband, he was expected to hold “a good esteem of his own wife,” to acknowledge that she was “the best for him, and worthy of love on his part,” and to profess “mild and loving speech to and of his wife.” Historian Katie Barclay summarised the spouses’ duties perfectly well in these terms, “A husband’s primary duties were to love, provide and protect, while a wife was to obey” (126). If a wife showed reluctance in obeying her husband, Gouge advised the latter to keep “maintaining his authority.”<sup>20</sup>

Before we delve into the means used by husbands to “maintain” their “authority,” we should clarify that women of this time period knew exactly what to expect when entering married life. As we saw in the first part with the concept of habitus, women were shaped from a young age to accept the fact that men’s domination over them was ‘natural.’ Thus, they were prepared to obey their future husbands even before they got married. As Barclay explains, “young women were reminded from childhood of the centrality of obedience to their later lives and they married keenly aware of the implications” (128). On this point, historian Maureen Waller adds that “women were prepared to endure [any kind of violence], so deeply ingrained in their psyche was the doctrine of passive obedience” (158).

As studied in our first part, the purpose of a woman’s life in the late seventeenth century was to become a wife and later on a mother. Because being a good wife meant being obedient, women took pride in exhibiting their submission to their husbands. According to Barclay, “many wives subscribed their letters with the words ‘loving’ and ‘obedient’” (105). In 1698, for example, Christian Kilpatrick signed her letter to her husband John Clerk in these terms, “I rest your loving obedient wife.” As we can see, love and obedience were connected. Indeed, the ultimate proof of a wife’s love to her husband was her obedience. The more obedient she was, the more truthful her love to her husband was. Consequently, love (and in this case, obedience) was weaponized against women. According to Barclay, “love reinforced male authority and female subordination” (103). Because love for women was a synonym for obedience, they had no choice but to follow their husbands’ orders. Thus, love gave power to men over their wives. It is in this context of emotional manipulation that domestic abuse took place in the

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in WALLER, Maureen, p.48-51.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

According to Barclay, husbands had the lawful right to restrain and constrain their wives in case of disobedience. This was not surprising considering the fact that, as we saw earlier, Gouge advised husbands to maintain their authority in order to keep their wives at bay. Barclay explains, “Restraint was exercised by imprisonment, captivity or hindrance of the use of things necessary for life” whereas “constraint” was “beating, wounding, or the like force upon the body, or the fear of it, whereby any thing is extorted” (179-80). We notice that compared to a wife’s vague duty of obedience, the approach in which a husband might ‘rightfully’ restrain and constrain his wife is very detailed. This was a means to assert men’s domination over women as the only condition required for a husband to abuse his wife was if the latter had disobeyed him. However, what was considered as disobedience was arbitrary. Indeed, only a husband could judge if his wife was obedient or not, therefore if she ‘deserved’ to be punished or not. As Barclay explains, “a wife’s obligation within marriage was vaguely defined as obedience, leaving her vulnerable to punishment” (180). Thus, according to Waller, “husbands assumed it was their God-given right to beat their wives” (158). Thereupon, Barclay adds that domestic abuse “was a device within the patriarchal marriage to ensure that husbandly authority was not undermined and that duty, necessary to the good order of society, was fulfilled” (179). To put it another way, domestic abuse was a means to help perpetuate patriarchy in the seventeenth century, and asserts men’s dominance over women.

To illustrate how husbands exercised restraint and constraint, Waller reports the story of “Mr Veezy” whose wife committed suicide in the eighteenth century after years of domestic abuse.

In the early eighteenth century a Mr Veezy was tried at the Old Bailey after his wife found her life with him so intolerable that she threw herself out of the window. It was established that he had kept her confined in a garret for several years, without fire, proper clothing, or any of the basic comforts of life. He frequently horsewhipped her. Since food – one hard and mouldy piece of bread – was found in the garret and it was clear that Veezy had not pushed her out of the window himself, he was acquitted. He had as good as got away with murder. (Waller 158)

In this case of domestic abuse, Mr Veezy exercised both restraint and constraint against his wife. Let’s first focus on how he restrained his wife. Mr Veezy

“kept her confined” in their house’s attic “for several years,” which means that he basically imprisoned her for years. Not only that, but he also prevented her from staying warm. Indeed, he kept her “without fire” and “proper clothing.” On top of that, the wife was deprived of “any of the basic comforts of life.” Although Waller does not detail what she means by “basic comfort of life,” we can assume that Mr Veezy denied his wife access to sanitary facilities, clean water, or simply spare clothes. When it comes to food, Mr Veezy reportedly fed his wife to a “piece of bread” which, by the time of the wife’s suicide, had turned “hard and mouldy.” This indicates that the wife was malnourished and rarely given proper food. These accusations fall under the category of restraint as they prove that Mr Veezy kept his wife away from “the use of things necessary for life” (Barclay 180).

If we focus on how he constrained his wife, it was reported that Mr Veezy “frequently horsewhipped her,” which means that he beat and wounded her. We notice that he used a horsewhip to physically abuse his wife; a weapon usually used to beat animals. Judging by his actions, it could be argued that Mr Veezy treated his wife like an animal. Thus, he did not perform his duty as a husband (i.e. loving his wife). Yet, according to Waller, he was found innocent of the murder of his wife. In the eyes of the law, Mr Veezy did not commit a crime because he had conducted the abuse in a lawful manner. He did restrain and constrain his wife, which was his right as a husband, but he also technically sheltered and fed her, which was his duty as a husband. Plus, as Waller points out, Mr Veezy was not the one who “pushed her out of the window.” Thus, he did not directly kill his wife.

Domestic abuse did not only happen in the context of hatred. In some cases, husbands loved their wives so much that they became extremely jealous and possessive. According to historian Ginger Frost, jealousy was the main reason why domestic abuse occurred in eighteenth century England. As Frost states, “Jealousy was overwhelmingly the primary stated reason for attacks” (27). In 1714, for example, Alexander Murray wrote to his in-laws to justify his abuse of his wife Grisell Baillie. This is an extract of his letter:

I take God to witness I married with a full resolution and inclination to Love and gratitude, yea too much Love, Because she was the only thing I Loved She was my God and all my duty to my Neighbour For all thoughts of duty whatever were either banished or forgot, and center’d in her... I truly Lov’d her face, thought (and was not deceived) she had sense, was reasonably perswaded she Loved me, was sensible she preferred me to better worthy offers and made me happy, without her all the world would not have satisfied me at the time (I doe

really believe) and therefore it was I valued nothing and no body in any manner of comparison to her, I thought if I gott her I had all I wanted... my Jealousie has indeed rendered me justly obnoxious to all and many more like Censures from her... But then she has drove those thoughts too far, and by her disrespect, afforded me (in the eyes of the world) an excuse for my madness and within my breast this consideration that I would not have continued as I have been, had she obeyed what I desired at first and all alongst had not repeated or run into the very same or very parallel courses I quarrelled.<sup>21</sup>

According to Barclay, this letter was written after Grisell Baillie sued her husband for “a legal separation for cruelty” (178). Yet, Alexander Murray argued in his correspondence that his “cruelty” was actually adoration. According to his claims, he was merely performing his duty as a husband (i.e. loving his wife). The problem is that his love for his wife became obsessive. Alexander qualified Grisell as his “God” and “the only thing [he] loved.” He went as far as to admit that he could not be content unless Grisell was part of his world (“without her all the world would not have satisfied me”). Consequently, Alexander centered every aspect of his life around her (“I valued nothing and no body in any manner of comparison to her”) and he did not want to share her with the rest of the world. If Mr Vizzy supposedly viewed his wife as an animal, Alexander viewed Grisell as his thing. Because of that, he judged that she had to be punished when she failed to centre her life around him as well.

It seems that Alexander gaslighted Grisell in order to justify his abuse. He claimed that he loved her so much that it drove him into “madness.” In other words, Grisell is to blame for the abuse because she made Alexander fall madly in love with her. As a consequence, Alexander started worshipping Grisell, yet she disobeyed him, failing to perform her role as his wife. Alexander even admitted that “had she obeyed what [he] desired at first” he would not have beaten her. Thus, according to Alexander, the abuse was entirely Grisell’s fault as she persisted in her disobedience to her husband in spite of the fact that he was ready to spare her. This argument not only provided a justification to Alexander’s in-laws for the domestic abuse, but it also justified the abuse in the eyes of society. Indeed, in this case of domestic abuse, the husband performed his duty (Alexander loved Grisell) and his lawful right (he punished her to maintain his authority over her). Thus, Alexander argued that he should not be considered guilty of “cruelty.”

Jealousy was not the only cause of domestic violence in the seventeenth and

<sup>21</sup>Quoted in *ibid*, p.178.

eighteenth centuries United Kingdom. According to Frost, money was the second most cited reason to justify abuses (28). As we saw in the first part, during the Victorian era, wives were expected to stay in the domestic sphere and oversee household duties. Thus, they were in charge of making sure that their servants bought the necessities that would ensure that their house stayed in perfect condition. Frost explains, “A woman had the responsibility to manage the household budget on whatever part of his pay packet the man chose to give her” (28). However, if a husband suspected that his wife did not use his money adequately, he had the right to ‘punish’ her. As Frost asserts, “any woman who took more of the pay packet than the man offered was ‘stealing’ from him” (28). John Bishop, for example, killed his wife Mary Ann Ford in 1874, after he accused her of misusing his money to buy alcohol. Bishop declared that “she had robbed him of a sovereign, and that all he had got out of his week’s wages was 10s. 3d.” (Frost 28).

On the monetary issue, Waller reminds us that money was “the motive for so many marriages” in the eighteenth century. As we saw in the first part, when a woman entered marriage, all her belongings became her husband’s (159). According to Waller, women started to set up contracts that would ensure the safety of their money and “protect their interests against a husband’s profligacy” (159). This practice irritated husbands so much that they would physically harm their wives if they refused to revoke this term of their marriage contract upon being wedded. As Waller explains, “A husband might use threats, blackmails, sustained mental torment and physical violence to make his wife rescind such a settlement” (159). As we can see, despite having found an effective solution to secure their money, women were still victims of patriarchy in the eighteenth century. Because a husband’s ability to keep his family under control was more important than a wife’s refusal to give away her possession, society agreed with wife beating in this scenario. As we saw earlier, Victorian respectable society deemed it inadmissible for a woman to disobey her husband, whatever his wishes might be. Thereupon, Waller asserts, “Men could play the system with confidence, accusing their wives of provoking them, knowing full well that such ‘unwomanly behaviour’ would not be condoned” (159).

However, according to Frost this behaviour came from a place of insecurity. She argues that “the motives for [domestic abuse] were bound up in men’s desire to assert their masculinity” (30). For example, jealousy happened when a husband

suspected his wife of adultery. Frost explains, “A woman who left a man for someone else ‘slighted’ him, especially in front of other men” (30). From the husband’s point of view, his wife was telling him that he was not good enough, that he could not sexually satisfy her, thus she needed to find a ‘better’ man elsewhere. Witnessing his wife being sexually satisfied by another man (something that he had failed to do) would hurt his pride, or as Frost puts it, his “honor” (30). Thus, husbands resorted to violence not only to prevent this from happening, but also to remind their wives (and potential lovers) that they were the ones in control.

When it comes to money, Frost explains, “Women who took more than their ‘share’ of the pay packet or who demanded more money to support children questioned the men’s ability to provide” (30). Indeed, a wife stealing from her husband was perceived as an insult, a challenge to his ability to meet her needs. In worse cases, her actions could indicate that her husband did not want to care for his family, and consequently she had to take care of her money issue by herself. As we saw in the first part, providing for his family was one of the eighteenth century male’s gender roles. Thus, if a wife took this role away from her husband, she was basically insulting his masculinity by telling him that she (ranked lower on the gender hierarchy) had succeeded where he (placed at the top of the gender hierarchy) had failed. Thus, these men resorted to violence to prove that they were the dominant ones in the relationship. Once again, this was because their pride had been hurt.

This is quite paradoxical considering that, as we saw in the first part, men were thought to be rational and in full control of their emotions in the eighteenth century. However, by letting their insecurities take over their heads, they proved that they could also be led by their hearts on some occasions, just like women. In an attempt to demonstrate their masculinity, they revealed that they possessed attributes that were deemed ‘feminine’ (i.e. being led by irrational emotions). On this point, Barclay explains, “When such violence was made visible to the wider world, it undermined models of masculinity based on honour, self-control and good management of the household” thus “marital violence was hidden to maintain social reputation” (180).

That is not to say that men’s violence was always viewed in a negative light. Poet Anatole France wrote in the nineteenth century that the sword was “the first

tool of civilisation” and “the only means man has found to reconcile his brutal instincts and his ideal of justice.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, men’s brutality was seen as ‘natural’, something that was instinctive to them. However, it was also linked to their desire for justice. According to historian Robert A. Nye, in the nineteenth century noblemen were expected to only use the sword in “a discourse of chivalric concern for the weak” (369). In other words, men’s violence was to be used strictly in the context of helping “the weak” (i.e. women, children and the disabled). We saw in the first part that this expectation is still relevant in today’s society for men. Indeed, heroes in action movies are celebrated for using their physical strength to avenge “the weak.” According to Nye, this honourable behaviour “exhibited courage and sang-froid” (370). Thus, using violence for the opposite of this would be exhibiting cowardice and discomposure. Therefore, it is not surprising that noblemen hid their domestic abuse from the nineteenth century British society.

Centuries later, women beating is still seen as an act of cowardice by most, but is it still used to prove one’s masculinity? We will answer this question in the next section.

### 2.1.2 - Domestic Abuse in Modern-Day Society

According to the *Office for National Statistics*, in England and Wales, an estimated 2.3 million adults between the ages of sixteen and seventy-four have experienced domestic violence in 2020, among which 1.6 million were women and 757,000 were men. Statistician Helen Ross comments that, although domestic violence remains one of the least reported crimes, “The number of domestic abuse related crimes recorded by the police continued to increase in the year ending March 2020; this may reflect improvements in police recording and an increase in victims’ willingness to come forward” [*Office for National Statistics*]. While it is great that victims are less afraid to denounce their abusers, there is still an alarming gap between the number of female victims (1.6 million) and male victims (757,000). According to the *Female Census*, in the past decade “62% of all the women killed by men [in the United Kingdom] (888/1,425) were killed by a current or former partner” and “of the cases where women had separated, or made attempts

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in NYE, Robert, p.369.

to separate, 89% (338) were killed within the first year.” The organisation estimates that, across the United Kingdom, “on average, a woman is killed by a current or former partner every 4 days.”

How is it that the number of domestic violence related crimes have not decreased in the United Kingdom since the seventeenth century despite the rise of feminism and the creation of protective laws<sup>23</sup> for battered wives? According to feminist activist Tina Hill, domestic abuse is rooted in British history and culture; so much so that it is seen as the ‘norm’ for a husband to dominate his wife even to this day (45).

It is the social control of women by the ‘male state’, i.e. the historical, cultural and social context, which sanctions and promotes the differing power relationships between men and women. This means that acts of physical and sexual violence by individual men can be seen not as deviant, but as an over-zealous use of power vested in them by being members of the male ‘class’ with all that this implies. Further, this overzealous use of power by a few serves to maintain the power position of all men. (Hill 45)

As we saw in the first part, gender roles are learnt from a very young age and passed down from generation to generation (referring to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus). Boys are taught that men do not cry, and the only way to express their emotions is through violence. Girls are taught that men are by ‘nature’ more aggressive than women, thus they should forgive men’s violent behaviour towards them. More than that, women are sometimes expected to calm their partners’ temper with their ‘natural’ calm demeanour. Thus, men’s violence is accepted and even understood.

Professor of criminology Russell Dobash and professor of social research R. Emerson Dobash remark that in many cases domestic violence occurs after marriage.

After marriage, the authority relationships between men and women become more explicit, husbands came to feel their wives should meet their demands immediately and without question no matter how reasonable or unreasonable. The major source of contention centred on what might be called ‘wifely obligations’ and husbands’ authority. In our research, it was the real or perceived challenges to his possession, authority and control which most often resulted in the use of violence. A late meal, an unironed shirt, a conversation with any man,

<sup>23</sup>The Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976 inhibits “the other party to the marriage from molesting the applicant [and] from molesting a child living with the applicant” and “from using violence against the applicant [and] against a child living with the applicant” [*Legislation.gov.uk*]

no matter how old or young, all served as 'justification' for beatings.<sup>24</sup>

It is as though a switch happens after being wed. The status of husband seems to give men authority over their wives. As Hill points out, "He not only feels that he has the right to expect his wife to obey him but that he is expected to make sure that she does" (53). As we see, the gender roles given to husbands and wives have not changed much since the seventeenth century. Gender roles still expect husbands to keep their wives 'under control', and wives are still expected to vow obedience to their husbands. Furthermore, women are still praised to this day for being "wifey material." The term has been made popular in pop culture in the past few years. According to columnist Mandy Stadtmiller, the term is used "to evaluate a woman's narrow potential as a spouse." Simply put, it describes "a good woman to marry," meaning a woman who can cook, who cleans the house and is faithful to her husband, as opposed to a woman who is just to "fool around," meaning a woman whom men date but do not marry [*The Washington Post*]. Thus, women who are "wifey material" revolve their lives around their husbands. Hill comments that this submissive role of wife "carries with it implicit expectations of control, or at least the legacy of ownership by the husband" (53). Because she is expected to be devoted to her husband, the wife becomes his possession, earning him the "implicit license to keep her within the wifely role" (Hill 53). This in turn gives the husband a "justification" for using violence if she fails her "wifely obligations."

Sociologist Jeff Hearn makes a distinction between "excuses" and "justifications." According to him, "With excuses, the man accepts the blame but not the responsibility; with justifications, the reverse is the case" (*The Violence of Men* 121). To put it another way, "excuses" imply that although the man acknowledges his wrong doing, he portrays himself as the victim of his own actions. Something might have snapped within him for a brief instant, making him lose control, which suggests that he is not responsible for his actions during this brief moment. Thus, the responsibility is placed elsewhere. As Hearn explains, when a man uses excuses to explain his violent behaviour, he presents himself as "a victimized, potentially violent self, arising from forces beyond his individual self" (*The Violence of Men* 121). On the other hand, "justifications" imply that the man accepts his responsibility and even believes that he had every right to do what he

<sup>24</sup>Quoted in HILL, Tina, p.53.

did. As Hearn puts it, the man presents himself as “a holder of rights of possession of the woman” (*The Violence of Men* 121).

Between 1991 and 1995, Hearn conducted a research study among seventy-five men in West Yorkshire (England) that demonstrates his argument. These men had all been violent to known women (wives, girlfriends, mothers, female friends, etc.) at some point in their lives. The purpose of Hearn’s study was to analyse how men describe and justify their abuse, in order to understand the reason behind their violent behaviour.

