

# I Am a Bull! The Construction of Masculinity in a Group of Men Perpetrators of Violence against Women in Spain

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## ABSTRACT

The relationship between violence and masculinity warrants special attention in intervention work with men who inflict violence against their partners. In this article we sought to explore this connection drawing upon the metaphor of 'being like a bull' used by a member of a group of men held in Spain. We reflected on the patriarchal system that legitimises the constant proof expected of the 'bull', of its masculinity in an 'arena' made up of an audience of spectators who reflect the traditional male image. In conclusion, we highlighted the importance of psychosocial interventions in this sector with a more committed political/policy and gender perspective, focusing on cultural and macro-social aspects in interventions with those who inflict violence.

## Keywords:

masculinity; violence; bull; domination; subjectivity; intervention

## RESUMEN

La relación entre violencia y masculinidades merece especial atención en el trabajo de intervención con hombres que ejercen violencia contra sus parejas. En este artículo buscamos explorar esta conexión a partir de la metáfora "ser como un toro", utilizada por un integrante de un grupo de hombres en medio de un encuentro tuvo lugar en España. Nuestra intención es reflexionar sobre el sistema patriarcal que legitima que el "toro" tenga que ofrecer pruebas de su masculinidad de manera constante, ante una "arena" constituida por espectadores que refuerzan la imagen masculina tradicional. En conclusión, destacamos la importancia de intervenciones psicosociales con líneas más comprometidas políticamente y con perspectiva de género, que atienden a los aspectos culturales y macrosociales en los trabajos con autores de violencia.

## Palabras clave

masculinidad tradicional; violencia; toro; dominación; subjetividad

The concepts of violence, power and domination are closely related to the traditional way in which maleness or masculinity is understood to be constructed in western society. When working with men who have inflicted violence against women, this relationship should be regarded as a problem to be addressed in order to seek new senses and expressions of being a man which mitigate violence in emotional relationships.

By the end of the 1970s the first intervention groups with male perpetrators of violence began in the USA and Canada. Since then they have been conducted in many countries under various theoretical perspectives and formats. Due to recent legislative changes in some Latin American and European countries, intervention with men has grown even with the initiative of governments (Boira Sarto, 2010; Exposito & Ruiz, 2010; Geldschläger et al., 2010; Toneli, Lago, Beiras, & Climaco, 2010).

The main focus of intervention in groups with male perpetrators of intimate violence are anger, accepting responsibility for their acts, expressing their emotions, and interpersonal communication with their partner (Beiras, 2012; Boira Sarto, 2010; Exposito & Ruiz, 2010; Geldschläger, Ginés, & Ponce, 2011). We also can find different theoretical and methodological perspectives in this field.

This article explored the relationship between masculinity and violence through a narrative approach (Augusta-Scott, 2009; Beiras & Cantera, 2012, 2014; Lloret i Ayter, 2004; Ponce-Antezana, 2012) for research and intervention. We sought to promote alternatives for changing the relationship by using data collected from group processes for men who have inflicted violence against their partners. We centred our research analysis on the 'I am a bull' metaphor, used by one of the members of the group, to underpin cultural and theoretical analysis to think of possible alternative ways of working with men who seek to reflect on the construction of male subjectivity and its relationship with violence.

Studies on bullfighting (Araúz, 1978; Delgado, 1986; Pink, 1997; Wolff, 2008) have helped us to understand the metaphor 'to be like a bull'. We sought evidence of cultural and subjective elements related to the construction of masculinity that

directly or indirectly influence the sexist, violent actions of many men. Due to the sociocultural elements and gendered power relations that are continually present in the construction of male subjectivity in intervention work with violent men, it is imperative to promote interventions that deconstruct certain aspects of the traditional and idealised construct of masculinity.

In doing so we can help to promote the expression of male subjectivities that do not yield to the domination of the other, to authoritarian power and to heteronormativity as a natural model. We believe that this can help to enable more effective interventions with male perpetrators of violence against women. To achieve our objective, our analysis was based on theories of masculinity (Connell, 1995, 1997, 2000; Kimmel, 1997; Seidler, 1994, 2009), poststructuralist feminism (Butler, 1993, 1997, 2006), and elements of social constructionism (Burr, 1996; Gergen, 1999; Gergen, 2001; Gergen & Gergen, 2010; Ibañez, 2001). We sought to show the possibility of effective reflection and intervention, centring on a narrative and cultural analysis of qualitative research. To this end, we utilised examples of descriptive and narrative data from practice collected from the observation of participants in a therapy group.

## Theoretical framework

Based on social constructionism and narrative perspective, subjectivity is built from the way we live and narrate our experiences (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Riessman, 2008). We use the term masculinity based on studies by Connell (1995, 1997, 2000), Kimmel (1997), Vale de Almeida (1995, 1996) and Butler (1990, 1993, 1997, 2006) exploring the performative construction of gender. Influenced by those authors, we conceptualise masculinity as a performative game that is enacted through the legitimisation of peers in daily socialisation, made up of bodies that are standardised according to ideals of supposedly 'correct' or 'accepted' masculinity. This is produced in social contexts including macro-social terms as in culture and micro-social terms as in subjective construction.

Also, it is shaped in an idealised and hegemonic form (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1997) alongside other subaltern positions of masculinity with lower social values. It constitutes a game of power and social expression that legitimises hierarchies embedded in gender, where being female, vulnerable or weak ranks lowest. Its performative structure is strongly associated with other categories, such as homophobia, health, paternity, patriarchy, corporeity and/or violence. Currently, as a result of the continuing decline of patriarchal models and relative gains of the feminist, gay and lesbian movements, there is growing stimulus for the expression of other masculinities and femininities, the so-called 'new' expressions, despite the fact that some of these have always been present in our society as subaltern, devalued and unaccepted positions. These changes produce a diversity of expressions that promote the modification of the gender panorama in our society.

In some countries, such as Spain, public policies have been implemented to stimulate gender equality, to respect difference and diversity, to support more participative paternity, civil rights and equal work opportunities towards a fairer society in terms of gender. All of this is in keeping with the recommendations of conferences organised by international organisations and recognised Non-governmental organization (NGOs): International Conferences for Population and Development – UN, in Cairo, 1994 and Beijing, 1995; Convention of Belem do Para, 1994; Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2009. Nevertheless, the patriarchal model retains a strong presence in western society. One of the most persistent and serious problems is male violence against the women with whom they have emotional relationships. Working with violent men on their subjective involvement, revising and reflecting on their socialisation among peers and promoting new paths and tools that do not use violence is the task of some of therapeutic or psychological education interventions.

It is important to clarify the variety of terms used to define male violence intervention groups. We found such terms as 'rehabilitative', 'educational', 'psycho-educational', 'reflexive', and 'therapeutic'.

This variety is related to the theoretical approach and the objectives of the group. In legislative terms, for example, Spanish law mentions 'specific rehabilitative and psychological treatment', whereas Brazilian law mentions 'recovery and re-education programs'. This research centres on therapeutic and reflexive intervention groups. We hope that our research analysis can provide possible future narratives and cultural interventions. Most of the studies and experiences are located in a European context with a prominent clinical view that often pathologises and criminalises these men. This fosters a mode of practice that is distanced from changes in subjectivity in politico-social feminist terms due to a focus on behavioural change (Beiras, 2012; Cabruja-Ubach, 2004; Lloret i Ayter, 2004). Intervention that seeks awareness in men, of how they were socialised according to an oppressive masculine model may make it possible for them to resignify and problematise how they have become the men they are. It would offer alternatives and possibly an efficient way of combating male intimate relationship violence.

The concept of violence against women from the United Nations General Assembly from 1993 is used in this study. We also consider that understanding this phenomenon occurs in a patriarchal context, as Cantera (2007) demonstrated. She described patriarchy as a sociocultural system where male domination organises social relations on the basis of asymmetrical and hierarchical power relationships. According to Medrado and Lyra (2008), male domination over women in general does not have a single perpetrator but a series, in which the media, education, religion, women, public policies and psycho-social interventions are all present. They reiterated that the collective power of men not only comes from the subjective interiorisation of these subjects but also from social institutions, to which cultural, literary, political and historical institutions should also be added. In other words, male domination is the product of cultural practices sustained by men and institutions such as Family, Church, School, and State (Bourdieu, 2003).