Hearn found that when a man uses excuses to explain his violent behaviour, he puts the blame on external aspects of his life, such as upbringing, past-traumas, alcohol or drugs (*The Violence of Men* 122). It is as though violence remains in a dormant state inside of the man, and can only be triggered by these external aspects. According to Hearn this “inner violence” is a product of “a social learning model of violence” (*The Violence of Men* 123). In other words, because men have been taught since a young age that it is in their ‘nature’ to be violent, they believe that they cannot control themselves when facing frustrating situations. As we saw in the first part, gender roles dictate that ‘real men’ should be rough and unafraid to fight back when provoked. Thus, boys build a habit of reacting with violence when angered from a very young age to meet these expectations, so much so that it comes ‘naturally’ to them in their adult lives. According to Hearn, “In this frame of meanings, violence is to be excused; it is not the responsibility of the man but it is the result of past social, psychological and even biological events or factors, the effects of which are embedded in his body” (*The Violence of Men* 123). Violence is to be excused because society teaches us that ‘boys will be boys’. It is presented as something that they cannot control, as though it was their hegemonic masculine-self (a different entity) living within them and awakening only when triggered. One man said, “It’s like somebody else what’s inside me controlling me to do them things, and it hurts, you know” (*The Violence of Men* 123). Another explained, “It was just like something came over me” (*The Violence of Men* 123). While another described, “It all boils up like a volcano, it’s waiting” (*The Violence of Men* 123).

Other male abusers use the consumption of substances (such as drugs and alcohol) to excuse their violent behaviours. One man admitted, “I’m only violent because of the drink” (*The Violence of Men* 125). We notice the use of the word

‘only’ to minimize the seriousness of his assault and his potential alcohol problem. According to Hearn, the word ‘only’ is often used by abusers to suggest that “the violence was not greater in extent or quantity” (*The Violence of Men* 119). By doing this, the abuser takes away the right for the victim to be traumatised by his assault as the violent occurrence can ‘only’ happen if he is drunk. Another man confessed, “I used to [slap her] if I were on acid, you know (...) I were trying to get off [drugs] and I had a few bottles of pills. And then she started on men and I were drunk at the time, so I just realised what I were doing” (*The Violence of Men* 126). In this statement, although the abuser acknowledged his wrong-doing, he also held his addiction and his female partner responsible for pushing him into this violent state. To put it another way, he presents himself as seemingly innocent as the assault occurred because of forces beyond his control (drugs, alcohol, and a cheating partner).

According to Hearn, the difference between excuses and justifications lies in the fact that with justifications, violence is “conscious” instead of triggered (*The Violence of Men* 126). Thus, justifications imply that the abuser was perfectly aware of his violent behaviour, and believes that he had every right to do so. In this case, violence resides inside of the man and can only be awakened whenever he decides. According to Hearn, justifications are used when something “is not done by the woman” and often include “not being sexually faithful,” “not doing housework,” “not doing childcare,” “not maintaining her appearance,” or “not restricting herself in terms of movement” (for example, going out with her friends too often) (*The Violence of Men* 126). As we can see, unlike with excuses where violence occurs because something external happened, with justifications violence occurs because something was not done.

This brings us back to the Dobashes’ argument we saw earlier; domestic abuse often happens after the female partner dared challenge the “wifely obligations” the man had set for her. Because the man feels threatened of losing his dominant role in the relationship, he uses violence to remind the woman of her subordinate position. As Hearn explains, “Justifications are made on the basis of the man’s right and/or ability to do violence in order to correct the woman in the context of his relationship with her – a relationship of having, holding, owning and subordinating a woman” (*The Violence of Men* 127). One man admitted, “I can’t handle a woman arguing with me” (*The Violence of Men* 135). Another man said,

“what led to [the assault] was her being clever and cocky with me” (*The Violence of Men* 129).

Thereupon, sociologist Kristen Anderson argues that male abusers often feel “emasculated by what they [interpret] as their partners’ efforts to control them” (367). In other words, a female partner who steps out of her gender role (obedience), and claims male gender role as her own (dominance) is perceived as controlling. Thus, she becomes the abuser and he becomes the victim. Anderson explains, “women who ‘wear the pants’ disrupt the binary opposition of masculinity/femininity” and as a consequence, the man “is unable to perform masculinity” (368). Not only is it humiliating for him to lose his masculinity to his female partner, but he is also at risk of being shamed by society if his new subordinate position in the relationship is known. Thus, men justify their assaults by claiming that they were merely taking back their gender role, and put the blame on women for stealing it from them in the first place.

According to Hearn, justifications are also used when the female partner is believed to be unfaithful, even if it is an “actual, potential, assumed or suspected” affair (*The Violence of Men* 127). One man confessed, “if I saw her talking to somebody that I didn’t know, I used to be suspicious and I used to think, ‘Well how can she possibly get to know him?’ Especially if it was somebody male and somebody young” (*The Violence of Men* 128). This brings us back to Frost’s argument about the motives for domestic abuse. Yes, the assault was fuelled by jealousy, but it also revealed the man’s insecurity when it comes to his masculinity. Indeed, he feared that a young man (that is, a ‘better’ man) would replace him. Sociologist Connell talks about a “hierarchy of power among men” (*Masculinities* 24). In the context of hegemonic masculinity, the man who is younger, stronger, and richer is considered ‘better’ than the other men. Thus, he is placed at the top of this hierarchy of power. Consequently, he becomes a threat to the other men.

However, we note that in this last confession, in an effort to prove his masculinity, the abuser assaulted his female partner and not her potential lover. According to Anderson, this is because domestic violence in itself is a “gender performance” (375). As we saw earlier, keeping his wife obedient is one of the male gender roles. Thus, performing this role (beating her) proves that the abuser is still ‘the man’ in the relationship (that is, the dominant one). His violence becomes

proof that he can still control a woman, and thus that he still belongs to the top category of the gender hierarchy. This ensures his image as a hegemonic masculine man. As Anderson explains, “By gendering violence, these batterers not only performed masculinity but reproduced gender as dominance” (376).

Gendering violence presupposes that only one gender can abuse the other. But what about female abusers?

### 2.1.3 - When Women Assault Men

In the 1985 American comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*, Susie Derkins is often seen physically attacking Calvin after the latter verbally insults her. Her attacks often result in Calvin being plastered to the ground with black eyes and bruises. In the 1987 Japanese anime *City Hunter*, Kaori Makimura frequently hammers Ryo Saeba’s head with a 100-ton mallet as a punishment for his skirt-chasing tendency. In the 2005 British novel, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Hermione Granger conjures dozens of birds and makes them attack Ron Weasley after the latter kissed Lavender Brown (see annex, figure 5, page 132). In all of these scenarios, women’s violence is portrayed as something ‘funny,’ something that should be laughed at. These scenarios are written in a way that makes the audience sympathise with the abusers (women). The victims (men) seem to ‘deserve’ the attacks; Calvin was rude to Susie, Ryo was being a pervert, and Ron broke Hermione’s heart. Now, if we were to reverse these characters’ genders, the severity of these violent scenarios would look much more harmful.

According to sociologist Kristen Anderson, unlike men’s violence, women’s violence is perceived as “hysterical, trivial, and ineffectual” (363). She argues, “Women were constructed as incompetent in the practice of violence, and their successes [violent attacks] were trivialized” (366). To put it another way, women are rarely blamed or punished for their violent behaviours because their assaults are not perceived as a threat to men to begin with. It is ‘funny’ when Susie attacks Calvin because she is being “hysterical.” It is ‘cute’ when Kaori attacks Ryo because he is much stronger than her, which renders her violence as “trivial.” It is ‘all right’ when Hermione attacks Ron because he is happily dating Lavender in the

next scene, which makes Hermione's violence "ineffectual." Women's violence is ridiculed because it is seen as the result of their irrational emotions. Men's violence, on the other hand, is perceived as logical and useful. Calm and collected, men are believed to use violence to protect and avenge the 'weak' (as seen earlier), but also to appease their "hysterical" female partners. To illustrate this argument, Anderson reports the case of Phil, a man who assaulted his girlfriend during a domestic dispute in order to make her "come to her senses." Interviewed by the sociologist, Phil related:

She came back and started hitting me with her purse again so I knocked the purse out of her hand, and then, she started screaming at me to get out. I went back to the room, and she came running down the hall saying she was going to throw all my stuff out and I'd just had enough so I went and grabbed her, pulled her back. And grabbed her back to the bed and threw her on the bed and sat on her – told her I wasn't going to let her up until she came to her senses... she came back up again and I just grabbed her and threw her down. After that, she promised – she finally said that she had come to her senses and everything. I went into the other room, and she went out to clean up the mess she had made in the living room, and then she just started crying all night long, or for a while.<sup>25</sup>

As we can see, women's violence is described as "hysterical" once again. Compared to Phil's calm and rational demeanour, his female partner is portrayed as a wild individual led by her irrational emotions. Despite the fact that Phil threw her down repeatedly, he portrayed himself as a non-violent peacemaker. From his point of view, he was not hurting his girlfriend; he was merely 'showing' her how to behave rationally. As Anderson comments, "[Phil] suggests that he used this incident to demonstrate his sense of superior rationality to his partner" (365). In other words, violence became a means for Phil to perform his masculinity and prove his moral superiority to his girlfriend. Thereupon, Anderson explains, "by denying a threat from women's violence, [male batterers] performed masculinity and reinforced notions of gender difference" (366). Simply put, by denying the legitimacy of women's violence, men reinforce the belief that violence is unique to them, and as a consequence hegemonic masculinity is maintained. Solely men can perform acts of violence, thus solely men can define what counts as violence. According to Anderson, "These representations mask the power relations that determine what acts will qualify as 'violence' and thus naturalize the notion that violence is the exclusive province of men" (367).

<sup>25</sup>Quoted in ANDERSON, Kristen, p.365.

In 2004, professor of criminology Russell Dobash and professor of social research R. Emerson Dobash conducted a study among ninety-five heterosexual couples in which at least one of the partners had been victim of domestic abuse. This included both, men's violence against women, and women's violence against men. The purpose of this study was to measure the frequency and severity of women's violence in comparison to men's violence. When asked "how often the man had been violent to the woman" during the last year of their relationship, 31.6% of the interrogated women "reported five or more incidents perpetrated by their male partner," whereas only 13.7% of the men "agreed that they had perpetrated this number" (336). The same question was asked about women's violence and this time the answers were nearly identical. 9.3% of the men and 9.5% of the women "reported that women perpetrated five or more incidents during the one-year period" (336). We notice that men are more likely to commit domestic violence according to the victims (31.6% reported cases of women's abuse compared to 9.3% for men's abuse). However, women are more willing to admit their wrong-doing. Indeed, only 13.7% of the interrogated men agreed that they were violent compared to 9.5% of the women, a number that surpasses the percentage of male victims who came forward (9.3%). This could be explained by our previous findings. As we saw earlier, male abusers often use excuses and justifications to explain their violence. Thus, it is possible that they do not consider their violent behaviour as abuse. Moreover, women's violence is often minimized, which could explain why only 9.3% of the men perceived women's violence as domestic abuse. On this point, psychologist Gayla Margolin argues that women are more likely to admit their own violent behaviour. She asserts, "Spouses may have different definitions and thresholds as to what they view as violent, may ascribe self-serving labels and interpretations to behaviours, or, simply falsify reports."<sup>26</sup> This brings us back to Anderson's argument; violence is gendered and considered men's property.

When asked about the nature of the violence acts in itself, it was reported that women tend to "throw something to 'hit'," "slap," and "punch" their partner, whereas men tend to "kick," "choke," and use "forced sex" (336). The study also revealed that while women's violence was often isolated events, "many men perpetrated these 'acts' on a frequent basis" (336). This could explain why the

<sup>26</sup>Quoted in DOBASH, Russell, DOBASH, R. Emerson, p.333.

injuries inflicted by these assaults differ for both genders. Indeed, 38.9% of the interrogated men reported that they were bruised and scratched by their partner, while 76.8% of the women reported that they got a black eye, 61.1% reported a slip lip, 42.1% reported fractured bones, and 33.7% black-out after the assault (337). As we can see, the injuries inflicted by men upon women are much more severe. These injuries are not only physical, but also psychological. 79% of the interrogated women admitted being “frightened” by their male partner, 60% felt “helpless,” and 57% felt “trapped” (340). On the other hand, 26% of the men said that they were “not bothered” by their assault, 14% felt “angry,” while 3% were “impressed” by their female partner’s violence (340). Because women’s violence is perceived as inoffensive, men barely get any serious psychological wounds from it.

These results show that women are more affected by men’s violence not only physically, but also psychologically. The brutality of men’s violence is also much more severe. This could be explained by using Bourdieu’s analysis of the male’s body, which is traditionally considered bigger and stronger than the female’s body. Thus, it is not surprising that a punch coming from a man would leave more impact on the victim than a punch coming from a woman. Going by this argument, should we agree that violence is exclusive to men because of its effectiveness compared to women’s violence? And if this is the case, should we deem women’s violence as ineffectual? The problem is, this would imply that it is impossible for a woman to harm a man. Yet, the Dobashes’ study revealed that some men were physically injured by their female partner. The other problem this argument implies is that any man who gets injured by these ‘ineffectual’ acts of violence is not masculine enough. If the male’s body is bigger and stronger, and thus superior than the female’s body, men should easily be able to dodge a punch coming from a woman. According to counsellor Suzanne Degges-White, the shame associated with this mindset is the reason why male victims rarely report their female abusers [*Psychology Today*].

Degges-White argues that men’s and women’s violence get different reactions from society. If female-on-male violence is met with doubt, male-on-female violence is believed right away, sometimes even with no evidence provided by the female partner. For example, in May 2016, actress Amber Heard accused actor and then-husband Johnny Depp of physical abuse. Depp was immediately hated by the public. *The Sun* called him a “wife beater” and he lost several movie roles in the

aftermath of this accusation. However, in January 2020, phone recordings revealed that Heard was also physically abusive to Depp during their marriage. While Heard received sympathy from the public, Depp was vilified and later on laughed at when the truth came to light [*Insider*]. On this point, Degges-White states that unless a man presents “bruises, open wounds, or broken bones,” no one would believe that he had been battered by a woman [*Psychology Today*]. Once again, this is the result of gender roles that dictate that a woman is not strong enough to physically assault a man. Consequently, when facing a case of female-on-male domestic abuse, society tends to shame the man for being too ‘weak’ instead of admitting the reality of female’s violence. A man who lets a woman batter him is not a ‘real’ man, and thus does not deserve to be at the top of the gender hierarchy. Because the husband is supposed to demand obedience from his wife, it is perceived as shameful when the roles are reversed. Degges-White comments:

We typically don’t imagine that men, the stronger sex, can become victims at the hands of a woman, the weaker gender. ‘Women don’t use violence to solve their problems, that’s something men do,’ is an argument that some stalwart and strict gender dividers believe. Unfortunately, men are almost equally as likely as women to be assaulted by a partner. Further, men don’t have access to the same level of basic community empathy, sympathy, or support that women typically receive by nature of their gender. Men don’t report because of the shame associated with being physically attacked by a woman. [*Psychology Today*]

As we can see, male victims have to not only deal with the trauma associated with their abuse, but they also have to face the shame associated with losing a physical fight against a woman (whom Degges-White refers to as “the weaker gender”). In the eyes of society, when a woman batters her male partner, she becomes the masculine authority in the relationship, and therefore deprives the male partner of his masculinity. Consequently, he becomes the woman (or “the weaker gender”) in the relationship. According to Degges-White, this is the reason why male victims are met with “shame” and are ridiculed by their peers when they report their female abuser, whereas female victims receive “empathy, sympathy, or support” from other women. It is as though the bond between men was not as tight as the bond between women, as though there was a competition within the male gender itself to see who would perform masculinity the best. But how does this competition come about, and how is its victory measured? These are questions we are going to answer in the next part.

## 2.2 - MALE-ON-MALE VIOLENCE: DISCORD WITHIN THE MALE GENDER

‘Be a man!’, ‘Boys don’t cry!’, ‘Fight like a man!’. These are phrases that have been normalised in today’s society, so much so that we seldom question their meanings and the harm they could inflict on men. Indeed, if women are pressured to perform their gender role, the same could be said for men.

In this section, we are going to analyse the consequences of performing male gender roles and how this negatively impacts the relations within the male gender. To do so, we will first focus on the issue of bullying behaviours in school settings. We will see how bullying shapes hegemonic masculine traits in male pupils, and how it forces them to perform their gender roles from a very young age. This will lead us to our second part where we will discuss the issue of criminal behaviours in male adult lives. We will see how crimes are used as a means to prove one’s masculinity. Finally, in our third part, we will study the damages that proving one’s masculinity entails within the male gender.

### 2.2.1 - Hegemonic Masculinity and Bullying Behaviour in School Settings

In January 2019, ten-year-old Seven Bridge from Kentucky (United-States) committed suicide because of vicious bullying over his colostomy bag. Bridge was found by his mother on a Saturday morning at the family’s house after he hanged himself [*The New York Post*]. In February 2019, thirteen-year-old Michael Martin from Michigan (United-States) died at the hospital two days after he attempted to take his own life. Martin was said to be bullied over his weight, glasses and braces [*Fox News*]. In April 2019, fifteen-year-old Nigel Shelby from Alabama (United-States) killed himself after being victim of relentless homophobic bullying at school [*Metro Weekly*]. We notice a pattern in these three cases; all the victims are male and they committed suicide after being bullied by their schoolmates. The bullying occurred for seemingly similar reasons. In each case, the victim presented characteristics that go against the ideal hegemonic masculine man that we defined

in our introduction. Bridge suffered from a medical condition, Martin was overweight, and Shelby was homosexual. In these three cases, the parents of the victim alerted the school, expressing concern for their son's well-being, but in each case the school dismissed the charges, concluding that their son was not being bullied.

This presses the question; can these violent behaviours be considered as bullying? The American campaign *stopbullying.gov* defines 'bullying' as an "unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time." If we look over the three cases presented above, we can see that the male victims were all "school aged children," they all suffered from "unwanted" and "repeated" violence, and there was a "power imbalance" between them and their abusers. Indeed, it seems that Bridge, Martin and Shelby were outcasts because of their disability, physical appearance, and sexuality respectively. Thus, it is fair to conclude that these three boys were victims of bullying. Yet, their schools unanimously declared that it was not the case.

According to reporter Wendy Sachs, bullying is quick to be dismissed among boys because of the belief that 'boys will be boys'. As we saw earlier, society expects and even encourages boys to be violent. Thus, it is considered 'normal' when a group of boys gang up against their classmate because they are 'merely' performing their gender role. As Sachs explains, "The belief in a 'boys-will-be-boys' mentality still persists, whether it's on a playground or in a college fraternity" [CNN]. On this point, counsellor Suzanne Degges-White adds, "If stereotypes are to be believed, [boys] are 'expected' to get into a little bit of trouble and a few scrapes along the path to adulthood" and to "use physical aggression to settle playground conflicts" [Psychology Today]. With this new information, we understand now why bullying speculations are quickly dismissed when it comes to boy's violence in school settings. If boys are expected to solve their disagreement using their fists, the line between a simple quarrel and unwanted violence becomes blurry. This gets even more complex when, according to Sachs, "cruel taunts and physical tests" are also perceived as "a form of bonding among boys." For example, if a boy calls his overweight classmate 'Big John', is he bullying him or showing his affection towards said classmate the way gender roles taught him to? Sachs argues that this is the reason why bullying among boys is "complicated and sometimes tough to

identify” [CNN].