To explain male domination, Bourdieu (2003) commented on the need to understand the lasting

effects of the patriarchal social order on women and men. In line with this thinking, symbolic strength is a kind of power that has direct influence on the body. Women are educated through learning self-denial, resignation and silence, while men are taught the values of dominant representation. These characteristics applied to males and females are not fixed in nature but are constructed through a process of socialisation. In the specific case of men, the male condition assumes honour, nobility and virility: these are reflected and embodied through a set of apparently natural aptitudes, and guide their practices by way of force (Bourdieu, 2003). Virility is 'understood as a reproductive, sexual and social capacity, but also as an aptitude for combat and for exercising violence' (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 68).

Taking these aspects into account, we have stressed in this text the need to go beyond the micro-level (specific context), to promote macro-level interventions (attention to cultural meanings, for example) directed not only for work with individuals but also towards necessary social and relational changes without forgetting that it starts with personal-subjective work. We offer this critical reflection analysis for those being trained in interventions with male perpetrators of intimate relationship violence. Observing the narratives of the participants in the group made us reflect on different possibilities of interventions based on narrative, cultural and feminist perspectives (Beiras, 2012; Beiras & Cantera, 2012, 2014; Cabruja-Ubach, 2004; Lloret i Ayter, 2004; Ponce-Antazana, 2012). This article is focused on reflections that we made after the intervention that can be used by professionals who work on searching for new significance of masculinities.

## Methodology

The methodology chosen for this research is qualitative. Qualitative studies involve the interpretation and study of phenomena in the context in which it is customarily encountered, with attention to the meanings that individuals give to these experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This article focused on thematic narrative analysis of an episode narrated

by one of the participants in a weekly group for male perpetrators of violence against women. The data was collected through in-depth interviews audio recorded with the participants and participant observation recorded in a field journal. We planned a qualitative study with participating men between 22 to 56 years old. The majority were Spanish and some were Latin American from different social classes. They took part in the group voluntarily. The sessions were closed and occurred in a non-governmental organisation in Barcelona with public sponsorship. The data were collected in 2009 for doctorate research. The aim of this study was to analyse the construction and deconstruction of subjectivities in a group of men that had perpetrated violence against their partners. The main researcher was one of the psychologists during the session group. Based on social constructivism which does not promote a neutral researcher, we understood that the research is one possible version of reality. The interviewees were conducted at the beginning and the end of the group process. Regarding ethical procedures for data collection, informed consent was obtained. It was read, discussed, dialogued and finally signed by all participants.

In this paper, the aim was to obtain a thematic analysis of the narratives of the participants in terms of cultural and critical reflections. Following the narrative study principles, we selected some fragments from the research diary related to masculinity construction. From this data, we chose one statement that reflected a lot of cultural meaning about the theme. This paper sought to discuss the metaphor to analyse cultural conceptions that reinforce masculinities and build subjectivities related to violence, the analysis brings critical and cultural qualitative reflexions that can be used to build others men group interventions in similar contexts, relate with masculinities and violence. It is not a discursive analysis, but a thematical discussion with cultural contexts and how it exerts influences on masculinities, subjectivity and violence contexts.

Furthermore, we also sought to discuss male psychosocial interventions. According to Emerson and Frosh (2009), the study of narrative focuses on a small number of subjects. The analysis is centred on

an in-depth, detailed and thorough study of a small number of narratives, without seeking generalised conclusions. However, it explores and gives attention to critical issues addressing context and social interaction. It focuses on details of the narrative (Riessman, 2008), which provide critical reflections on dominant discourse and its relationship to subjectivities and power relations in society. The approach of the narrative is to see how the narrator imposes order in his experience, in his narrative sequence, in order to make sense of the events and actions of his life (Riessman, 1993). We analysed and studied how the narrator uses linguistic and cultural resources to persuade the listener of the authenticity of his narrative. Personal narrative needs a structure to hold it, so some events can become more or less significant according to their places in the narrative.