However, the *stopbullying.gov* campaign determines three types of bullying; verbal bullying (such as name-calling, threats, or sexual harassment), social bullying (for example excluding someone from the group, spreading rumours or embarrassing someone publicly), and physical bullying (hitting, spitting on someone or damaging someone’s belonging). If these violent actions are unwanted by the victim and repeated by the abuser, they are considered bullying. On this point, sociologist Stacey Nofziger adds that the reason for bullying in school settings is often influenced by how well one performs their gender role. According to Nofziger, effeminate boys are labelled “sissy” or “fag,” while masculine girls are called “tomboy” or “dyke” (300). Simply put, performing outside of one’s gender role bears the risk of being a victim of violence. Going back to our previous cases, the three male victims presented characteristics that go against the ideal hegemonic masculine man defined in our introduction. As we said earlier, Bridge suffered from a medical condition, Martin was overweight, and Shelby was homosexual. From the bullies’ point of view, these facts justified their actions and why the victims ‘deserved’ to be assaulted.

Although bullying concerns both sexes (girls and boys), Nofziger observes a difference between how boys and girls perform violent behaviour in school settings. She argues:

Overwhelmingly, males are perceived as being more aggressive than females, and therefore are more often the targets and perpetrators of bullying. Boys are also more likely to use direct (physical) bullying, which includes hitting, kicking, choking, spitting, or hair pulling. Indirect bullying, including name calling, starting rumors and other forms of psychological bullying, while used by boys, is more often used by girls. (Nofziger 299)

This argument echoes what we said in the previous part. Boys are taught that it is in their ‘nature’ to be violent, and therefore that they cannot control their aggressiveness. Thus, using physical bullying against their peers is perceived as ‘normal’ boy’s behaviour. On the other hand, girls are taught that it is not proper for a woman to use physical violence. Thus, they tend to resort to indirect forms of bullying (such as “name calling” or “starting rumors”) to show their aggressiveness. On this point, Degges-White comments, “Daughters are raised with expectations that they will be ‘good girls’ and avoid ‘trouble’,” they are taught “how to use

verbal subterfuge, relational control, and social power to jockey for position in the social landscape” [*Psychology Today*]. Once again, we notice a contradiction in the established gender roles. Indeed, women are thought to be led by their irrational emotions, as opposed to men who are able to stay calm and think rationally. Yet, girls are expected to use “rational control” when dealing with playground’s quarrels, whereas society expects boys to get into one or more physical fights at some point in their life. Thus, according to Nofziger, this is the reason why bullying among boys is more prominent than bullying among girls in school settings. She goes further and comments:

Boys are more harshly judged than girls for breaking traditional gender rules, and as a result often engage in more physical bullying as a mean of asserting a heterosexual identity. In other words, boys’ participation in bullying is often a direct result of them trying to affirm their heterosexuality and ‘manliness’ (299).

Simply put, bullying among boys serves to ensure that gender roles are performed correctly, and that every boy possesses hegemonic masculine character traits. For example, a male pupil who is more interested in a traditional feminine activity (such as sewing) than in a traditional masculine activity (such as football) risks being harassed by his male peers for lacking “manliness.” Moreover, participating in the bullying in itself also serves to prove that one is masculine enough to perform acts of violence. The bully is presented as the ‘model’, the ‘perfect’ representation of hegemonic masculinity, and thus the authority who can judge who is performing their gender role well enough. Consequently, bullying reinforces the idea that every boy (and future men) should present hegemonic masculinity characteristics.

In 1997, professor of gender equality in education Christine Skelton put this theory into practice by conducting a research study among young students of Benwood Primary School. The target of this study was a class of twenty-four children (ten girls and fourteen boys) aged between six and seven-year-old. Benwood Primary School is situated in an underprivileged neighbourhood of Oldchester (England). Skelton observes that the school is often victim of vandalism and most of the male inhabitants of the area present characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, such as frequently being drunk and getting into fights, whereas a high proportion of the women of the neighbourhood are single mothers. According to

Skelton, “The overriding impression males in the area transmit between themselves and to women, is that women are there to serve them, are ‘stupid’ and ‘useless’ and, basically, powerless” (353). As we saw in the first part with the argument of reporter Christopher Dickey, sons tend to model their ideas of what a man should look like based on the image that they have of their father [*BBC News*]. Thus, it is not surprising that according to Skelton, at such a young age the male pupils of the class studied had already picked up on their father’s violent behaviour and had concluded that only one ‘man’ could rule among them. Skelton reports:

Whilst the girls had quite clearly defined friendship groups the boys tended to interact with each other on a more fluid basis. There were some tensions, however, not least between two boys, John and Shane, who were constantly arguing over and competing for what they called the 'first boss' position. Being 'first boss' meant being able to tell the other boys what to do and to achieve this status required some sophisticated manoeuvrings whereby attempts were made to outwit the teachers or successfully contravene one of the school rules and remain undetected. The extent to which the other boys did do as the 'first boss' instructed is highly debatable, as knowledge of the existence of this position seemed to be restricted to John and Shane. However, it is fair to say that it tended to be John or Shane who provoked competitive behaviour in the other boys. For example, if John or Shane had effectively played a 'trick' on Terry Blake [the class teacher] or circumvented one of the rules other boys would mimic their actions. (Skelton 354)

The term “first boss” implies the existence of a hierarchy among the male pupils of the class studied, as though one of them was the leader and the other boys were his followers. Indeed, Skelton explains that the “first boss” set the rules and ordered his peers around (he was the only one “able to tell the other boys what to do”). This status was achieved by overpowering the current authority of the class, that is Terry Blake, the teacher and a fellow male. Blake represented the ‘man’ who ‘ruled’ over them. By breaking the classroom’s rules (and thus, Blake’s rules), John and Shane wanted to show that they held more authority over their classmates than Blake did. Thus, this was a means for them to prove that they were the most dominant and powerful male of the group. In short, to John and Shane breaking the rules was a proof of their masculinity. As Nofziger argued earlier, boys are judged brutally for not performing their gender roles. Because the “first boss” represented the ideal masculinity (i.e. hegemonic masculinity), John and Shane were the ones setting the standard to reach if their classmates wanted to become a ‘real’ man. Consequently, their classmates started to not only “mimic their actions,” but also compete against one another in order to prove their masculinity and stay in the group. Thus, daring to “outwit the teachers” (i.e. the male authority figure) became

a means to measure their masculinity.

This presses the question; how are the “first boss” candidates chosen? Skelton did another research study in Oldchester (England), but this time in Deneway Primary School. The school is situated in a suburban area frequented by middle-class families, and could be considered as a ‘good’ school. The class studied consisted of thirty-three children (eighteen girls and fifteen boys) aged between nine and ten-year-old (361). Skelton observed that football held an important place among the male pupils of the school. The choice of this sport is not insignificant. According to Skelton, football combines many “aspects of hegemonic masculinity” such as “competitiveness, discipline, physical strength, and adventurousness” (362). These character traits were very important to determine one’s popularity according to Smittie, Dougie, and Ossie, three male pupils of the class studied.

*Smittie:* Ossie’s the most popular– he’s one of our best footballers.

*Dougie:* Matthew... and Mark Walker, they’re not like popular.

*Smittie:* They’re not very good footballers.

*Dougie:* They don’t play football much and that’s why they’re not popular. They’ll play with them but they don’t like talking to them as much. I know it’s a bit stupid like but that’s the way it is...

*Ossie:* Anyone who’s not very good at football... (Skelton 362)

Matthew and Mark Walker are cast as “not popular” because they are “not very good footballers,” whereas Ossie is said to be “the most popular” because he is the “best” footballer. It seems that their popularity is linked to how good of a footballer they are. However, as explained earlier, football is more than just a sport for these young men. It represents the ideal masculinity. Thus, what is measured here is not how good one is at football, but how masculine one is. It is as though the

sport becomes a test. If a boy is good at it, he is deemed masculine enough, and thus is granted popularity. But if he is “not very good” at it, he becomes an outcast and someone other boys “don’t like talking to” as much. We can see once again how important it is for male pupils to perform their gender roles correctly if they want to be accepted. As Skelton argues, “playing of football at leisure points during the school day had greater implications for the school’s gender regime than simply boys establishing male friendships” (362). Although football was a way for these boys to bond, it was also a means for them to depict their hegemonic masculine traits (“competitiveness, discipline, physical strength, and adventurousness”) and thus prove to their peers that they were worthy of acceptance. Thereupon, professor of social sciences Carrie Paechter argues that male pupils put a lot of energy into their social image for fear of being rejected by their peers and becoming the target of bullying. She states:

To be accepted as ‘fully masculine’ in a particular social grouping, one must therefore display certain characteristics and behaviours; without this, one is not seen fully as a member of a group. Hence, it is not simply a matter of claiming membership of a particular community of masculinity or femininity; one has to be accepted as a legitimate participant by those who are already members.<sup>27</sup>

These “characteristics and behaviours” that boys have to display if they want to be accepted are, as stated earlier, hegemonic masculine traits (such as possessing physical strength, athlete skills, being daring, etc). As Paechter explains, they cannot be part of the dominant group without these traits. She goes further and points out that it is not sufficient to merely possess these traits; boys also have to participate in the group’s activities to be considered a real member. Considering that the dominant group’s activities entail policing how well other male pupils perform their masculinity and ‘punishing’ them if they do it wrong, this means that boys who want to be part of this group have to become bullies to prove their membership. Thus, male pupils are not only pressured to reach a certain level of masculinity, but they also have to bully their peers to avoid becoming a target themselves.

To illustrate this argument, in 2012, researcher on education Martin Mills conducted a research study among the male students of Tamville State High School, situated in the middle-class area of Brisbane (Australia). Mills observed that it was

<sup>27</sup>Quoted in MILLS, Martin, p.95.

very rare for boys to stand up for bullied students. He compares their behaviour to survival. “You might get picked on [if you defend them],” one student told Mills, “cos they might be bigger and there’s a lot more of them” (99). Some students even participate in the bullying out of fear. “They have to join,” another student said (99). According to Mills, this was a way for these boys to ensure that they will not become the bullies’ new target (99). We can clearly see a hierarchy among these boys. The one who presents the most hegemonic masculinity character traits is placed at the top of the pyramid and rules over his peers.

According to the 2015 British *Anti-Bullying Programme’s* survey, in the United Kingdom, “bullying is the leading concern for boys contacting Childline.” Indeed, 45% of young people under the age of eighteen are or have been bullied, and 10% of young people admit to have attempted suicide because of bullying. Overall, 38% of young people “believe their school, university or college doesn’t take bullying seriously.” These numbers are a reflection of the normalisation of violence among boys. Not only do male pupils think that they are allowed to bully their peers, they also believe that they are expected to behave this way. As Nofziger explained earlier, boys resort to physical violence to assert their dominance because this is what they believe is expected of a ‘real’ man. Nofziger observes that physical dominance is “a key characteristic of hegemonic masculinity, as men are expected to be independent, strong, invincible, and brave,” and consequently, “being strong and aggressive, rather than being weak and a victim of violence, is also important within the ideal of masculinity” (314). By accepting this bullying behaviour, teachers implicitly tell their pupils that it is acceptable for boys to act violent, thus bullying is perpetuated not only in school settings, but also in the male pupils’ adult lives.

### 2.2.2 - Hegemonic Masculinity and Criminal Behaviours

According to *Statista*, in 2020, “there were approximately 77.42 thousand men and 3.41 thousand women in prison in the United Kingdom.” The gap between the number of male prisoners and female prisoners is quite shocking. Thereupon, professor of criminology James Messerschmidt comments that “crime is clearly a male-dominated social practice” (68). According to him, because of the pressure of

male gender roles, men who lack certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity character traits resort to criminal behaviours to ‘compensate’ their manliness. For example, a jobless man who cannot provide for his family might resort to robbery, or a single man who cannot get a woman’s attention might resort to rape. Needless to say that the pressure of male gender roles does not excuse these criminal behaviours. As Messerschmidt explains, “crime is a resource that may be summoned when men lack other resources to accomplish gender” (69). To illustrate this argument, he gives the example of Ron Santiago and his friends. Santiago relates that one night, as they were wandering through New York City, his friends and he decided to rob a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant.

We went inside and there were two customers and one guy behind the counter. Alvin grabbed the guy behind the counter and he stuck the gun to his head. I took the two customers and pushed them to the side and held the gun on them; the other guy just stood by the door. Alvin jumped over the counter and made the guy give up the money out of the safe, and threatened him, which was standard: don’t call the police, don’t use the phone, don’t touch the alarm, or anything.<sup>28</sup>

Messerschmidt comments, “robbery is a means of getting money when other resources (a job) are unavailable” (69). However, in the case of Santiago and his friends the robbery represented more than that. As we said earlier, male gender roles dictate that it is men’s responsibility to provide for their family. Men are expected to be in charge of making money and feeding their families, but because Santiago and his friends could not perform this particular gender role without a job, they had to resort to robbery.

Messerschmidt goes further and argues that the robbery also provided “a public ceremony of domination and humiliation of the victim” (69). Indeed, if we go back to Santiago’s confession, we note that the cashier was male (“one guy behind the counter”). In this scenario, the cashier represented the authority figure of the restaurant. He was supposed to be the one serving, charging, but also protecting the patrons. In short, the cashier was the dominant male figure in the restaurant. However, by holding him at gunpoint, Santiago and his friends asserted their dominance over him in front of his subordinates (i.e. his “two customers”). They even ordered him around (“don’t call the police, don’t use the phone, don’t touch the alarm”). As a consequence, the cashier lost his dominant status to them. This

<sup>28</sup>Quoted in Messerschmidt, James, p.69.

echoes the events seen earlier in Benwood Primary School. Just as John and Shane were trying to take their teacher's place as the dominant male figure in his classroom, Santiago and his friends were trying to take the cashier's place as the dominant male figure in his restaurant. Thus, this crime became a means for them to assert their superior masculinity.

Thereupon, professor of criminal psychology Julia Shaw counter-argues that it is not fair to link crimes to masculinity. She states, "It's punitive. Practically every descriptor we use for prison prides itself in its masculinity" [*Psychology Today*]. Admittedly, the first image that comes to mind when one thinks of prison is a cell full of dangerous looking men. But how far from reality is this prejudice? Shaw herself points out that in 2018, 90% of prisoners in the United Kingdom were male (83,000 inmates). Additionally, most violent crimes (meaning, crimes that resulted in someone being physically injured) were "committed by men," which are "more likely to result in incarceration than other kinds of crimes" [*Psychology Today*]. We explained earlier why men are more likely to be violent than women; because gender roles have taught them since a very young age that it is in men's 'nature' to be aggressive and to take risks. However, Shaw argues that it is doing them a disservice "to assume that men have no capacity for self-control" [*Psychology Today*]. According to Shaw, "It is irresponsible to socialize our boys thinking that they don't need to control themselves, that they can hurt each other without consequence, that it's uncool to act in a respectful and calm manner towards others" [*Psychology Today*]. There is a contradiction here; society teaches boys to be violent and not to worry about the consequences of their acts, yet it punishes them for doing said violent acts by imprisoning them. As Shaw points out, men are put "in cages to keep us safe" when their violence becomes 'out of control' [*Psychology Today*]. It is as though it was an attempt made by society to reverse their teaching and hope that inmates would better themselves in prison. However, professor of criminology Yvonne Jewkes argues that prison is where hegemonic masculinity is the most established (47).

Sociologist John Remy asserts that a prison could be compared to a "men's hut," that is a place "where those males who have earned the right to call themselves *men*, or are in the process of attaining this emblem of privilege, gather" (italic not mine).<sup>29</sup> The concept of men's hut implies that not only women are

<sup>29</sup>Quoted in JEWKES, Yvonne, p.47.

removed from this group, but also men who are not considered 'masculine' enough by their peers, that is men who do not 'deserve' to be called 'men'. Thereby, the criteria to fit in order to be part of the men's hut is those of hegemonic masculinity. This inevitably creates a hierarchy within prisoners, or as Jewkes puts it, an "unequal power relations among men" in which the ones who display the most masculinity dominate the ones who 'lack' it (47). Interviewed by Jewkes, Roy, an inmate of one of the men's prisons of the English Midlands, explains, "They are one or two bullies on the wing. They tend to pick on the weaker ones, those who look young and vulnerable. Everytime you go to a new prison you let it be known that, while you're a good guy, you're not to be messed around" (Jewkes 51). As we can see, the power imbalance here lays on the fact that one is younger and more vulnerable than the other, or to put it another way, one displays more hegemonic masculine traits than the other (that is maturity and physical strength). Consequently, the one who displays more masculinity gets to dominate the 'weaker' one. Thus, Jewkes concludes that prison maintains "masculine hegemony not only by excluding women but also by preying on weaker men" (48).

Roy's confession enlightens once again how important it is for men to perform masculinity in order to stay safe from their peers' bullying. Just as the male pupils of Deneway Primary School had to be good at football in order to prove their masculinity and be accepted, male inmates have to project an appearance of aggressiveness and physical strength to avoid being "messed around." It can be argued that executing male gender roles is a lifetime performance. Men are expected to fit into the ideal hegemonic masculinity characteristics every day throughout the course of their lives because going against this expectation would lead to them losing their place at the top of not only the gender hierarchy, but also the male gender hierarchy. Thereupon, Jewkes asserts, "'Wearing a mask' is arguably the most common strategy for coping with the rigors of imprisonment, and (...) inmates feel it necessary to adopt a facade while inside" (53). Thus, men are pressured not to be their true self, but to merely act (that is, perform their gender roles) in order to be accepted by society and their peers. As we will see later in this study, this constant pressure takes a toll on their mental health.

The existence of a hierarchy entails the presence of carefully established categories; one at the top and one at the bottom. Jewkes observes that, in prison settings, professional criminals and armed robbers are at the top of the hierarchy,

while rapists and pedophiles are at the bottom (52). Thereupon, Messerschmidt adds that there are others categories, such as the “rats” (prisoners who pass on information to officials), the “merchants” (prisoners who deal drugs within the prison), the “gorillas” (prisoners who use violence to assert their power) and the sexual slaves to their “protectors” (young inmates who offer sexual services to stronger inmates in exchange for their protection) (67). This last information is interesting considering that heterosexuality is a major trait of hegemonic masculinity. On this point, psychiatrist Terry Allen Kupers argues that “Rape is not about sex, it is about power and domination,” as we will see in the next part (433).

### 2.2.3 - Sexual Assaults: Men’s Domination and Isolation

On October 5, 2017, actress Ashley Judd was the first of more than sixty other female victims to come forward and accuse former film producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault. Ten days later, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” This started the #MeToo movement [*Chicago Tribune*]. According to #MeToo founder Tarana Burke, “This is a movement that deals specifically with sexual violence (...) And it is a framework for how to do the work of ending sexual violence.” Not only does the movement focus on healing sexual assault survivors, but it also provides them with a safe space where they can share their experience with other survivors, and move forward together [*Time*]. On October 10, 2017, Terry Crews, one of the most muscular actors in Hollywood, tweeted: “This whole thing with Harvey Weinstein is giving me PTSD. Why? Because this kind of thing happened to ME.” Crews did not name his aggressor, however he stated that it was a man of “power” and “influence” [*The Guardian*]. On June 26, 2018, Crews appeared before the Senate judiciary committee and related his assault.

In 2016, while at a party with my wife, I was sexually assaulted by a successful Hollywood agent. The assault lasted only minutes, but what he was effectively telling me while he held my genitals in his hand was that he held the power, that he was in control. This is how toxic masculinity permeates culture. As I shared my story, I was told over and over that this was not abuse, that this was just a joke, that this was just horseplay. But I can say that one man’s horseplay is another man’s humiliation. And I chose to tell my story and share my experience, to stand in solidarity with millions of other survivors in the world, that I know how hard it is to come forward, I know the shame associated with assault. It happened to me. I’m not a small or unsecured man, but in that moment and in the time following I’ve never

felt more emasculated. [C-SPAN]

We see once again that violence was used to showcase a man's superiority over another one. Interestingly, Crews associated his "genitals" with "power" and being "in control." As we will see later in this study, in the context of hegemonic masculinity male's genitals are a reflection of one's masculinity. Thus, by having a hold on Crews' genitals, the Hollywood agent was telling the actor that his masculinity was now his. As a consequence, Crews lost the privilege of calling himself a 'man' for the duration of the assault, and was ejected from the "men's hut" (to quote sociologist John Remy). Hence, we understand why he felt humiliated, shameful, and "emasculated."

Crews also advised to stop excusing men's violence as "just a joke" because this mindset takes away the validation of male victims' trauma, yet the actor was met with rape jokes and sniggers from his peers. Indeed, rapper 50 Cent posted a picture on his Instagram account in the aftermath of Crews' statement, ridiculing the actor. Attached to an image of a shirtless Crews, the post said, "I got raped. My wife just watched." "LOL," the rapper proceeded to comment, "[what] is going on out here man. Terry: I froze in fear... they would have had to take me to jail" [*The Washington Post*]. The opinion that Crews should have fought back was shared by other male celebrities, including comedian D.L. Hughley, who on August 10, 2018, was invited on *Vlad TV*. Hughley expressed his confusion as to how Crews let himself get into this situation. "I don't understand," he told the male host who was laughing at the sexual assault. "God gave you muscles so you can say 'no'." The comedian said that if he had been in Crews' position, he would have physically hurt the Hollywood agent. "You can't touch my dick in front of my wife (...) I ain't ready to let that happen" [*Vlad TV*].

We notice a difference between how Crews' and Judd's confessions were received by their peers. Judd was met with warmth and support from her fellow actresses. In the wake of her statement, the #MeToo and Time's Up movements were created, other male sex offenders got caught (such as actor Bill Cosby and singer R. Kelly), and several feminist marches were organised all over the world in support of the victims [*Chicago Tribune*]. Compared to this, Crews was ridiculed by his peers. As we explained earlier, from their point of view Crews' assault signified his lack of masculinity. He was no longer a man, and thus no longer 'one

of them'. One internaut commented, "Terry Crews is big and strong enough to defend himself. He could've beat the man to a pulp if he wanted to. Maybe he liked it?" Another joked, "You must of liked it cuz you didn't do or say shit!! –Mrs. Crews during the ride home" [*Vlad TV*]. These comments echo our earlier observation; men are expected to constantly perform their gender roles. Because gender roles dictate that men should answer violence with violence, they are expected to 'fight back' when assaulted, regardless of the power imbalance between the victim and the offender. Following this mindset, if a man 'chooses' to freeze in fear in face of danger, it means that he is 'secretly enjoying' his assault, which turns him into a willing victim and thus nullifies the violent act in itself. According to university reader in international law Sandesh Sivakumaran, this sort of backlash is the reason why male victims of sexual assault are afraid to come forward.

In 2005, Sivakumaran conducted a research study on male/male rape in order to demonstrate this argument. Let's first define the term 'male/male rape'. Sivakumaran makes a distinction between the term "male/male rape" and the term "homosexual rape."

The term 'male/male rape' describes the rape of one man by another man. There are no additional meanings of the term, and no connotations attached to it. The same is not true of the term 'homosexual rape.' (...) the term homosexual rape has two meanings, the etymological and the everyday. The etymological simply describes the rape of a member of one sex by a member of the same sex and can therefore be equated with male/male rape, while the everyday describes a rape in which one or both of the parties are homosexual. (Sivakumaran 1285-86)

To put it simply, while male/male rape and homosexual rape refer to the rape of a man by another man, in the case of homosexual rape, one or both of the protagonists have to be homosexual. Despite the distinction made between these two sorts of rape, Sivakumaran observes that society usually views cases of male/male rape as a homosexual man raping a heterosexual man (1286). It is as though the idea that a man could commit such a crime against another man was unfathomable unless one of them was 'abnormal', that is homosexual. It is expected of 'normal' men to be heterosexual and therefore to only crave sex from women. On this point, Sivakumaran explains that this assumption is made because society views rape as a sexual issue instead of a "power/dominance" issue. According to him, "Such usage would thus implicitly perpetuate the notion that it is only homosexual men who rape," and hence further the prejudice that every homosexual

man is a predator (1286).

As explained earlier, rapists use sexual assault to assert their dominance over their victims, and this is also true in the case of male/male rape. Taking this into account, and the fact that according to Sivakumaran “the majority of perpetrators are heterosexual” (1286), we could argue that the reason behind male rapists’ motive is to ‘punish’ whoever they judge are not performing their masculinity well enough. This presses the question, what are the characteristics that male rapists deem not masculine enough in their victims? According to feminist activist Catherine MacKinnon, men victim of sexual assault are perceived as too “weak” or too “effeminate” by their perpetrator. She states, “[they] are thereby stripped of their social status as men. They are feminized: made to serve the function and play the role customarily assigned to women as men’s social inferiors.” Simply put, the damages of rape are not only physical to male victims, but they are also social. A man who was raped by another man is perceived as the ‘woman’ of his rapist. He has been deprived of his masculinity and therefore can no longer benefit from men’s social privileges as he is now perceived as a feminized version of himself. Thereupon, MacKinnon states, “[t]his lowers the victim’s status, making him inferior as a man by social standards. For a man to be sexually attacked, by placing him in a woman’s role, demeans his masculinity; he loses it, so to speak.” Consequently, male victims are afraid to come forward and sue their perpetrator for fear of being labelled as ‘weak’, ‘effeminate’, or ‘gay’. According to Sivakumaran, this leads to several traumas for the male victims.

Part of the rape trauma syndrome is the non-reporting of, or a delay in the reporting of, the crime. This may be due to feelings of shame, confusion, guilt, stigma, fear, or a mixture thereof. Shame due to the loss of honor accorded to victims of rape by certain societies; confusion regarding why that particular individual was singled out; guilt as to whether anything more could have been done to resist the rape; stigma as a result of society’s treatment of survivors of rape; and fear of retaliation if the story is ever made public. (Sivakumaran 1289)

This statement brings us back to the Internet comments that actor Crews had to face in the wake of his confession. The idea that men should be able to fight back when targeted regardless of the consequences is perpetuated. Thus, male victims feel guilty for being too ‘weak’ in face of the assault. In a sense, they believe that it is their fault for not ‘resisting’ the rape, which leads to feelings of shame. According to Sivakumaran, male victims are also confused as they start to question what they

did to 'deserve' the rape. Additionally, because of the stigma that society holds against male rape survivors that we saw earlier (the idea that they are no longer men and should be treated as their rapist's women) survivors also fear being rejected by their peers. Consequently, they keep quiet and rarely report the crime.

We are now going to focus on the assumption made by society (which worsens rape trauma) that states that if a male victim did not fight back, he must have 'enjoyed' the sexual assault. One male survivor reported that the first question police asked him when he reported his sexual assault was, "Did you come?" When the victim truthfully admitted that he did, the policeman concluded, "Well, probably you really wanted this to happen. You wanted to have sex with a man, then you got scared. And now you want to say it was something else" (Sivakumaran 1292). Interestingly, Crews observed that he too was told that what happened to him "was not abuse," but merely a "joke." Yet again, we see that the thought that a man could sexually assault another man is unfathomable, hence society tries to rationalize the violent act for fear of 'tainting' the heterosexuality of men. Thus, the blame is put on the victim and not on the perpetrator; he ejaculated (a believed proof of men's enjoyment of sexual acts) and therefore was consenting. However, according to Sivakumaran, "it is not uncommon for survivor to have become sexually aroused during the rape and this may even have been the intention of the perpetrator," thus "'a major strategy' used by some male/male rapists is to try and get the victim to ejaculate" (1291). Because ejaculation is too often used as a synonym for sexual enjoyment, this serves as a 'proof' to the rapist that he was right about the victim's homosexuality (and therefore lack of masculinity), and the victim is left to question his sexual orientation. Indeed, they are embarrassed that they would be accused of having taken pleasure from the assault and that their ejaculation would be interpreted as them being, in fact, gay. This leads to confusion about their sexual orientation. As Sivakumaran explains, "These insinuations that the victim is gay may further confuse already vulnerable victims and lead those victims who had not previously questioned their sexuality to do so" (1291). He refers to this type of rape as "queer bashing" (1291).

Sivakumaran defines "queer bashing" as a "hate crime" committed in form of sexual assault with the purpose of denigrating the victim sexual orientation. According to Sivakumaran, "the perpetrator may make derogatory comments about gay men during the course of the rape," resulting to the victim further questioning

his sexuality (1291). There is a paradox here. The rape is done by hegemonic masculine men who believe that heterosexuality is 'superior' than homosexuality, yet they commit an act which they deem as 'effeminate' to prove how much more masculine they are compared to the victims. However, we need to remember that according to Sivakumaran, rapists use the assault as a form of sexual violence to assert their power over their victims. As said earlier, rape is not a sexual issue, but a power/dominance issue. This seems to reflect the discord within the male gender. While women benefit from the support of feminism, men are not only isolated in face of danger, but they also fear one another as most of the danger they risk facing come from fellow men.

In this second part, we studied how hegemonic masculine traits, more precisely domestic and sexual violence, manifest themselves throughout men's lives. Indeed, hegemonic masculine men use violence to assert their dominance not only over women, but also over other men whom they deem 'not masculine enough'. This furthers the discord between genders, and creates tension within the male gender. A fierce competition to know who performs their masculinity better is established, which forces men to perform their gender role from a very young age for fear of retribution. If women can count on the support of their peers if they want to break free from their gender role, men risk facing violence and humiliation if they attempt to do so. Thus, a hierarchy is established within the male gender, with the most masculine one at the top. But what are the struggles men have to face to stay on top of this pyramid? We will aim to answer this question in the next part.

### 3 - PART THREE: THE DIFFICULTIES OF PERFORMING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

*“Men are recognizing that they have been forced to conform to a very narrow and rather two-dimensional picture of maleness and manhood that they have never had the freedom to question.”*

*Andrew Cohen*

We saw in the previous parts of this thesis that women are expected to perform their gender role properly if they want to be considered ‘good girls’ or ‘wifey material’. If a woman goes against her gender role, she risks being categorised as ‘bossy’, ‘slutty’, or if she happens to be a feminist, as a ‘men’s hater’. Does this apply to men, too? Are they subject to social mockery if they decide to go against their gender role? According to professor of management David Mayer, the answer is yes. Mayer argues that “men too face backlash when they don’t adhere to masculine gender stereotypes –when they show vulnerability, act nicer, display empathy, express sadness, exhibit modesty, and proclaim to be feminists” [*Harvard Business Review*]. It appears that men who choose to stray from performing masculinity risk being rejected by their peers. As we saw in our second part, it is a necessity for men to perform their gender role if they want to be part of the men’s hut. Thereupon, Connell explains that “there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men” (*Masculinities* 78). It has been established that the more a man showcases traits of hegemonic masculinity, the more he is seen as belonging to a ‘superior’ masculine class by his peers. We have also established that masculinity is a gender role, and thus is meant to be performed. This presses the question; is constantly playing a role harmful for men’s well-being? According to Mayer, “trying to make men adhere to gender norms, for example, in terms of attire, is detrimental in terms of allowing men to fully express themselves” [*Harvard Business Review*]. This argument will be the main focus of this third part.

In order to analyse the struggles of performing masculinity, we are going to focus our study on two aspects of men’s life; their sexual life and their mental health. We should specify that hegemonic masculinity can impact other aspects of

men's lives (such fatherhood for example) and hegemonic masculine traits differ slightly depending on a man's ethnicity.<sup>30</sup> We should also clarify that this part centres around men who wish to stay in the men's hut, and therefore men who wish to be hegemonic masculine. Thus, we will not focus on men who openly disregard gender roles and choose to express their gender however they want.

Firstly, we will study how hegemonic masculinity influences men's sexual lives. More precisely, we will see how important being potent and sexually active is to hegemonic masculine men. We will also see that having sexual partners can only be considered 'manly' if the said partner is female. Indeed, being heterosexual is another requirement to be considered as hegemonic masculine. This will lead us to our second section, in which we will analyse the impacts of performing male gender roles on men's mental health. In this second part, we will study how men struggle to repress their emotions in order to appear more masculine. As we will see, this behaviour can lead to alcoholism, depression, and in worse cases, suicide.

<sup>30</sup>Connell observes "the subordination of women and the hierarchy of power among men, particularly the oppression of black men and gay men" in the context of hegemonic masculinity (*Masculinities* 24).

### 3.1 - THE INFLUENCE OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY ON MEN'S SEXUAL LIVES

“I’m a virgin, I always have been,” declares Andy Stitzer (played by Steve Carell) in the 2005 American romantic comedy *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*. Stitzer is portrayed as a forty-year-old man who would rather play with his action figures than date around. The film presents his virginity as an ‘abnormality’ that needs fixing. Thereupon, film critic Manohla Dargis asserts, “it seems hard to believe that anyone, especially an apparently healthy man living in the age of Madonna and Maxim, Pamela and Paris, has managed to avoid getting some with someone, somewhere, at some point” [*The New York Times*]. This statement implies that men are expected to be sexually active pass a certain age. Sexual intercourse seems to be something unavoidable, something pushed onto men by society, and therefore a part of their gender role. According to Dargis, men who do not perform this particular gender role are deemed unhealthy or (like Andy Stitzer) odd and unmasculine.

We saw in our introduction that being sexually active is a hegemonic masculine trait. Thus, men who wish to stay in the men’s hut need to live up to this expectation. In this first part, we are going to study the influence of hegemonic masculinity on men’s sexual lives and the harms it can lead to. To do so, we will first draw the link between potency and masculinity. We will see that penis size too often serves as a measurement for men’s masculinity, exposing them to anxiety over the size of their genitals and their sexual performance. This will lead us to our second part, in which we will focus on the importance of being sexually active. We will see that hegemonic masculine men compete against each other to have as many sexual partners as they can, putting immense pressure on themselves, and that men who are still virgins past a certain age risk being mocked by their peers. Finally, in our third part, we will question why hegemonic masculinity requires that ‘real’ men be heterosexual, and that other sexualities be marginalised.

#### 3.1.1 - Male Genitals as a Symbol of Masculinity

During one of his 2016 rallies, American senator Marco Rubio implied that

then-presidential candidate Donald Trump had an ‘abnormal’ small penis. Rubio said, “Have you seen his hands? And you know what they say about men with small hands?” Trump, who has been called “short-fingered vulgarian” by the press for years, was quick to reply that there was “no problem, I guarantee” with the size of his genitals [*The Intelligencer*]. In 2019, Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte claimed that his penis “points all the way up,” alluding to its big size. “If God gave me a small penis,” Duterte said, “I would have cut it from the altar” [*The New York Times*]. These comments about male genitals were not stated by men only. For example, in 2004, American girl group Destiny’s Child proclaimed in their song *Soldier* that they were looking for a man “known to carry big things, if you know what I mean.” In 2008, fashion designer Victoria Beckham commented on her husband David Beckham’s Armani pants commercial, saying, “I’m proud to see his penis 25 ft tall. It’s huge. It’s enormous” [*The Independent*]. These events makes us wonder why is it considered acceptable to talk about men’s penis size so openly? And why does size matter so much? Trump took offence at being accused of having a small penis. Duterte implied that having small genitals should be considered shameful and useless (according to him, men with small penis should “cut it” off). Likewise, women seem to associate big genitals with attractiveness, which implies that they deem the opposite unappealing.

Thereupon, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu draws a link between masculinity and virility. According to him, the two are “indissociable” and represent a man’s “point of honour” (12). Before we delve into this argument, we should define ‘virility’. According to historian Jean-Paul Thuillier, the word *vir* (root of the word ‘virile’) does not exist in French; it had instead been replaced by the word *homme* (which means ‘man’ in English and is derived from Latin *homo*) (44). This brings us back to Bourdieu’s argument; masculinity and virility are linked. However, according to Thuillier, *vir* cannot simply be reduced to *homo*. He suggests translating *vir* by ‘male’ instead, which he deems a better suited definition of virility (44). In other words, virility refers to traits associated with manliness (‘male’). However, in the context of virility, we are talking about a specific aspect of manliness. As Thuillier explains, *vir* is also the root of the Latin word *virilis*, which refers to a “well-hung, well-endowed” penis (46). Bourdieu goes further and adds that “sexual potency” is also a factor of one’s virility. According to him, “virility” is demonstrated “through the attestations of sexual potency –deflowering

of the bride, abundant male offspring, etc.– which are expected of a ‘real’ man. Hence the phallus, always metaphorically present but very rarely named, concentrates all the collective fantasies of fecundating potency” (12). Therefore, we shall define virility as a testament of a man’s masculinity, which is conveyed through his genitals. The more potent his genitals are, the more masculine he is perceived by society. As we saw in the previous part, displaying masculinity is very important if a man wants to be accepted by his peers. Thus, we understand why men have no shame in talking about the size of their genitals so openly. Sexual potency is another factor of virility. It is also too often a synonym for sexual prowess. As Bourdieu argues, potency is associated with the sexual act of “deflowering” a woman and having several “offspring.” This implies that a viril man is knowledgeable in bed, and his sperms are healthy enough (fertile) to impregnate a woman. Thus, potent (big) genitals are considered attractive to women.

All these values put on penis size already existed in Antiquity. According to Thuillier, Roman men used to compare their genitals and celebrate those with the more potent ones. Emperor Commodus went as far as to “generously” pay “a man with an impressive penis” (Thuillier 46). During the Renaissance, European men wore codpieces, a “pouchlike” garment “located at the crotch” and worn over their tights. The purpose of the codpiece was “to emphasize male genitalia” [*Britannica*]. As we can see, men were already praised for having a big penis in Antiquity, and in the fifteenth century, they were already pressured to give an appearance of virility and potency through the size of their genitals. This pressure is perpetuated to this day and can lead to severe insecurities.