There are various types and conceptualisations of narrative studies (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Czarniawska, 2004; Elliott, 2005; Emerson & Frosh, 2009; Riessman, 1993, 2008). In this paper, we mainly focused on Riessman (1993, 2008), Czarniawska (2004), Martin (1990) and Emerson and Frosh (2009), adapting their methods to the epistemological perspective chosen for this study and its specific literature. About metaphor analysis in narrative studies, we based in studies done by Czarniawska (2004) and Martin (1990), who understand the metaphors as a potential resource to work and explore the deconstruction of narratives and comprehend social contexts. Rismann (2008) argues there is not a unique rule to do a narrative analysis, but a variety of perspectives that can be adapted to the main aim of the study. For narrative studies and therapeutic settings, the metaphor is also understood as an important tool or a ludic game to analyse the meanings given to experience (Paschoal & Grandesso, 2014). It can be an auxiliary tool to develop therapeutic conversations and new senses among the participants. They can explain in another way the experience avoiding a defensive behavior and other difficulties. To our research and discussion, the metaphor is a linguistic resource to explore narratives and collective meanings and externalize social problems. It is a way

to catch cultural and normative significances and think about how to make new meanings.

From these authors we defined a narrative as a short story, temporally ordered, that responds to a question from an interviewer, or an extended conversation that organises complex paths, flashbacks or episodes. In both cases, the term narrative is reserved for a limited unit of expression, rather than a complete biography (Riessman, 2008). Therefore, narrative analysis provides a methodology particularly sensitive to the construction of meaning, social processes and their relation to the construction of personal narratives (Emerson & Frosh, 2009).

## Results and Discussion

For the purpose of this text, we specifically reflected on one of the excerpt taken from a group process. The excerpt that we refer to is the one from which the article takes its name; *I am a bull*, which was made by one of the members of the group, during a session dealing with a family argument:

During the group session, the group member stood up to tell his story, dramatising and punching the air, shouting and looking angry, serious, demonstrating his anger performatively. Then his language gets stronger '1, 2, 3, bastard, I am a bull'... He said, 'they needle me, they torment me, I react like a bull'. He was talking about an argument with one of the relatives of his former partner which demonstrated performatively how the participant reacted to the conflict and was corroborated by other reactions in the group regarding conflict and direct aggression towards his former partner. (Group Field Diary, May 21, 2009)

This excerpt inspired us to develop an analysis about the social and cultural meanings of being like a bull. The aim of this study was to analyse the metaphor provided by this participant into three categories or arguments: (a) *being a bull*: the relation of this metaphor with the masculinity and subjectivity construction; (b) *the audience*: what are the meanings that others have concerning this topic, and (c) *intervention as an 'arena' for build-*

*ing new significances, narratives and audience.* This third point helped us think about interventions and future actions in similar sociocultural settings. We highlighted the potential of this metaphor to reflect on cultural and social dynamics.

*I am a bull.* Taking the bull-fight as a starting point, we can gather that reacting like a bull naturally consists of being combative and expressing active force (Wolff, 2008). If the ethics of the bullfight are related to the violent behaviour of the bull, we can state that this group member allows the nature of being a bull to be expressed when provoked. The question that must now be asked is: what does it mean to be the bull in bull-fighting? For Wolff (2008), the fighting bull is a distrusting animal that, because of its instinct to defend itself, acts according to its rebellious, untameable and unsubmissive nature.

We therefore ask which ideologies, narratives or significances and meanings are behind this phrase in terms of the construction of masculinities and violence? What are the constituent elements of what men are like and how they should confront conflicts? What does it mean to be a bull? We explore this metaphor from the arguments of the subject, including theoretical concepts to aid in its comprehension.

Being like a bull involves certain qualities and characteristics, particularly for Spanish culture. After the session, in a brief brainstorming on its meanings we associated it with strength, fighting spirit, courage, nobility, a volcano, impetus, love, violence, domination, blood baths, power. On this point it is important to question what light the literature on bull-fighting can shed on the metaphor of being a bull. Wolff (2008) defined the bull using a trilogy of its virtues: fighting spirit, nobility and power. The first is understood as the being, as what it is naturally; the second has to do with frankness, sincerity and uprightness. And finally, power is related to the physical strength and resistance in combat.