In 2014, psychologist Audrey McKinlay conducted a research study with the University of Canterbury (New Zealand) among one hundred ten heterosexual individuals (forty-three women and sixty-seven men) all in their early twenties. The participants took an online survey related to penis size. The majority of the male participants confessed that “they would like a longer penis and they believe that women would like them to have a longer [one]” (227). About the possibility of altering penis size via “diet, exercise, or drugs,” 49% of the male participants and 44% of the female participants answered that they believed it was doable (227). However, only 16% of the male participants admitted having “consulted a medical practitioner regarding penis size or sexual function” (227).

These results show that men in general are not satisfied with the size of their penis and wish for it to be longer. We notice that although male participants believed that women would rather have a sexual partner with a bigger penis size, female participants stated that “they did not consider a larger than average penis to be desirable” (227). Therefore, it could be argued that this pressure and anxiety over penis size is not put on men because of women’s demands. According to McKinlay, one of the reasons why men worry about the size of their genitals is because they not only “equate manhood and masculinity with penis size,” but they also “associate a larger penis with attributes such as strength, dominance, power, and the capacity to love and be loved” (225). In other words, because male genitals embody masculinity, a man’s personhood (and thus, his worth in society) depends on the size of his penis. A man who has the ‘misfortune’ of being born with a small penis risks being mocked and being perceived as weak, submissive, and impotent. He is deemed as ‘worthless’ by society as he cannot perform his gender role correctly (referring to, as Bourdieu puts it, “deflowering the bride” and having an “abundant male offspring”). Moreover, because men also believe that their worth of being loved depends on the size of their penis, they often resort to taking pills or undertaking surgeries in order to enlarge their genitals. According to McKinlay, “there has been an increase in the number of men seeking cosmetic procedures to increase penis size” in recent years (225). She argues that this is because society associates larger penis with “sexual success” (228). Following this mindset, if a larger penis means being loved by women, it should also mean being sexually successful with them. This presses the question; what about men who suffer from actual impotence?

In 2017, psycho-oncologist Suzanne Chambers, led a research study among male post prostate cancer treatment patients. It was revealed that the majority of those who suffer from erectile dysfunction feel “a ‘loss of potency’ which reflects not only their ability to have erection but also their ‘sense of being a man’” (Chambers Table S2). If we go back to Bourdieu’s diagram about the differences between male and female bodies (see annex, figure 2, page 129), we see that the male body is associated with hardness and upward movements, whereas the female body is characterised by its softness and downward movements. Therefore, removing the phallus (hardness) from a male body deprives it of its manliness and relegates it to a female body. As we saw earlier, men who cannot perform their

gender roles correctly (“deflowering the bride,” meaning having sexual encounters with women, and having an “abundant male offspring,” meaning impregnating them) are deemed ‘worthless’ by society. Incidentally, one of the male patients described his experience as feeling “worthless” and “trying to keep himself invisible” (Chambers Table S2). As we can see, there is a feeling of shame associated with impotence. According to Chambers, many men use their erection as an “evidence of their virility or sexual prowess,” and consequently many male patients viewed impotence as “a threat to their masculinity” (66). This makes us wonder why do young boys believe that their masculinity is defined by their sexual prowess, so much so that they feel depressed if they lack it when growing up?

### 3.1.2 - The Importance of Being Sexually Active

Interviewed by R W Connell, Patrick Vincent, a seventeen-year-old Australian boy, said that he lost his virginity at the age of thirteen. “Just got onto a chick and ended up going all over her,” he said. “Then I just kept it up” (*Masculinities* 103). Twenty-one-year-old Eel, who lost his virginity at the age of seventeen, confessed that his first time was “with an older woman, who taught [him] a hell of a lot” (*Masculinities* 103). We notice two similarities in these statements. First, Vincent and Eel both lost their virginites in their adolescence. Second, the female partners do not appear to be important in both cases. Indeed, none of them mentioned their names, their ages or how long they had been dating (if they were in a relationship with these girls). Eel, who specified that his female partner was older, only gave away this detail to highlight the second part of his statement, that he lost his virginity to an experienced woman. What they did with these girls seems to be more important than who they did it with. Concluding this interview, Connell observes that “sex seems casual and easy” for these men, but nonetheless “very important” (*Masculinities* 106). Thereupon, twenty-nine-year-old Alan Rubin, who lost his virginity at the age of fifteen, mockingly mimics “the breathless boy-talk about ‘Have-you-done-this-have-you-done-that-have-you-done-this?’” in high school (*Masculinities* 106). It seems that teenage boys tend to put a lot of importance on sex, and if we are to believe Rubin’s recollection of his high school years, there seems to be a competition among boys to know who has had the

most sexual experiences.

Sexuality professor Abbey Hyde led a research study in 2004 to explore teenagers' perspective on sex in Ireland, and came to the same conclusion. Two hundred and twenty-six pupils from ten different Irish high schools, in both rural and urban areas, were interviewed. Hyde observed that over all, the “discourse of sex [was] male driven” and “[was] bound up with traditional manifestations of masculinity” (49). In other words, sex was perceived by these teenage boys as a way to dominate and perform their masculinity as having sex with a girl meant ‘conquering’ her. Hyde explains, “sex is perceived as a commodity to be chosen, consumed and discarded, in an individualistic fashion based on the primary of ‘me’ and ‘now’” (50). This brings us back to Connell’s argument; sex is viewed as a casualty by teenage boys. It seems that they put more value on the physical aspect of the act, and not on the emotional side. They seem to give more importance to the fact that for the duration of the encounter, they have successfully persuaded a girl to satisfy their “primary” and “individualistic” needs. A male pupil from a rural school admitted, “For a girl it’s special, for the lads it’s like, ‘Oh yeah, try to get the leg over –tell all the lads about it’” (Hyde 57). As we saw in the previous part, publicly showcasing masculinity is important if a man wants to be accepted by his peers. Therefore, it is not surprising that these boys used sex as a means to pride themselves to their peers and to assert their dominance over the girls they have ‘conquered’. Hyde comments, “the notion of sexual conquest and of women as objects to be consumed and discarded was expressed most strongly” among teenage boys (50). Thus, it can be argued that there is in fact a competition among teenage boys to know who has had the most sexual experiences. The more “sexual conquest” a boy has, the more masculine he is perceived by his peers. Thus, sex is treated as some sort of reward that validates one’s masculinity.

Interestingly, female pupils seemed to be aware of this fact. A female pupil from a rural school pointed out, “A fella will chance his arm and if you’re good-looking he’ll say, ‘I’ll give it a shot and see can I get her’, and if he doesn’t, he doesn’t care, he just goes on to the next one” (Hyde 50). On this point, when asked where did they receive information about sex, 33% of male pupils and 31% of female pupils answered from friends, while only 7% of male pupils and 14% of female pupils answered from their parents (Hyde 14). While the percentage of female pupils who relied on their parents to educate them about sex was low (14%), it was

still significantly higher than the percentage of male pupils who gave the same answer (7%). Hyde argues that “young women are much more likely than young men to have received information about sexual issues from their mothers” because mothers tend to assume that their daughters “need to be protected from sexual advances of boys and, ultimately, from pregnancy” (18). This argument echoes Bourdieu’s habitus theory. It is assumed that boys cannot control their sexual desire, and therefore “girls need to be protected” from them. Simultaneously, girls are thought not to be interested in sex, yet they are made responsible for boys’ lack of control over their urges. Therefore, as Bourdieu explained, mothers warn their daughters about boys’ ‘ill intentions’, and they teach them how to act ‘properly’ around men to avoid unwanted attention. Hyde noted that majority of participants (male and female) believed that boys wanted to have sex more than girls. She refers to it as the “male heterosexual drive” (50).

Psychologist Roy Baumeister defines ‘sex drive’ as “the sexual motivation usually focused on craving for sexual activity and sexual pleasure (...) A person with higher sex drive would be one with more intense or more frequent desires, or both, for sex” (244). Simply put, ‘sex drive’ refers to a person’s desire for sexual encounters. Someone with a higher sex drive will seek sexual activities more often than the average person. In 2001, Baumeister led a research study about men and women’s behaviours, cognitions and emotions regarding sex in the United States. According to him, men have “more frequent thoughts about sex” and they experience “spontaneous sexual arousal several times per day” compared with “only a couple times per week” for women (245). When it comes to masturbation, he commented, “Women and girls are less likely to masturbate than men and boys (...) and women who do masturbate do so less frequently than men” (251). On the other hand, the majority of men “reported masturbating at least once per week,” and “even past the age of 60, men masturbate more than women” (251). These results show that men in general have a higher sex drive than women.

As to why women in general have a lower sex drive, feminist writer Stevi Jackson suggests that it is because of the way society teaches girls about sexual intercourse. She argues, “Terms such as penetration or the insertion of the penis into the vagina give the impression of male activity and female passivity,” and consequently sex is viewed as “something that would be done to them” (23). For example, girls are taught that boys take their virginity, or in less aggressive terms,

that they give their virginity to boys. Either way, virginity is seen as something that girls lose to boys, and therefore it is something that never completely belongs to them. As Jackson explains, sex itself is described by teenage girls as “something they ‘gave’” (27). Interviewed by Jackson, a young girl confessed that she does not masturbate. “I wouldn’t touch myself down there!” she said, because no one “had the right to do so except her future husband” (Jackson 28). While the majority of teenage boys see sex (and their penis) as a means to dominate and assert their masculinity, the majority of teenage girls see sex (and their vagina) as a sacred gift that they give away to boys.

Jackson adds that “women’s sexual desire” is too often associated with “a sort of reproductive urge” (23). This echoes Hyde’s earlier argument; mother teach their daughters about the ‘danger’ of sex (i.e. the danger of becoming pregnant) instead of telling them that sex can be enjoyable. As a consequence, teenage girls equate sex with pregnancy. Hydes points out the difference between how parents educate their sons and their daughters about sex. During her study, she observed that “fathers were stronger disciplinarians” to their daughters (33). According to Hydes, fathers in general expect their daughters to save their virginity, whereas they seem less rigorous and controlling when it comes to their sons’ sexual lives. Many female pupils expressed “the relative liberty that their brothers had and the different messages they were getting” (Hydes 34). Indeed, parents tend to accept (and to some extent, to expect) that their teenage sons are sexually active. The warning that sons get is also different. If teenage girls are taught about accidental pregnancies and are thus talked out of having sex, teenage boys are encouraged to have sexual intercourse and are taught to practice safe sex. A male pupil related, “[Fathers] would tell you that if you are going out to bring protection with you. (...) Just to take [a condom] with you... that by chance... you should have one with you” (Hydes 64). As we can see, since their adolescence, boys are expected to have higher sex drive than girls and they are even encouraged to act upon their urge, which could explain Baumeister’s findings.

According to these previous studies, male gender roles expect boys to become sexually active and increase their sex drive in their adolescence. But what happens if a man is still a virgin in his adult life? In 2014, columnist Travis McKnight confessed to *The Guardian* that he was twenty-three-year-old and still a virgin. McKnight recalled growing up in a society that views sex as “what separates

helpless, scrawny boys from real, masculine men.” This brings us back to Hydes’ study; there seems to be a hierarchy among boys when it comes to sex. Because men view sex as a testament of their masculinity, or as McKnight put it, as “the pinnacle ‘achievement’ that validates one’s manliness,” men with the most sexual experience are placed at the top of the male pyramid, whereas virgin men are seen as weak and unattractive “boys.” As we saw earlier, virginity often connotes femininity (we can think of Mary the Virgin, or girls saving their virginity for a ‘special’ man). Thus, society sees virgin men as lacking masculinity and society chases them out of the men’s hut. Consequently, virgin men are treated as inferior to hegemonic masculine men (who are considered the ‘norm’).

According to psychotherapist Sam Louie, virgin men are more likely to be victims of social mockery, or as Louie puts it, “virgin-shaming” [*Psychology Today*]. Sociologist Colby Fleming defines ‘virgin-shaming’ as “a phenomenon whereby an individual is called out or made fun of for lacking sexual experience” (227). In other words, virgin-shaming refers to the act of judging and belittling a person because of their virginity. According to Louie, “the world-view is if you haven’t had sex by 30, you must be not only sexually inadequate, defective, and inept, but also socially” [*Psychology Today*]. To put it another way, society seems to think that if a man has not had sex pass a certain age, he must be ‘abnormal’ or lying about his virginity. We saw this happening to *Bachelor* star Colton Underwood in 2018. Underwood was twenty-six-year-old when he appeared on the reality show and confessed being a virgin. His virginity was then discussed in the American talk show *The View* where co-host Sunny Hostin commented, “There’s something fishy because he’s an ex-football player, he’s not overly religious, he has said... Yet, he’s a virgin? Why?” Journalist Abby Huntsman informed her, “He said he wants to wait for the right feeling, for the right person,” to which Hostin answered amid the audience’s laughter, “Oh, come on, Colton! I don’t buy it!” As we can see, there is a stigma behind virgin adult men. Men and women alike (as shown by the example above) tend to shame men who are inexperienced in sex. Gender roles teach us that men have a higher sex drive and crave sexual intercourse more than women do, therefore it is ‘abnormal’ if a man is still a virgin by his late twenties. Just as Hostin did, society tends to question the motive behind their virginity, and if none is found, the virgin man is laughed at and shamed. McKnight told *The Guardian*, “Virgins often find themselves the butt of jokes and the center

of bad plot lines from popular teen movies –all of which can easily make you feel inferior, and beyond insecure.” As we will see later in this study, the pressure of performing male gender roles can have severe repercussions on men’s mental health.

According to journalist Megan Kelly, another speculation that society tends to make about virgin men is that they must be gay [*The Strand*]. In the next part, we are going to see why homosexuality is often used as an insult in the context of hegemonic masculinity.

### 3.1.3 - Hegemonic Masculinity and Heteronormativity

As we saw in the previous part, male gender roles expect boys to seek sexual intercourse from the moment they reach puberty. However, this intercourse is expected to be exclusively between a man and a woman. Thus, homosexual intercourse is to be rejected. According to feminist author Scarlet Friedman, heterosexuality is “frequently assumed to be natural” (5). Friedman argues that this assumption is based on two frameworks: sociobiology and Marxism.

Let’s first focus on the sociobiological aspect of this argument. According to Friedman, sociobiology believes that every man and woman ‘naturally’ possess the need to reproduce in order to survive as a species. As Friedman explains, “The biological goal which is deemed to be the most important determining force affecting each and every man and woman –and the social relations between them– is the reproduction of young (...) Social relations, then, are seen to be predominantly instinctual” (6). Therefore, because a child can only be conceived when a man’s sperm fertilizes a woman’s egg, sociobiology theorises that heterosexuality is the ‘natural’ course of humankind. Marxism adds to this theory that it is a necessity for human beings to bring other human beings into the world in order to survive economically as a species. Friedman explains, Marxist theory believes “economic development to be the ultimate determining force in history,” and thus “men, who daily remake their own life, begin to make other men, to propagate their own kind” (12-3). To put it simply, the goal of Marxist theory is to bring children into the world with the hope that they will carry forward the

economy of their country in their adult lives. We could argue that another reason why heterosexuality is considered 'natural' is because of religion. As we saw in our first part, the three monotheist religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) believe that God created a man and a woman (Adam and Eve) in order to populate the world. Consequently, the majority of religious people believe that God intended men to marry women, and together they shall procreate. Everything that goes against this command is considered unacceptable. As social studies professor Arthur Berliner explains, "The Judaeo-Christian tradition has consistently held that the sex act is intended for procreation. Thus only heterosexual activity is proper" (138).

Whether we see it from a sociobiological, Marxism, or religious point of view, heterosexuality seems to be considered 'natural', or in another word, the 'norm'. This implies that everything that goes against heterosexuality is viewed as 'abnormal'. LGBTQ+ rights activist Jacob Tobia refers to this concept as 'heteronormativity'. Tobia explains, "Heteronormativity is the belief that everyone around you is heterosexual. If you view the world in a heteronormative way, then you're falsely assuming that everyone is straight" [*NBC News*]. In other words, heteronormativity promotes heterosexuality as the default sexual orientation. It is the belief that everyone is 'naturally' born heterosexual, and therefore heterosexuality is the 'normal' sexual orientation. Thereupon, political scientist Cathy Cohen adds that heterosexuality is the "hegemonic sexuality" (438). This suggests that there is a hierarchy among sexualities, with some regarded as 'superior' and others as 'inferior'. According to Cohen, every individual is put into sexual boxes in which "all heterosexuals are represented as dominant and controlling, and all queers are understood as marginalized and invisible" (440). Thus, because society defines heterosexuality as the 'dominant' sexuality, we assume that everyone around us is by default heterosexual, and the ones who turn out to be any other sexual orientation are considered 'abnormal'. As a consequence, homosexuals (and queers) are "marginalized" by society.

Between 1990 and 1992, social and education professor Máirtín Mac An Ghaill led a research study among the pupils of Parnell School (England) to analyse the link between masculinity and sexuality in school settings. He observed that LGBTQ+ topics in sexual education classes were censored in this secondary school, as though it was a taboo subject. According to Mac An Ghaill, teachers' discussions about sexuality encouraged the "normalization and regulation of heterosexuality"

(45). When asked, teachers admitted that “they had never discussed with students different forms of sexuality other than heterosexuality,” and on the rare occasions that they did talk about homosexuality it was to depict homosexuals as a “high-risk group for HIV/AIDS” (45). As we can see, heterosexuality was presented to these teenagers as seemingly the only existing sexual orientation, making it the ‘norm’ in their young minds.

We could argue that because of the time period of Mac An Ghail’s study (the early 1990s) schools were not as accepting of the LGBTQ+ community as they are today. However, in 2019, Parkfield Community School (England) had to stop teaching LGBTQ+ lessons to its pupils after parents protested the primary school’s curriculum program. The class’ goal was to expose its pupils to the LGBTQ+ community and challenge homophobia in school settings. Children aged between four and eleven-year-old were to have five lessons a year, during which books such as *Mommy, Mama and Me*, *King & King*, and other stories about same-sex relationships were read to them. Fatima Shah, who withdrew her ten-year-old daughter from the school, stated, “We are not a bunch of homophobic mothers. We just feel that some of these lessons are inappropriate. Some of the themes being discussed are very adult and complex and the children are getting confused” [*The Guardian*]. As we can see, it seems that even to this day homosexuality is viewed as an ‘abnormality’, something too foreign and too difficult to explain, so much so that these parents believed that a minimum age should be set to start acknowledging its existence.