A closer look at its historical meanings takes us to the ritual of death, the struggle between intelligence and unreasonableness – a well-known quality of men which Seidler (1994) talked about in one of

his books. This is connected to mythology, to the labyrinth of the minotaur and the struggle of brute strength against reason, brute strength against philosophy, chaos against order, Dionysus against Apollo, known for form, order and rules. Making a parallel with the traditional male qualities idealised in our society (Connell, 1995, 1997, 2000; Kimmel, 1997), we found similar elements such as the constant struggle of men to prove their strength, fighting spirit, nobility, violence, domination, power, the fight of reason against emotion, the fight against the female that represents vulnerability and fragility.

Continuing with our reflection, the bull that dies in the bull-ring is also a stallion, frequently used to fertilise the cows. In other words it is the macho fornicator, dominating (or dominated by) several females. Pink (1997) referred to this in his criticism of Gilmore when he stated that being 'macho' in Andalusia means being sexually aggressive using his penis as a weapon. Hence the expression 'tener pelotas' symbolises and helps to define male honour. But, the same bull is also surprisingly the ham that has become too old. It represents immobility. The part that does not go, anymore, in the waiting way. He is and he is not. Does society have room for bulls like this in our time? Do we need to change something in this animal and if so what? Where is his heart and his point of transformation, balance and bravery?

Could it be that this young man identifies with the bull in his own position, in his own role, when dominating what he considers his property – his wife; when he is hurting her, trying to tame her, inseminating her? This is the point of crisis when the macho bull-bull macho loses his identity, loses sight of what he is looking for or sees it as being meaningless at that moment, goes into reflection and consequently into crisis; he feels desperate, justifies (or not) his violence and looks for new spaces. As Seidler (2009) stated, more focus must be given to the changes in men's behaviour, beyond an end to physical violence, to involve them in a review of their inherited masculinity, ideas of control such as domination – the same ideas that for years have structured their relationship with their own bodies, sexuality and emotional life.

*The audience.* It can be observed that many of the characteristic elements of the bull are similar to the traditional construction of maleness, demonstrating the connection of the cultural figure with the male ideal in our society. The visibility of these aspects helps us to reflect, by means of the metaphor, on how this man, the speaker of the phrase and participant in the group of violent men, sees himself and organises his understanding as a subject, as a man and as an identity. It offers the possibility of making a close connection between his formation as a masculine-male subject and elements of domination, power and violence. Exploring the metaphor allows us to go beyond a simple identification and reflect within the group on the construction and standardisation of certain orders of masculinity that determine the way in which a man should behave. The result is that to demonstrate his manhood, he shows violent behaviour, whether towards his partner, other women or in peer groups with other men. The celebration of bull-fighting is structured from a male point of view, in which the spectacle is a male one, as Araúz (1978) rightly pointed out by relating to bullfighting the expression “¡Olé los hombres!” (p. 183). According to this author, the celebration is a battle of powers, where power takes on a male sense and is “a primitive demonstration of hormones” (Araúz, 1978, p. 183).

Delgado (1986) discussed different anthropological interpretations to understand the significance of the bull-fighting ritual as presented below. The first is the conception of the bull as the female and the bullfighter as the male who courts, besieges and finally penetrates her with his phallic sword. The second sees the bullfighter as the scorpion-woman, who seduces the innocent male and then kills and devours him. In this sense the role of the woman is charged with negative meanings present in culture, as the author pointed out. Regarding this description, Delgado questioned male fear in the face of female sexuality and the need to defend themselves. For Pink (1997), the performance symbolises the conflict between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Delgado (1986) highlighted the fact that the men kill the bull in order to take its sexual capac-

ity, since this allows them the illusion of recouping their lost masculinity. How much of this is present in men? Especially in those who inflict violence on their emotional partners?

It is important to question the normative patriarchal system that legitimises the ‘bull’ as having to be constantly offering proof and actions of masculinity before an ‘arena’ of spectators who reinforce the traditional male image with gestures, questions, insinuations, etc. In poetry, history and literature the bull is a seducer and is seen and admired as an expression of the highest god; it transmits sad joy, some love it alive and some love it dead and yet others ingest it into their being. This bull in our society, in Hispanic culture, has a tragic destiny because it cannot choose – its history is predetermined, its struggle perhaps overcome, without being noticed, its destiny is marked by the play between power and vulnerability, life and death, pain and struggle, violence, aggression and passion, love and glory.

But who torments this bull to leave it angrier, more agitated, out of control and lost for reason? Who provokes this change that leaves him mad? Could we say that it is women or his male friends? His partner? His family? Or maybe society? Or even perhaps all of them together? If the bull-fighting celebration corresponds to a drama of masculinity that provokes an emotional response from the audience, we could think that perceiving of oneself as a bull shows the need for the spectators (men, women, State, Church, School, media, etc.) to revise the messages that are preinscribed during male socialisation so that the experience of masculinity does not need to be a drama and a load. And all of that without the need for approving looks from the other in order to be able to construct himself as a man. Taking into account that the bull-fight has been the object of many attacks by anti-bullfighting movements which define the ritual as ‘violence as a form of custom’ (Vicent, 2001, p. 109), identifying oneself as a bull to a certain extent reflects the violence of having to represent rigid roles of masculinity that also feed into social violence against women. This double violence in which men and women are subjected to a system where physical and verbal aggression in partnership relations has become a form of legitimised *custom* must be dismantled.

The counter argument is that currently with all the controversy about bull-fighting in Spain, we could interpret that a man who compares himself with a bull also compares himself with a being that is under question, that is losing part of its social glory of violence and fighting spirit and becoming an animal in need of new paths or that has to fight to maintain its traditional social space. We find savagery, the contemporary struggle for rights, where the symbolic bull mixes the old and the new, demarcating roots that today enter into social discussion for the promotion of violence against animals and the brutality that this implies. Setting out from the notion that a fighting bull stages its violent nature in the ring, but ends up being sacrificed, Delgado (1986) proposed that the situation represented by bull-fighting is a loss of virility. Within that meaning, future group intervention can allude to the bull during the process of therapy calls into question the male hegemony of having to be strong and violent. In this context, it is worth considering anthropological interpretations of the male role that are sustained in sexual differences, which associate the male organ with physical force and strong character, to defend the idea of socially constructed gender that is subject to reorganisation, re-reading and re-experiencing.

The metaphor of being a bull may also reflect a questioning of the traditional culture and its consequences, resistance to change in modern times, changing values, justice, etc. We can therefore draw another parallel, this time using the current discourse against machismo, for an end to violence against women, where sexist values lose status, naturalness and normalness to be seen as inadequate, as errors and as unfair sexual domination. Vulnerability is found in this bull, which becomes unstable and which, in his loss of power reacts with a great deal of aggression, seeking to survive and to maintain and prove its status. All this indicates that 'male privilege does not cease to be a trap and finds its counterpart in permanent tension and contention, sometimes at an absurd level, that imposes on every man the duty to affirm his virility in any situation' (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 68).

*Intervention as an 'arena' to build new subjectivities, narratives and audiences.* Exploring the implicit and explicit aspects of this metaphor allows the professional worker leading a group to guide possible reflections and questions in the group process with all the participants, showing certain requirements of being masculine and the connection with violence. It enables the proposal of new narratives, new socialisation among peers and other possible identifications, questioning the connection with violence, domination and power over others in the relationship. Returning to the group processes analysed, we illustrate our reflection using another part of the field diary, taken from one of the previous sessions with the same subject:

H. intervenes and begins to talk about his relationship with his ex and he talks about something quite serious that happened this week. He comments that he was at her house with the daughters because she had gone out. She took too long to come back and he started to get agitated about that. When she finally returned they had an argument and he threatened her with a knife. It was interesting to see how H. told the story. How he used his body to recreate the whole situation, showing the group how he did it using one of the other group members, onstage. It was also interesting to see how he spoke, his level of awareness of what he had done, his feelings, what seemed to be and what he discovered was really the case afterwards. Initially he used words that indicated the weight of the situation, such as 'I wanted her to show me some respect', and then he stated how he really felt 'I wanted her to be afraid of me'. An important discursive change occurs in the group. H. said that at the moment of acting out the knife scene he remembered the group, the organisers, everyone in the group and he realised what he was doing and stopped. He said he thought it was important to mention this to the group. One of the organisers says that when we talk about the situation we end up using words that do not properly express what happened or what we felt and that sometimes we use words that minimise the situation. (Group Field Diary, May 21, 2009)