Going back to Mac An Ghail’s study, according to him teachers of Parnell School taught their pupils that homosexuality could expose them to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Scientist Cari Courtenay-Quirk explains that the stigma blaming gay men for the disease has existed since the apparition of HIV/AIDS. According to her, HIV/AIDS was formally labelled “gay related immune deficiency” (56). Thereupon, sociologist Erin Ruel adds that the media used to call it the “gay plague” in the 1980s (2168). Ruel gives three explanations as to why society stigmatized gay men as HIV/AIDS spreaders. According to her, “At the onset of AIDS, the early period, the primary victims were gay men” (2168). This led people to believe that the disease was transmitted through an already frown-upon sexual behaviour (homosexual sex). Ruel continues that HIV/AIDS is “contagious and puts others at risk,” and “is incurable, meaning fatal at worst and

chronic at best” (2168). As a consequence, people started blaming homosexual men for endangering others’ lives. Therefore, gay men were blamed and ostracised because of not only their sexual orientation, but also because of this stigma against them. Going back to Mac An Ghaill’s study, if the only thing pupils learn about homosexuality is that it is an ‘abnormal’ sexual orientation, and the reason why HIV/AIDS has spread around the world, it is understandable that they would recent queer people. As a result, Mac An Ghaill observed that homophobic slurs were used loosely in Parnell School (especially by male pupils) as insults to humiliate those who were deemed not masculine enough (45).

Before we delve into this argument, we should first define ‘slur’. Professor of philosophy Robin Jeshion defines ‘slur’ as “expressions used to derogate persons and groups of persons on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, gender, occupation, and various other socially significant categories” (232). She identifies five properties to slurs:

- (i) slurs function to derogate or dehumanize, by which I mean, that they function to signal that their targets are unworthy of equal standing or full respect as persons, that they are inferior as persons; (ii) slurs function to derogate in the same way; (iii) slurs function to derogate to the same degree; (iv) slurs’ capacity to derogate is closely associated with the speaker’s intent to do so; (v) slurs’ capacity to derogate is conventional; it is a feature of, a power of, the words themselves. (Jeshion 232)

Simply put, slurs refer to insults directed to an individual with the intention to devalue their worth as a human being. They are used by groups socially considered ‘dominant’ to assert their superiority over the ‘subordinate’ groups. Jeshion adds that slurs are associated with “disgust, fear, and dismissiveness” (233).

According to Jeshion, one of the most often used homophobic slurs are “faggot” and “dyke” (233). However, Mac An Ghaill noticed that at Parnell School the most derogatory term used to refer to gay boys was “poofter” (90). Although, we should clarify that this slur was not used as an insult to homosexuals *per se*, but rather it referred to effeminate and deemed not masculine enough male pupils. Ashwin, who used to be a troublemaker but later on decided to focus on school, related, “Yes, I have gone from a warrior to a wimp. Smiths’ fan and books and all that but it’s funny how people see me. I could be seen as a right ‘poofter’. But I’ve still got my old reputation with the gang I was with, of being hard. So I suppose they wouldn’t see me as soft” (Mac An Ghaill 93). ‘Poofters’ categorised school-

focused and unadventurous boys, which are non hegemonic masculine characteristics that these teenage boys associated with homosexual men. This homophobic stereotype that portrays gay men as unmasculine dates back to the early twenty century when Sigmund Freud theorised that gay men share more similarities with heterosexual women than heterosexual men, whereas lesbians share more similarities with heterosexual men than heterosexual women. Freud called his theory the “gender inversion” (Blashill 784). As psychologist Aaron Blashill explains, society adopted this theory and tends to believe that “because gay men have the same sexual attractions as heterosexual women, they must be like heterosexual women in other ways; because lesbians have the same sexual attractions as heterosexual men, they must be like heterosexual men in other ways” (784). Following this mindset, if homosexual men are deprived of traditional masculine traits (such as being physically strong, athletic, and a troublemaker) male pupils who do not fall into this category must be gays. Indeed, if they depict traditional feminine traits (such as being physically weaker, not being interested in sports, and following the rules) they showcase their similarities with the female gender, thus making them part of this social group. This prejudice is reflected in the way Ashwin described what he judged a ‘real’ man should look like (“warrior,” part of a gang, and “hard”) and the way he described a ‘poofter’ (“wimp,” academic, and “soft”). There seems to be a hierarchy where heterosexual men are considered ‘superior’ to gay men.

When asked about his thoughts on homosexuality, Ashwin answered, “If I was gay, I would try to change. I’m not against gays as long as they don’t touch me” (Mac An Ghail 94). Mac An Ghail observed an apparent homophobic behaviour among the male pupils of Parnell School. According to him, they adopted “a heterosexual superiority/gay inferiority” discourse, and did not shame away from arguing that homosexuality was “a form of disability” that could infect them, as shown in Ashwin’s statement (94). This homophobic discourse already existed in the nineteenth century. Neurologist Richard Von Krafft-Ebing referred to homosexuality as a “‘degenerative’ neurological disorder” in his works, in which he theorised that homosexuality is “a disease, a condition that deviates from ‘normal’, heterosexual development” (Drescher 445). According to Von Krafft-Ebing, reasons for this ‘disease’ could be attributed to “intrauterine hormonal exposure, excessive mothering, inadequate or hostile fathering, sexual abuse, gender identity disorder”

(Drescher 445). In 1905, Sigmund Freud refuted this theory, arguing that homosexuality was found in people with no mental nor intellectual development issues, and therefore should not be labelled as a mental disorder. Instead, he theorised that every individual is born with “bisexual instincts” and those who enjoy penis/vaginal intercourse are sexually mature, whereas those who enjoy anal sex are stuck in their early childhood, thus making gay men sexually ‘immature’ (Drescher 446). In 1940, psychoanalyst Sandor Rado refuted Freud’s theory and argued that heterosexuality was the sociobiological norm, whereas homosexuality was a “psychosexual adaptation” caused by someone’s fears of expressing heterosexual urges (Drescher 447). Rado suggested using treatments to ‘cure’ this fear of heterosexuality, exposing gay’s conversion therapies to a larger scale (Drescher 447).

As shown in the examples above, homosexuality has been treated as an illness for centuries. Von Krafft-Ebing thought it was a mental disorder, Freud infantilised homosexuals, and Rado regarded them as traumatized people. It seems that these stigmas are still present in today’s society to some extent. According to Mac An Ghail, male pupils in Parnell School reported being repulsed by gay men. “I just hate ‘bum boys’,” Jim, a sixth-form pupil admitted. “When I think of them, it makes me want to puke. When I see two guys holding hands or pecking each other on the cheek, I have to turn away. I feel dead sick” (Mac An Ghail 95). When asked why he felt this way, Jim answered, “They must be looking at you, undressing you in their minds. They’re just sick” (Mac An Ghail 95). Jim’s statement clearly reflects his prejudice against homosexuality. His perception of homosexuality as some sort of dangerous mental illness led him to fear being sexually harassed by gay boys whenever they happen to look his way. Jim’s fear plays into the homophobic stereotype that every gay men are promiscuous sexual predators. However, this is quite contradictory if we consider the fact that hegemonic masculinity believes that heterosexuality is ‘superior’ to homosexuality. Therefore, why fear something considered ‘inferior’? As Mac An Ghail dug deeper into this issue, he discovered that what these teenage boys really feared was that they would become homosexuals if they got too close to their male classmates. Graham, one of the most popular male students of Parnell School, said, “I think kissing and hugging a man is okay, but not anything more, no caressing or getting too close.” When asked why, he answered, “Only girls should do that. What if you

get aroused?” When Mac An Ghaill asked him if he thought he could get aroused by a boy, Graham answered, “Yes, not as easy as a girl. I have erections all the time, sometimes on the bus, once at a football match. I was so embarrassed.” When asked if he had ever talked about this fear to his friends, Graham answered, “Never. That’s the trouble” (Mac An Ghaill 98).

I think a lot of boys would like to talk but who do you talk to? Like these two girls are closer. They’re allowed to be closer, aren’t they? If I said anything like this to my mates, they’d think I was a ‘poofter’. I mean you just couldn’t (...) My parents wouldn’t know what I’m talking about. And girls aren’t going to want to hear this sort of thing. I mean it scares me when I think about it. (Mac An Ghaill 98)

We raise two points from this interview. First of all, the idea that Graham could have an erection from being close to one of his male friends is both frightening and taboo to him. Assumptions could be made about his sexuality by his peers, thus Graham could go from being part of the ‘dominant’ group (heterosexuals) to being part of the ‘subordinate’ group (homosexuals). As we saw earlier, homosexuality would relegate him to the female gender group, thus making him less than a man, but more than that, it would exclude him from the men’s hut. Plus, as seen in our second part, erection is too often considered as a sign of attraction. Revealing to his peers that he got a physical reaction due to being close to a male friend would be considered proof enough for them to doubt his heterosexuality, thus Graham decided to keep his fear a secret. Indeed, fear means that Graham himself doubts his sexuality, and therefore that he doubts his masculinity.

This brings us to the second point made by this interview: it is taboo for boys to talk about their feelings. As Graham explained, sharing feelings (or even showing physical affection towards one another) is reserved to girls, as this is seen as a feminine behaviour. Men have to be stoic, therefore they cannot share their fear and insecurities or they risk being labelled as a ‘poofter’. According to Mac An Ghaill, there was a paradox between the way male pupils projected “a public confident masculinity” and the way they admitted “their private anxieties and insecurities” to him (99).

Because male gender roles dictate that ‘real’ men do not express their feelings, Parnell School’s boys tended to isolate themselves. They bottled up their

emotions (hiding their “anxieties and insecurities”) and pretended that everything was fine in their lives (showcasing “confident masculinity” to their peers). In the next section, we will explore the detriments caused by such attitudes.

### 3.2 - IMPACT OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY ON MEN’S MENTAL HEALTH

According to Professor of developmental psychology Niobe Way, as boys grow older, they tend to disconnect from their emotions in order to appear more masculine. Way asserts that “they will say things like ‘no homo’ in response to questions about intimate friendships,” as though they feared being mistaken for gays if they happened to have a close relationship with their peers. Interviewed by Way in 2018, twenty-three-year-old Vinny Jessel confessed, “Not only did, like, our conversation started to change, but we hung out and didn’t really talk all that much. I spent a lot of time alone, or when I was with my friends, I still kinda felt like being alone there.” Way argues that the fear of showing emotions, thus of being seen as unmasculine, can have severe consequences on men’s mental health, such as depression, cigarette addiction, or alcoholism [*NBC News*].

In this second section we will study the harms caused by hegemonic masculinity on men’s mental health. To do so, we will first examine how men are taught to express their emotions, and how gender roles expect them to conceal their feelings and stay stoic at all times. This will lead us to our second part, in which we will study the consequences of repressing emotions. We will see that this can lead to alcoholism, depression, and sometimes suicide.

#### 3.2.1 - Hegemonic Masculinity and Emotions

According to psychologist Ilan Shrira, stoicism and emotional detachment are considered the “hallmark of traditional masculinity” [*Psychology Today*]. Before we delve into this argument, we should first define stoicism. Professor of philosophy Jason Lewis Saunders defines stoicism as a school of philosophy

created by Zeno of Citium in Ancient Greece in the early third century BCE. According to Saunders, stoicism is based on the belief that “the goal of all inquiry is to provide a mode of conduct characterized by tranquillity of mind and certainty of moral worth” [*Encyclopedia Britannica*]. To put it simply, stoicism teaches the virtue of remaining calm despite stressful events or rising anger, and to value logic over emotional attachment. As Saunders explains, to the Stoic rationality is considered “the sole means by which something outside of self might be achieved” [*Encyclopedia Britannica*]. Therefore, stoicism believes that a rational mental state is the key to happiness. Overcoming negative emotions such as anger, fear or jealousy might help reach this happiness quicker. Thus, the Stoic encourages erasing any sort of emotions in order to focus on reason. As professor of philosophy John Sellars explains, stoicism “presents the human being as a thoroughly rational animal, for whom violent emotions are actually the product of errors in reasoning” (ix). According to Sellars, although stoicism dates from 300 BCE, it has influenced many philosophers throughout history, such as Michel de Montaigne, Emmanuel Kant, and Friedrich Nietzsche, and it is still practised to this day. However, as Sellars points out, its meaning has changed in modern society. According to him, “In the popular imagination [stoicism] is now mainly associated with the ideas of emotionless calm and heroic endurance in the face of adversity” (ix). Thereupon, Shrira adds that this “cool, calm and collected” persona “is held as a manly ideal across many cultures” [*Psychology Today*]. This presses the question; why is stoicism such a key part of hegemonic masculinity? According to anthropologist Damien Boquet, gender roles play a huge part in shaping how boys and girls express their emotions.

Emotions are often considered to be a strong marker for gender, playing a central role in the cultural and social demarcations between masculine and feminine. Starting with the ancient theory of temperaments, the hot and dry emotions – anger, rage, audacity and hate – were seen as masculine, while the cold and wet emotions – modesty, sweetness, fear, shyness, compassion, languor – were feminine. In the western world, it was also thought that emotions in general were more feminine, while reason was more masculine. Women, reputed to be irrational and closer to nature, would by the same token display greater sensitivity than men; would be readier to express their feelings (to the point of being overwhelmed by them); and would pass more quickly from one emotion to another, becoming insane or hysterical. Men, the repository of culture and reason, would exert greater self-control, and be better able to master the expression of their feelings, veering less often between them. (Boquet 7)

Boquet’s argument echoes Bourdieu’s theory about the differences between the male and female body. Indeed, the male body is associated with heat and

dryness, thus men are expected to display harsh emotions (such as “anger, rage, audacity and hate”). On the other hand, the female body is associated with coldness and wetness, thus women are expected to express soft emotions (such as “modesty, sweetness, fear, shyness, compassion, languor”). However, unlike men, women are believed to lack rationality, and therefore to lack control over their emotions. On this point, musicologist Sam de Boise comments that women are more likely to be accused of being too emotional because of their hormones than men (1). Because society believes that it is in their ‘nature’ to be “overwhelmed” by their emotions, women are seen as “insane or hysterical” when they express ‘harsh’ emotions such as anger or hate. As Boquet explains, this free display of emotions is associated with women, and thus femininity. We saw earlier that there is a duality between men and women. Thus, if openly expressing emotions is regarded as a feminine trait, the contrary (concealing emotions) is considered a masculine trait. Consequently, stoicism and emotional detachment are viewed as part of masculinity.

In 1992, sociologist Sharon Bird conducted a research study in northwestern United States to analyse the impact of emotional detachment on men’s relationship with their peers. The study was led among eleven men aged between twenty-three and fifty-year-old (123). When talking about his childhood, one of the participants related that he used to “hang out with other little boys and do little boy things” such as “burn[ing] ants and things like that.” When asked about his relationship with girls, he said, “You just don’t hang out with females because you don’t want to be a wuss, you don’t play with dolls, you don’t whine, you don’t cry” (Bird 125). We see once again the opposition between the male sphere (focused on adventure) and the female sphere (focused on emotions). It seems that if a boy stepped out of his sphere and into the female sphere (meaning, if he allowed himself to cry and give in to his emotions) he would be renouncing his masculinity, and thus be ejected from the men’s hut. As Bird explained, “The masculinity ideal involves detachment and independence. The men interviewed indicated that emotions and behaviors typically associated with women were inappropriate” within the male group (125). As we can see, since childhood, these men have learnt a key rule in performing masculinity; ‘boys don’t cry’, and only girls and “wuss” (unmasculine boys) overtly express their feelings.

This leads us to our next point. Another behaviour that was considered

inappropriate among the participants was talking about their feelings. According to Bird, the majority of participants avoided talking about their feelings to their male friends. One man confessed, “I usually talk about ‘things’ rather than getting into your head and asking, you know, that real intimate stuff” (Bird 125). The terms this man chose to describe his feelings are very particular. Yes, they connoted intimacy (“getting into your head,” “real intimate”) but the actual word ‘feelings’ was never used. It was instead replaced with the word ‘stuff’. It is as though even saying the word was something taboo, as though the word itself would erase this man’s masculinity. Bird observed, “In their discussions of feelings, the men hesitated; none of them made consistent use of the word ‘feelings’. Instead of feelings, they referred to ‘personal stuff,’ ‘those things,’ and ‘those matters’” (125). Thus, it could be argued that hegemonic masculinity also impacts the way men talk and the vocabulary they use.

When asked how they managed their feelings if they could not express them, many participants answered, “you’re doing it alone (...) because you’re going to be in situations where you’re away from any support system... you’re going to have to handle your stuff alone” (Bird 125). These men seemed to know (and to have accepted) that they would be left alone to handle their emotions all their lives, even in serious situations. Bird argues that because stoicism is considered a proof of one’s masculinity, “emotional detachment is viewed not only as desirable but as imperative” (125). Indeed, as stated earlier, those who dare go against their gender roles risk being alienated and ejected from the men’s hut. One of the participants admitted, “If I was having a beer with a friend and they started crying (...) that would put him on the outs” (Bird 126). In other words, the crying man would no longer be considered a friend of the male interviewee because of his lack of emotional restraint, meaning his lack of masculinity. Thereupon, Bird explains, “violations of the norm of emotional detachment do not result in an alteration of the norm but instead result in the exclusion of the violator” (126). Because male gender roles (and hegemonic masculinity) are accepted as the ‘norm’, men do not intend to modify these social rules in order to make it easier for their mental health. If a man cannot handle the pressure of performing masculinity, he is deemed not ‘worthy’ of being a man and has to leave the men’s hut.

This set of social rules becomes an issue when a man faces a serious situation that requires moral support from his peers (such as divorce or grief for

example). According to Bird, the participants considered feelings as “something to ‘get over’, not to experience – much less express” (126). This echoes Sellars’ argument about modern stoicism; remaining emotionless and calm in face of adversity is celebrated and regarded as masculine heroic endurance. Thus, men prefer silently pulling through their emotions alone instead of asking for help. One interviewee expressed that he would never share his pain with his male friends because “tears are a very extreme thing in these male circles, partly because it’s messy... It has a lot to do with not looking soft and weak because if you do... it makes it difficult for men to have relationships with each other” (Bird 127). This statement sheds some light on the nature of male friendship among men who wish to follow the social rules of hegemonic masculinity. These men cannot be themselves even in their friends’ company. As stated above, “looking soft and weak” (i.e. appearing feminine) risks putting an end to their friendship. Thus, they have to constantly perform a role and present an overly masculine version of themselves in order to be accepted by their peers. Crying (and showing any sort of ‘feminine’ emotion) is considered “messy” and too “difficult” to deal with. It could be argued that these men choose to hide their emotions out of modesty, however Bird describes this concealment as a “burden” (126).

According to her, constantly having to hide their feelings and presenting a tougher version of themselves can become a burden for these men in the long run (126). One man confessed, “A couple of times when I was hurting, uhm, I did kind of seek out a couple of male friends and I was really disappointed... It was like they were embarrassed, you know, to talk about that shit” (Bird 126). As we can see, men are too often left alone to handle their emotions. Gender roles teach boys that it is not ‘manly’ to cry, thus men tend to judge and isolate any of their peers who dare express their feelings overtly. To avoid this exclusion, men in general tend to hide their emotions.

Shrira argues, “to succeed in hiding your feelings from others also requires hiding them from yourself, either by ignoring or denying their existence. As a result, masculinity often means not being comfortable with your emotions and having less self-awareness about your own mental functioning” [*Psychology Today*]. In other words, concealing one’s emotions can lead to mental illnesses. We will examine later in this study the mental harms caused on men by stoicism. According to professor of psychology Michael Sayetter, another effect of hiding

one's emotions is alcohol abuse. He argues that "drinking offers a way of coping with life's demands" (78). Thus, men who forbid themselves from expressing feminine emotions (such as crying), and from sharing their pain with their male friends because of social pressure, tend to turn to alcohol in order to forget these "life's demands." However, Sayette warns that this behaviour "can become maladaptive if excessively used" (78). In the next part, we are going to study the link between hegemonic masculinity and alcoholism.

### 3.2.2 - Hegemonic Masculinity and Alcoholism

According to the *Office for National Statistics*, in 2017 in Great Britain, an estimated 29.2 million adults (57% of the population) drank at least once a week. Among these people, men were found to be more likely to drink and get intoxicated than women, which entails that they were more at risk for negative alcohol-related consequences (e.g. getting into fights, car accidents, death). According to professor of psychology Alice Cheng, "masculine norms play a significant role in contributing to problematic drinking in men" (907). On this point, Connell adds that "heavy drug/alcohol use" is one of the many hegemonic masculine traits (*Masculinities* 110).

As we explained in our introduction, hegemonic masculine men are characterised by their ability to control their emotions (think with their head and not their heart), to be in control of the situation (always asserting their dominance), and to be independent. However, the consumption of alcohol might disturb the performance of these three traits. According to scientist journalist Erica Cirino, when drunk, one might "have emotional outbursts" and "have trouble making judgement calls." This means that intoxicated people are less likely to be in control of their emotions and to think rationally. Moreover, they might "be very confused about what's going on," or even "fade in and out of consciousness." This means that when drunk, one is less likely to be in control of the situation. Finally, Cirino explains that intoxicated people might "have blurry vision and lose balance," and in some cases "it might be hard to stand and walk." This implies that a drunk person might need the assistance of a sober person to walk properly, which means that one loses their independence when drunk [*Healthline*]. So how can alcohol be a sign of

manliness if it cancels three important hegemonic masculine traits?

According to Cheng, “the masculine norms of willingness to take risks and the values placed on power and stamina may increase the risk of drinking to intoxication because they reflect one’s perceived ability to consume and tolerate increasing amounts of alcohol” (907). In other words, being competitive and a risk-taker are admired hegemonic masculine traits, thus in the context of alcohol intake, men view the consumption of alcohol as a challenge to prove their masculinity. The goal is to prove that they can ‘hold their liquor’ without becoming too drunk and losing control of the situation. According to Cheng, men equate “the ability to physically consume and tolerate large amounts of alcohol without adverse reactions as being characteristic of ‘masculine’ behavior” (907). On the other hand, they equate “the inability to consume and hold down large amounts of alcohol” as “a sign of weakness” and “feminine behavior” (907). As Cirino explained earlier, the usual effects of alcohol on people include loss of control over their emotions and loss of independence over their body. These traits are associated with femininity. Indeed, ‘real’ men are expected to be rational and to assume a dominant role at all times. Thus, a drunk man who can fight the effect of alcohol on his mind and body proves that he is above the norm, and thus that he is superior to women and his peers. In doing so, he also ensures his place in the men’s hut. Thereupon, anthropologist Paul Christensen adds, “Control of one’s intoxication is noteworthy, as the construction of being able to ‘hold one’s liquor’ is a defining masculine characteristic among Western men taught to control their body, even while simultaneously and deliberately working to impair this control through consumption” (246). Simply put, men consume alcohol despite knowing how dangerous the consequences of being intoxicated can be to prove that even alcohol cannot take away their rationality and control over their body. Thus, willingly consuming alcohol despite these possible outcomes serves to showcase their hegemonic masculine traits.

In 2007, professor of psychology Kenneth Mullen led a research study in Glasgow (Scotland) among young men aged between sixteen and twenty-four-year-old. The purpose of this study was to analyse the relation between masculinity and alcohol use among young Scottish men. Mullen found that drinking alcohol was first and foremost a means to strengthen male friendship. As he explains, young men reported to “play pranks on each other when drunk,” to get “in trouble with the

police,” or to engage in “unplanned violence to others” (158). Getting in trouble together while drunk was considered a way to strengthen male friendship.

One participant related, “Used to pick fights with people, someone would be walking up the street, I’d be with my pals and I’d go, ‘Lets batter him’, some of my pals would go, ‘Oh no’, and one of them was just as drunk as you and we’d run across the street and start lamping into him for no reason at all” (Mullen 158). As we can see, this man and his male friend bonded over alcohol intake and violence, which are considered signs of manliness. We could assume that the interviewee wanted to “batter” this male pedestrian with the aim of asserting his dominance over him (and thus proving that he was more masculine than the other man). We notice that some of the interviewee’s friends refused to join him in this fight, however the drunkest of the group promptly accepted. We could argue that this friend wanted to prove his masculinity to his peers, and to convince them that he deserved his place in the men’s hut. Thereupon, Mullen argues that men often drink to feel powerful when they feel powerless in their sober state. According to him, “alcohol use in men is related to men’s feelings of power and powerlessness. Men are supposed to be powerful but when they do not feel powerful they may use alcohol to compensate. Drinking stimulates power thoughts; heavy drinking makes men feel more powerful, stronger and assertive. Drinking may help them negotiate the emotional hazards of being a man” (153). To put it simply, alcohol helps appease the pressure of performing male gender roles. Taking the example we used in the previous part, a man who cannot find a sexual partner might feel powerless and unmasculine because of social ‘norms’. Consequently, he might turn to alcohol, get intoxicated, and feel powerful (i.e. masculine) enough to engage into fights with other men and assert their dominance over them. Thus, alcohol helps them perform their gender roles.

Thereupon, Mullen argues that the pressure of performing male gender roles was still present even when drunk. According to him, certain behaviours such as “being noisy, urinating in the street, singing loud songs and passing out drunk on the street were viewed as acceptable behaviour for men” (157). However, being too emotional was seen as feminine behaviour, and therefore unmasculine and unacceptable. Mullen observed, “there was near unanimous consensus among the research participants that while young men may become more physical (i.e. emphasizing their physical presence by becoming louder, larking about, becoming

aggressive, clumsy), young women become more emotional (e.g. crying, sharing confidences)” (160). As we can see, even when they are drunk, men are expected to act a certain way if they want to be accepted by their peers. This is quite paradoxical because as we explained earlier, men often drink to escape the pressure of performing their gender roles. One participant confessed that his male friend got drunk and tried to commit suicide because he thought he was not attractive enough to get a girlfriend. “There were two cuts up his arm,” he related, “he was very upset that night. It was because somebody rejected him and he got it into his head that he’s never really had a proper girlfriend and he feels really ugly” (Mullen 160). As we saw in our introduction, hegemonic masculine men are expected to have a muscular body (which is considered a conventional beauty feature for men) and to be sexually active. Because this man could not meet these expectations, he attempted suicide. According to Mullen, the majority of men “drink for escapism” (152). It seems that when they cannot escape the pressure of performing their gender roles, some non-hegemonic masculine men turn to suicide.

According to professor of philosophy John Gunn, alcohol and drug abuse are “significant risk factors for suicidal behavior,” and considering that men are more likely to consume alcohol than women, “this implies a greater risk of suicide among men linked to the greater prevalence of alcohol and drug use/abuse” (48-9). To put it another way, it is not rare for men to be intoxicated when they commit suicide. It seems that the pressure of performing gender roles causes serious harms in men’s life, and suicide is one of them. In the next part, we are going to delve deeper into this argument by studying the link between male gender roles, depression and suicidal behaviour among men.

### 3.2.3 - Hegemonic Masculinity: Cause of Male Depression and Suicide

According to the *Office for National Statistics*, in 2019, England registered 4,017 deaths as suicide among men. In comparison, 1,299 deaths were registered as suicide among women. The *Office for National Statistics* notes that while the female suicide rate was consistent with 2018, the male suicide rate was the highest ever seen in England since 2000. But how to explain the difference between the male

and female suicide rate? Professor of psychology Karolina Krysinska argues that the psychological, social and cultural environment in which boys and girls are raised could be the reason why men are more likely to commit suicide than women (17).

In general, as a result of having to adapt to numerous changes in their social roles across the lifespan, women cope better than males with life stressors and develop better support networks. Women are more likely to recognize the signs of depression and other warning signs of suicide, and to seek professional help (...) In addition, the dominant model of masculinity, focusing on competitiveness, impulsiveness, decisiveness and strength, might increase the risk of male lethal suicidal behavior. (Krysinska 17)

Simply put, because of gender roles and how differently they affect men and women's lives, men are more likely to commit suicide than women. Indeed, women are better prepared to adjust to social changes throughout their lives. As we saw in our previous studies, girls are raised with marriage and children always at the back of their mind. From a young age, society teaches girls that they are going to get married someday and eventually become a mother. As a child, they are more likely to be taught how to cook, how to do house chores, and in sum, how to be a 'good' wife. When they reach puberty, girls are taught about the risk of becoming pregnant, which implements the idea of motherhood in their mind. In more recent years, girls have also been told that they can choose to have a career if they do not wish to get married. Consequently, they feel less pressured to pursue one specific objective in life if they decide not to conform to traditional female gender roles. Moreover, if they happen to feel pressured, girls tend to handle stress better than men as it is socially acceptable for them to have outbursts of emotions. Thus, they generally do not repress or bottle up their feelings, and are less ashamed to share their troubles with their peers when needed. This gives them access to friendly advice and emotional help. Finally, as it is acceptable for them to ask for help, they are also less ashamed to seek therapy when needed. All these factors help prevent women from going through with suicidal intentions.

In comparison, men are poorly emotionally equipped to cope with stressful situations. As Krysinska explains, men are expected to constantly perform their gender roles. Boys are raised to be competitive, which leads men to see each other as opponents in every aspect of their lives (be it in their professional or romantic lives). Because they are expected to be risk-takers and not fear challenges, men in

general tend to be more impulsive than women, and they tend to make rash decisions without thinking about the consequences of their acts. At the same time, they are expected to be decisive and rational, which implies that they would only have themselves to blame if their plans do not work out. Moreover, men are expected to always be strong (not only physically, but also mentally) which means that they cannot afford to express their emotions in case of failure. According to Krysinska, this is the reason why men have a harder time accepting failure compared to women, which explains why they are more likely to crumble under stressful situations and commit suicide in extreme cases (18).

Krysinska gives two examples to illustrate the previous argument. In the first case, a married man gets fired, and therefore he has failed in two aspects of his life. As Krysinska argues, “In this context, loss of work and unemployment can be experienced as a double failure. On the one hand, it means loss of professional pride and male identity (...) and, on the other hand, it results in an inability to fulfil the role of a provider for the family” (18). As we saw earlier, competitiveness is a key aspect of masculinity. Thus, a man who gets fired loses in his rivalry with other men who are now seen as ‘better’ (and more masculine) than him because they can still perform their gender roles (i.e. making money and feeding their family).

In the second case, a man gets divorced. According to Krysinska, for some men “the breakdown of an intimate relationship often results in a loss of a major (or the only) source of emotional support,” moreover “loss of a relationship means a failure to maintain a dominant position” (18). Because it is socially acceptable for women to freely express their emotions, men tend to feel more comfortable sharing their feelings with their female partner. However, in case of separation or divorce, the man in the relationship loses this emotional support. And as it is considered socially improper for men to cry with their male friends, he is left alone to handle this heartbreak. Furthermore, a divorce man loses his right to assert his dominance over his wife in the context of patriarchy. Thus, he has failed as a man in maintaining his authority over his wife. These failures in life seem to have more impact on men than women. It seems that the pressure of correctly performing male gender roles is heavier than performing female gender roles, and the consequences seem bigger on men’s mental health.

According to psychologist David Lester, twice as many women suffer from

depression, however men are less likely to seek treatment when needed, and therefore their mental illness goes unreported (25). But why do men hide their depression? Lester relates the confession of a young man who admitted, “I think everybody has done something to cover up their depression. Nobody wants to walk around showing that type of emotion on their sleeve” (26). As we can see, men considered depression as a particular “type of emotion.” The wording in this young man’s statement implies that depression carries a lot of shame with it, that it is something that needs to be hidden. It is as though a depressed man would be more at risk of being judged by society and their peers. Lester argues that this is because of “the stigma associated with mental illness” (26).

Thereupon, mental health counsellor Teresa Stone explains that people in general tend to regard depression as a sign of personal weakness. According to Stone, hegemonic masculinity in particular views depression as “an indicator of weakness, a lack of self-reliance or self-control” (5). These are traits associated with femininity, and therefore represent the opposite of what a ‘real’ man should be. As seen in our previous studies, ‘real’ men (i.e. hegemonic masculine men) are supposed to be mentally strong, independent, and in control of their emotions. Therefore, if depression is considered a sign of weakness, it is also a sign of lack of masculinity. According to Stone, this stigma too often “influence[s] people to believe that depression can be controlled and dealt with by the individual, without seeking professional help or treatment” (3). Thus, because they fear looking weak and unmasculine, men who suffer from depression rarely seek therapy and tend to believe that their willpower alone will be enough to cure their mental illness. This could explain why male depression too often goes unreported.

According to Lester, “The dominant ideals of masculinity, which include norms that prescribe that men should be tough, strong and independent, prevent men from expressing depression in a direct manner. If they act depressed in this traditional way, they attract societal punishment and punish themselves for deviating from these masculine scripts” (26). In other words, because society views depression as a weakness (and thus, as unmasculine) men who suffer from depression hide their mental illness by acting the opposite way of how society thinks depressive people should act. Consequently, depressive men tend to conceal their feeling of sadness and worthlessness, in favour of amplifying their hegemonic masculine traits. In doing so, they hope that society will keep seeing them as ‘real’

tough men, and that they will stay in the men's hut.

As we can see, men express depression differently than women, thus Lester argues that there are two sorts of depressions; a female one and a male one. According to him, female depression is characterised by symptoms such as “hypersomnia and leaden paralysis,” whereas symptoms of male depression include “irritability,” “aggressiveness,” “low stress tolerance,” “substance abuse (specially alcohol),” “dysphoria,” and eventually “suicide” (26). In our introduction, we saw that anger for example is a trait of hegemonic masculinity that is praised by men and accepted as ‘normal’ male behaviour by women. Thus, if the people around a depressed man do not see anything out of the ordinary in him, how can they reach out and try to help him? This could be another reason why male depression goes unnoticed until it is too late.

Lester observes that it is not rare for male depression to end in suicide. According to him, hegemonic masculinity is a major factor in this. He argues, “The typical male role of toughness and suppressed emotionality, the so-called hegemonic male gender role, makes completed suicide a sign of toughness whereas attempting suicide is a sign of weakness and failure” (30). As we saw earlier, depressed men tend to conceal their mental illness out of shame, which entails that they handle the symptoms of their depression alone and in silence. With no professional help, their depression can only get worse, which pushes them to attempt suicide. On top of that, surviving a suicide attempt is considered “a sign of weakness and failure,” as it implies that the suicidal man was not mentally strong enough to go through with it. According to Lester, this is the reason why men in general “choose the more violent methods for suicide,” such as the use of gun, stabbing oneself or running in front of a moving vehicle (30). The odds of a suicide attempt resulting in death are much higher using one of these methods, thus guaranteeing that these men would still be considered masculine even after their death. As we can see, the pressure of proving their manliness follows these men even in the afterlife.

In this third part, we analysed the struggle of performing masculinity and its impact on men's lives, more specifically on men's sexual lives and their mental health. We argued that hegemonic masculinity controls men's sexual lives in many

ways. First of all, we noticed an authority over the male body. Hegemonic masculine men are expected to be not only muscular, but also 'well-endowed'. A lot of emphasis is put on the size of their genitals because society associates larger penis with potency and sexual success. Hegemonic masculine men are supposed to be sexually active and to have a large offspring, therefore having big genitals is a requirement. This is a part of their features that men cannot naturally change, thus many of them develop anxiety over the size of their penis that they deem too small. Not only that, but hegemonic masculine men are also expected to be sexually active, which puts a lot of pressure of men who cannot (or do not want to) have sex. As we saw, past a certain age, society tends to shame these men (virgin-shaming).

For men who are sexually active, the requirement is to be heterosexual. Stigmas are spread against homosexuals and queer men, and being anything but heterosexual leads to being banned from the men's hut. Thus, men who wish to be hegemonic masculine are compelled to be heterosexual.

Performing masculinity not only affects men's sexual lives, but it also affects their mental health. Indeed, hegemonic masculine men are expected to be stoic and to never have outbursts of emotions (which is deemed a feminine trait). Therefore, men who wish to stay in the men's hut tend to conceal their emotions, preferring to suffer in silence instead. This is quite harmful for their mental health and can lead to alcoholism, depression, and in worse cases, suicide.

## CONCLUSION

This master's thesis revolved around the argument that there is a gender discord in contemporary Britain. Through accounts of feminists, but also masculinists campaigns, we argued in our introduction that this conflict has a negative impact on gender relations and men's lives. Thus, we aimed to identify the source of this conflict. We hypothesised that feminism and hegemonic masculinity play a role in this conflict. Therefore, we asked; what is the impact of feminism and hegemonic masculinity on gender relations and men's lives in contemporary Britain?

In our first part, we studied the concept of patriarchy and the emergence of feminism through sociological theories and historical accounts. We found that men have been placed in a position of power for centuries, while women have been relegated to the bottom of the gender hierarchy. Since ancient Greece, women have been locked into a gender role that expects them to stay home, take care of their house, and raise their children. On the other hand, male gender roles expect men to work and make money to feed their family. These social expectations create an unbalanced power dynamic between genders as women are made to depend on men, not only financially (men make money to feed them, dress them, and pay rents) but also socially (in the Victorian era for instance, women could not sue, own lands, or divorce without the authorisation of a man). Because of this oppression, women decided to fight against patriarchy and demanded gender equality.

Each feminist wave was met with male hostility. In the late nineteenth century, the majority of male politicians warned of the danger of women's suffrage. In the 1970s, the MLM campaigned against feminism. In modern days, anti-feminist groups (such as masculinism) paint feminists as overdramatic men-haters. As we can see, when men feel threatened by feminism, they tend to fight back in order to defend their 'superior' social status. Indeed, women's emancipation entails the end of the gender hierarchy, thus the end of patriarchy and men's domination. These findings suggest that feminism is the source of the gender conflict.

However, in our introduction, we argued that feminism and hegemonic masculinity are linked, and they both play a role in the gender conflict and male discrimination. Therefore, if feminism is the source of the gender conflict, it should *ipso facto* be the reason for male discrimination. Yet, as we saw in our first part, several feminists (such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Emmeline Pankhurst) have stated that feminism does not aim to make men's lives miserable but to end patriarchy. Still, we cannot forget that radical feminists spread misandrist propaganda in the 1970s, and more recently French feminist writer Pauline Harmange published a book about her hatred for men. Yet, philosopher John Stuart Mill fought for female education, wives' emancipation, and women's suffrage in the nineteenth century. In the 1970s, pro-feminist MLM members fought alongside feminists in favour of gender equality. Most recently, actor Terry Crews joined the #MeToo movement and spoke up against sexual harassment. It seems that only certain men were negatively affected by the emergence of feminism, while others gladly joined the fight to end patriarchy. If this is the case, can we truly talk about a gender discord?