So what happens to our bull when he does not achieve his frustrated and outdated ideal, and when he resists these changes? Maybe he panics, gets desperate, aggressive, empty, feels dizzy, experiences unclassified emotions he has never had before, that are not permitted unless they are rapidly adapted to the transfer of his surroundings, having lost his model and not knowing where to go. And in resisting all this and by not understanding what is happening around him, the bull uses a powerful weapon – aggression, violence, desperate movements, to stay in his position of domination – a weapon that is and has been legitimised, normal and valued for a long time. Or would society (the arena) by staying quiet and reinforcing the hegemonic model of man be the weapon with which men cause abuse?

Starting with the bull of strength, masculinity, race, battle, we move on to the construction of another bull that could be centred on other factors to defend its qualities such as fighting spirit, confrontation, conquering new spaces, one that suffers and fights for justice, balance and peace, transforming the meaning of hegemonic masculinity implicit in the metaphor of being a bull. This can be one possible intervention in a men group context based on the analysis made of this research after the observation. From this metaphor, future group interventions can follow this cultural idea to stimulate the participants to find new significant senses and narratives about the bull's identification and masculinities. For this we need a change of vision for new references and personal and social narratives, new subjective constructions, new bases, new models. We indicate the need for liberating discourses that offer alternatives to the hegemonic patriarchal model of being a man (Dutra, 2003). A change in the dominant model of masculinity can only be achieved if we cross ideological and cultural barriers (Lyra & Medrado, 2000).

Based on a constructionist and critical psychology, working to find new narratives, alternatives to those which predominate, we thought about as a group other possibilities of signifying and constructing the bull, building it with elements that counteract aggression and violence, with elements that are in keeping with gender equality, healthy social and

partner relations. This can be a way to build the re-signification of hegemonic masculinities in a group intervention context using metaphors as a resource. It can be a potential way to transform masculinities using reflexive questions trying to build new identifications and narratives. It produces new meanings using men socialization resources inside the group intervention context. Considering a future group intervention, we could question: what would that bull be like? Apart from discourse as a promoter of reality, performances, subjectivation and changes, we sought to promote other meanings, other possible narratives for the subjective construction of our participant, in such a way as to be able to promote committed changes (Beiras, 2012; Beiras & Cantera, 2012; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Lloret i Ayter, 2004; Morgan, 2000; White, 1991; White & Epston, 1990; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1994). In dialogue with the writings of Seidler (2009) we clearly see the need for 'new rules for new games' contributing to a new cultural imaginary for men, undistanced from emotions, differences, diversity, respect and equality.

We continue our reflection with illustration by way of some brief extracts and stories from the group session:

One of the group members talks in the last remaining minutes of the session. He says that he undertook an exercise in patience, in waiting his turn to speak and knowing how to listen to his colleagues. He says he sees the whole situation like a 'puzzle' and reflects that 'I see that all this is for me too'. He emphasises the question of having 'self-domination' and comments that he was scared when he did the performance and says that it really 'put the wind up' him. He tells a story about two drivers in the Honduras countryside who were going over a bridge that was only wide enough for one car. Both went onto the bridge and neither wanted to give way and go back, and one killed the other. He uses this example to illustrate to his colleagues what he calls 'self-domination', self control and the consequences of one's own actions. (Group Field Diary, June 9, 2009) 'I saw myself like that', 'I felt reflected' says one of the group members. He comments that one of his

challenges was to take control of himself. He says that what he felt was not fear, but pity. He adds that having been in the group he can now say 'this is violence', he has managed to name the acts that are violent. He also talks of compassion and pity for himself. (Group Field Diary, June 16, 2009)

The last person to talk was C. He thinks the fact that his colleagues could cry, express their emotions and use popular sayings is positive. He says that he identified with JL and C. He compares the situations and the gaps in relations to the family. He says 'tears come from the heart'. He talks about those who have opportunities and regrets the fact that many do not take them up. He states that he admires C because despite his diploma and studies he comes across as a humble, simple type of person. And in JL he admires the fact that he is a very hard worker. A. asks him 'and what do you see in yourself?' He says 'I see myself capable of doing things, developing spiritually', and also adds 'we are what we want to be'. (Group Field Diary, June 16, 2009)