Digging deeper into this conflict, we learnt that the type of men who are negatively affected by feminism are the ones who wish to stay at the top of the gender hierarchy and be part of the men's hut. In other words, men who display traits of hegemonic masculinity seem to feel threatened by feminism. Therefore, should we suggest that hegemonic masculinity is the true source of the gender conflict?

To answer this question, we put the focus of our second part on the relationship dynamic between men and women who perform their assigned gender roles in their daily lives. We found that hegemonic masculinity demands that men dominate and keep their female partners 'under control'. On the other hand, women are expected to remain docile and obedient to their male partners. Our study showed that hegemonic masculine men tend to assert their dominance through act of violence, more precisely through domestic and sexual violence. For instance, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, husbands used captivity, beating, and malnourishment as means to 'punish' their wives whom they deemed disobedient. We found that this practice is still happening in contemporary Britain despite the rise of feminism and the creation of protective laws for battered wives.

Sociologists agree that men's violence comes from a place of insecurity. For instance, if a woman tries to assert her opinions or make the decisions in her relationship, her hegemonic masculine male partner would likely resort to violence in order to take back his 'power'. In this case, domestic abuse serves as a public message; the abuser tells the world that he is the one 'wearing the pants' in this relationship. In another case, to prevent his female partner from cheating on him (and thus, wound his 'honour') a hegemonic masculine man would likely resort to violence. Here, domestic abuse serves as a reminder that he still has a hold on his female partner's romantic and sexual life. These data show that hegemonic masculinity encourages gender discord. Indeed, hegemonic masculine men use violence as a means to perform their gender role and to assert their 'superiority' over women.

What about male victims of domestic abuse? We found that male victims tend to be ashamed of coming forwards because it is not socially acceptable for a man (the 'stronger' sex) to be assaulted by a woman (the 'weaker' sex). It is considered shameful to be a victim of women's violence because it would mean that the female partner is now playing the role of the man (the authority figure) in the relationship. Therefore, male victims of domestic abuse tend to remain silent for fear of being shamed or mocked. Mocked by who exactly? Our findings suggest that male victims are primarily shamed by their peers.

Since their early childhood, there is a certain expectation put on men. They are to be strong, rational, and independent. If they do not fit hegemonic masculinity standards, they risk being excluded by their peers and regarded as a 'lesser' man. In order to stay in the men's hut, they have to showcase hegemonic masculine traits. By doing so, hegemonic masculine boys tend to exhibit bullying behaviours in school settings. These behaviours often follow them into their adult lives, and evolve into criminal behaviours. Sociologists agree that men who showcase hegemonic masculine traits do so in order to fit in. The goal here is to be accepted in the men's hut. The more a man displays traits of hegemonic masculinity, the more he is admired by his peers. The opposite is also true; the less hegemonic masculine a man is, the less respected by his peers he becomes. Thus, victims of bullying and of crimes (such as mugging or rape) are often men who do not fit hegemonic masculinity standards. As a consequence, men who fear being rejected (or bullied) by their peers tend to over-perform their gender role, resulting in

hegemonic masculinity taking control of many aspects of their lives.

In our third part, we focused on the many ways hegemonic masculinity impacts men's lives, especially their sexuality and their mental health. When it comes to their sexual lives, hegemonic masculine men are expected to be virile. Virility entails being potent (i.e. being able to impregnate a woman) and being performant in bed (i.e. being able to sexually please a woman). Sociologists argue that the penis represents a man's virility (manliness). Thus, the bigger a man's penis is, the more masculine he will be perceived by his peers. Consequently, many men stress over the size of their genitals for fear of being perceived as unmasculine or lacking. The pressure is so much that some men even get penis enlargement surgery. Those who suffer from impotence report feeling "worthless" and "less than a man." This is because hegemonic masculine men are required to be sexually active.

Sex, in the context of hegemonic masculinity, serves as an evidence of one's manliness. The more sexually experienced a man is, the more masculine he is deemed by his peers. Sex is regarded as something to be consumed, then discarded. Thus, it serves as a means to dominate women. It shows that a man was charming enough to coerce a woman into having sex with him, virile enough to please her, and dominant enough to avoid getting in a relationship with her after their intercourse. These are traits valued by hegemonic masculine men. Our findings suggest that there is a competition among hegemonic masculine men to see who can get the most sexual intercourse. Consequently, men who are still virgins past a certain age are viewed as 'abnormal' and are shamed by their peers (virgin-shaming).

As we can see, there is a lot of pressure put on men to be sexually active if they want to be accepted in the men's hut. Although there is a condition to these sexual activities; the sexual partner must be female. Indeed, heterosexuality is considered the 'norm' in the context of hegemonic masculinity (heteronormativity). This means that any other sort of sexuality (homosexuality, for instance) is considered 'abnormal' and unacceptable. This creates a hierarchy among sexuality, in which heterosexuality is viewed as 'superior' and the other sexualities are deemed 'inferior'. As a consequence, gay men (and queers) risk being harassed and insulted by their peers if they openly express their sexuality. Men who wish to stay

in the men's hut are pressured to appear heterosexual in every aspect of their lives. This refers to the stereotypical heterosexual philanderer who have intercourse with several women, but do not commit to a relationship because of his 'natural' needs for independence. The fear of being seen as homosexual can also lead hegemonic masculine men to distance themselves from their male friends ('no homo'). This isolation can be harmful for men's mental health.

Our findings suggest that men are expected to repress their emotions and remain stoic at all costs. Emotions entail irrationality, which is a feminine trait. Male and female gender roles being on the opposite sides of the spectrum, rationality is therefore a male character trait. Thus, hegemonic masculine men who wish to stay in the men's hut are required to hide their emotions, even in stressful situations ('Boys don't cry'). Not only do they not express their emotions openly, but they also forbid themselves from talking about their feelings for fear of being perceived as 'weak' by their peers. Thus, many hegemonic masculine men report never confiding in their male friends when they need help. This emotional concealment is glorified and imperative, therefore they are left alone to handle their troubles. However, this doesn't come without consequences. Having to constantly hide one's feelings to present a tougher version of oneself can become a burden eventually. This can lead to various mental illnesses.

To cope with loneliness and the pressure of being emotionally detached, many hegemonic masculine men turn to alcohol. Our studies revealed that hegemonic masculine men consume alcohol to help them perform their gender roles (they become bolder and more adventurous when they are drunk) and to ease the pressure of performing male gender roles. However, even when drunk, men are expected to act a certain way (to 'hold their liquor'). We found that while it is acceptable for drunk women to cry and be emotional, drunk men are expected to become loud and aggressive. As we can see, the pressure of performing hegemonic masculinity never quite leaves men. This pressure is so intense that it is not rare for hegemonic masculine men to suffer from depression.

Sociologists agree that men are more likely to commit suicide than women. As it is socially acceptable for women to voice their emotions and seek help when needed, they are less likely to be ashamed of seeking therapy. Thus, women in general tend to work on their mental illnesses before contemplating suicide. On the

other hand, men are expected to always be strong (physically and mentally), therefore seeking therapy would be perceived as a weakness. This is in part because of the stigmas associated with depression and other mental illnesses. Consequently, many hegemonic masculine men live with undetected depression, and the burden of having to hide their potential mental illnesses. When the burden becomes too much, these men often resort to committing suicide.

Our findings showed that hegemonic masculine men have a particular way of ending their lives. Most of them prefer violent methods, such as the use of lethal weapons or running in front of a moving vehicle, as the suicide attempt would more likely end with death in these cases. As we explained in our third part, surviving a suicide attempt is perceived as a sign of weakness. The suicidal man was not 'strong' enough to go through with it, thus he failed his attempt. Therefore, we argued that the pressure of performing hegemonic masculinity follows these men even in their afterlives.

After carefully reviewing the arguments we made throughout this thesis, we came to the conclusion that there *is* a gender conflict, and this conflict is triggered by feminism. However, feminism is not to blame for the gender discord in the contemporary Britain. As stated earlier, this conflict already existed in Ancient Greece, way before the emergence of feminism in the late 1850s. Therefore, we argue that feminism helped shedding light in an already existing social issue. This issue existed in the first place because gender hierarchy places men above women. According to gender roles (especially hegemonic masculine gender roles), men should dominate women, and women should obey them. Thus, we argue that hegemonic masculinity constructed a conflict between genders by making one superior to the other.

Not only does hegemonic masculinity disturb gender relations, but it also impacts men's lives negatively. Admittedly, men benefit from the privileges that come with their genders, but at what expense? If they want to be accepted by their peers and stay in the men's hut, men need to look, act, and think a certain way. Therefore, they can never truly be themselves. Unlike women, it is socially unacceptable for men to complain about the pressure of always having to perform their gender roles, or they risk being labelled as 'too emotional' or 'too feminine.' Consequently, hegemonic masculine men have to repress their feelings and put on a

stoic facade. As we saw earlier, this behaviour often leads to mental health issues, alcoholism, and suicide.

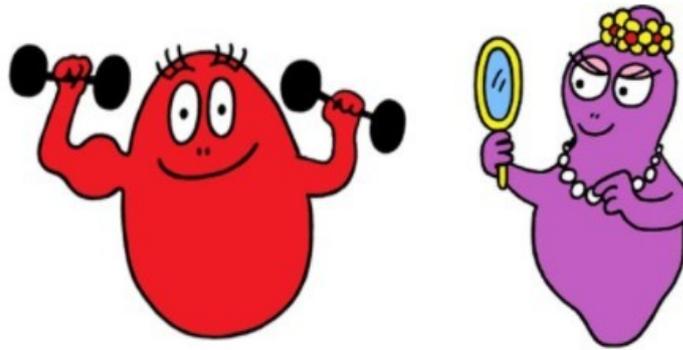
While women can afford to lean on feminism and ask for their peers' help when needed, it is socially frowned upon for men to ask for help. This brings us to our last point. We argue that feminism aims to eradicate gender roles, this includes the pressure put on men to perform hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, hegemonic masculinity promotes gender hierarchy and male superiority. Therefore, we argue that feminism aims to better men's lives, while hegemonic masculinity appears to worsen their lives.

Despite a number of efforts based on qualitative inquiries, much research remains to be done on British men's struggles to perform their gender role in the contemporary Britain. We should have selected more recent research studies in order to fit our findings into the time period chosen for this dissertation. Moreover, we wrote this thesis through a gender binary lens (masculinity/femininity) and did not take into account the existence of gender fluid people (who perform both masculine and feminine gender roles) and non-binary people (who perform none of them). For further work, we could look into what R W Connell refers to as the "other" masculinities, for instance Black masculinity and the pressure put on Black men (and men of colour) to perform their gender roles. We could also reverse the issue and focus on men who choose not to conform to hegemonic masculine gender roles.

## ANNEXES

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**Figure 1**



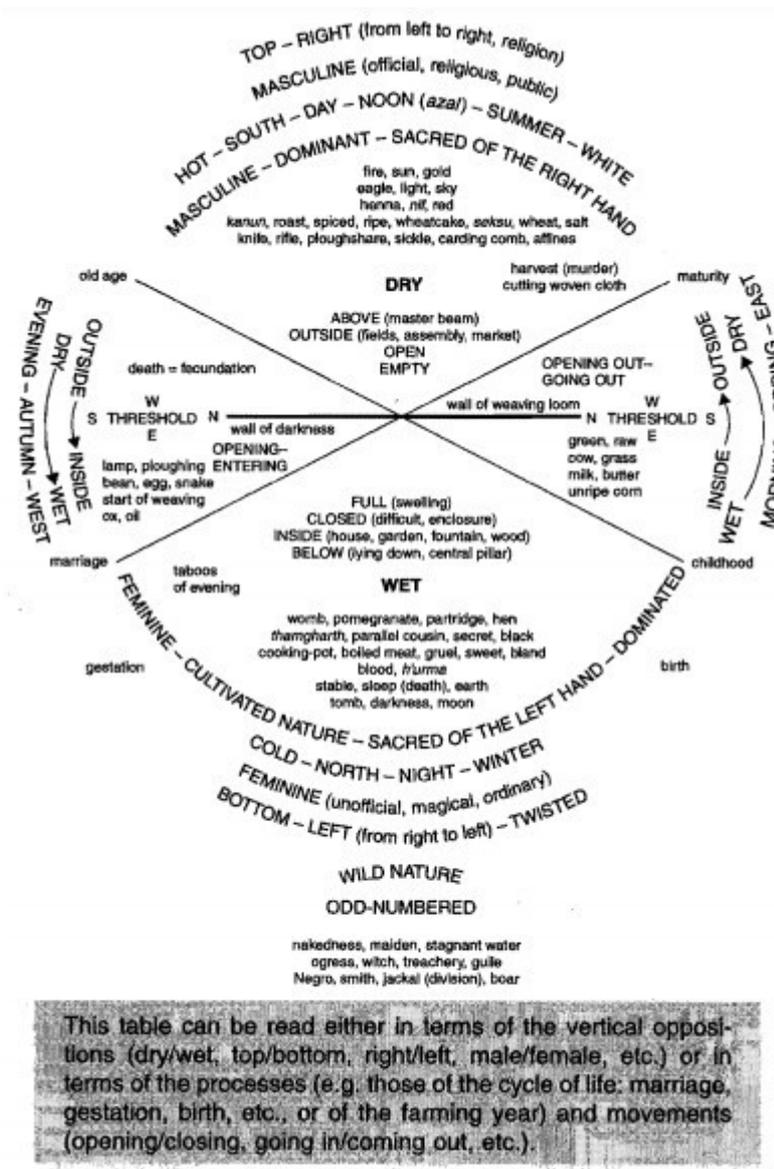
Barbabravo and Barbabelle showcasing their hobbies

Images retrieved on 10 December 2020 from:

<https://barbapapa.fandom.com/wiki/Barbabravo>

<https://barbapapa.fandom.com/wiki/Barbabelle>

Figure 2



Summary of the oppositions between male's and female's bodies

BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Masculine Domination*. 1998. Trans. Richard Nice. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002, p.10.

Figure 3



1909 postcards distributed by the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage, mocking suffragettes.

DEVANEY, Susan. "This is how misogynists tried to stop women from winning the vote." *Stylist*. 2019. Retrieved on January 24, 2021 from: <https://www.stylist.co.uk/visible-women/misogynists-anti-suffragette-illustrations-stop-women-win-vote-history-features/187998>

**Figure 4**Sylvester Stallone showcasing his muscular body in *Rambo III* (1988)Difference between Arnold Schwarzenegger's muscular body and Danny DeVito's plump one in *Twins* (1988)

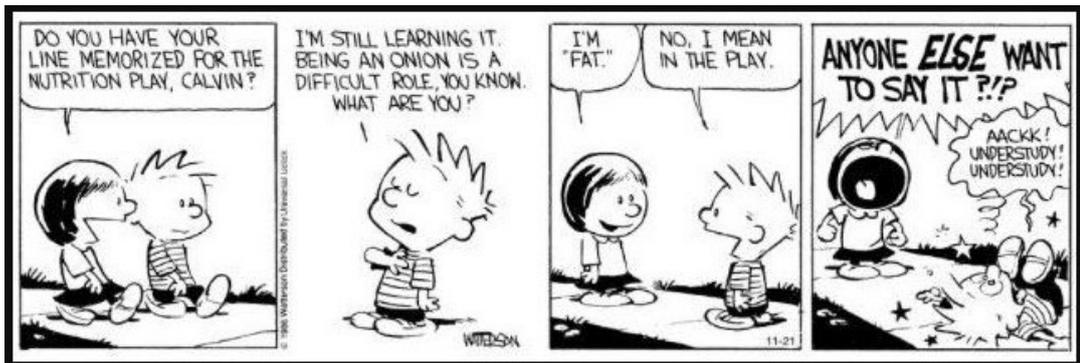
Images retrieved on March 12, 2021 from:

[https://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-36722/photos/detail/?  
cmediafile=18447765](https://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-36722/photos/detail/?cmediafile=18447765)

and

[https://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-33953/photos/detail/?  
cmediafile=19681871](https://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-33953/photos/detail/?cmediafile=19681871)

Figure 5

Comic strip of *Calvin and Hobbes* depicting Susie being violent towards Calvin

Kaori Makimura hitting Ryo Saeba's head with her 100-ton hammer

Images retrieved on April 22, 2021 from:

<https://www.gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes> and

[https://cityhunter.fandom.com/wiki/Kaori\\_Makimura](https://cityhunter.fandom.com/wiki/Kaori_Makimura)

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# RÉSUMÉ - ABSTRACT

## Résumé

Le féminisme et le masculinisme ont un impact sur les relations de genre et la vie des hommes dans le Royaume-Uni d'aujourd'hui. Alors que les féministes sont accusées d'être des misandres, les masculinistes sont jugés misogynes. Ce mémoire vise à déterminer la source du conflit entre les genres et à analyser son impact sur la vie des hommes. Pour atteindre cet objectif, nous avons fondé nos recherches sur des enquêtes qualitatives, des théories sociologiques et des comptes rendus historiques. Nos résultats suggèrent que le féminisme a permis de mettre en lumière l'inégalité et les interactions conflictuelles entre les genres. Certes, ces problèmes sociaux existaient déjà bien avant l'émergence du féminisme. Nous soutenons donc que la masculinité hégémonique figure parmi les sources principales du conflit entre les genres. En considérant les hommes comme supérieurs aux femmes, la masculinité hégémonique crée non seulement une opposition entre les genres, mais elle pousse également les hommes à agir, à se présenter, et à penser d'une manière qui peut s'avérer toxique, voir dangereuse. Ainsi, nous sommes arrivés à la conclusion que si le féminisme vise à améliorer la vie des femmes et des hommes en effaçant les rôles de genre, la masculinité hégémonique a un impact négatif sur leurs vies en renforçant ces rôles.

Mots-clés : féminisme ; masculinité ; masculinité hégémonique ; identité masculine ; psychologie masculine ; men's studies ; women's studies ; études de genre ; identité sexuelle ; rôle de genre.

## Abstract

The rise of movements such as feminism and masculinism seem to have an impact on gender relations and men's lives in contemporary Britain. While feminists are accused of being 'men's haters', masculinists are pinned as misogynists. This master's thesis seeks to determine the source of the gender conflict and analyse its effect on men's lives. To reach this goal, we based our research on qualitative inquiries, sociological theories, and historical accounts. Our findings suggests that feminism helped shedding light on gender inequality, and by doing so triggered the gender discord. Admittedly, this social issue already existed way before the emergence of the movement. Nonetheless, we argue that hegemonic masculinity is the root of the gender discord. By regarding men as superior to women, hegemonic masculinity not only pits men against women, but it also

pressures them to act, look, and think a certain way. Thus, we came to the conclusion that while feminism aims to better women's and men's lives by erasing gender roles, hegemonic masculinity negatively impacts their lives by reinforcing these roles.

Keywords : feminism ; masculinity ; hegemonic masculinity ; male identity ; male psychology ; men's studies ; women's studies ; gender studies ; gender identity ; gender roles.