From what we observed during the process, we can illustrate some impacts of the narrative about the bull to the participants. In some way, they explore identifications, emotions and memories about their lives. Ideologies, values, prejudices and norms are made visible, questioned and re-defined, they produce changes and reflections to promote alternative subjectivations to those that are predominant or traditional, less subjugated and more diverse. They promote the exhibition of narratives which, in the case of this group, are removed from specific mandates of masculinity and violence (Beiras, 2012; Beiras & Cantera, 2012; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Lloret, 2004; Morgan, 2000; White, 1991; White & Epston, 1990; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1994). However, a certain involvement of the leaders/facilitators of the group is needed in the promotion of change, gender equality, involvement of the feminist perspective and review of certain values that maintain violence as a male characteristic.

The narrative intervention used by men who have inflicted violence, according to Beiras (2009),

are important instruments for exploring meanings related to the construction of patterns of masculinity, femininity, beliefs and values in the group process. The stories that we tell are full of beliefs, feelings and values that guide the way in which we position ourselves in the world and understand ourselves as individuals and as subjects. In the group process, each member has the opportunity to experience the diversity of meanings and perceptions as group reflection takes place. Sharing experiences and narratives allows for the possibility of change and the development of new ways of seeing and signifying certain experiences, producing new socialisations, valuations and identifications in the participating subjects.

## Conclusions

Our intention in this article was therefore to launch a series of ideas, provocations, cultural reflections, interpretations and some possible directions for the most efficient and innovative types of intervention in the sector. Our analysis was centred on a theoretical point rather than a practise, in order to reflect about culture and normative points that maintain man domination. We organised our analysis on three arguments: I am a bull (subjectivity), audience (society), and intervention. For the first argument of analysis, we were able to observe the importance of going beyond changes in behaviour, conduct or anger management in interventions with men who have committed violent acts. We would like to emphasise the relevance of reflection and acting on aspects of power and domination in terms of subjective involvement, taking the different discussion achieved by the feminist movement as a basis, which demonstrates the importance of a more political, gender-based line in interventions on violence against women. We reinforce what Arisó Sinués and Mérida Jiménez (2010) have written about the need to not think of violence as a private, individual or partnership problem, but as a public problem that affects the whole of society.

This second argument analysis showed the need to act on a macro-level (the audience), on beliefs, symbology, cultural values, models and also on a

micro-level, with personal histories, learning, subjectivity and emotions. The group work, the narrative and reflective questioning are important tools for intervening on these two levels, in the interrelation and connection of these two systems (Bosch, Ferrer, Ferreiro, & Navarro, 2013; Heise, 1998).

Regarding the third argument of analysis, the reflections proposed in this article aimed not only to show the levels but also to promote the use of theoretical and practical tools for psychosocial intervention, in such a way that professional action and objectives take into account the ethical and political demands of feminism, as well as the direct need to eliminate acts of violence. About the intervention, elements of critical and discursive social psychology, cultural and feminist analysis and narrative therapies (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000; White, 1991; White & Epston, 1990; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1994) are possible tools and promising and efficient alternatives for promoting subjective change and redefining aspects of subjectivation subjected to standardisation, essentialism, fixation and worldviews that do not contemplate gender equality and the use of non-violence in the resolution of conflicts. Recognising that the life cycles of men in modern Spain are different and diverse take on greater importance. There is an urgent need then for new audiences, for plural models of masculinity that contemplate most, if not all, of the different ways in which men experience themselves and their bodies.

As in any study, the content of this article also contemplates some of the limitations. We take into account that this is a specific analysis that cannot be generalised, with interpretations that may vary and may be applicable only in specific contexts; the interpretations of the researchers were based on our own personal experiences and studies but it serves as a basis and example for specific interventions. We highlight the fact that from these ideas that contemplate a macro social and cultural context, the political nature of gender and the problems involved in the construction of male subjectivity, studies of masculinities, many other interventions, questions and reflections can be carried out in the group (possible suggestions for future work), jointly

with the men participating, using the therapeutic and group techniques that are appropriate to the context.

As final suggestions, we underline: (a) the importance of being aware of the constructions of masculinities and its specific cultural aspects when working with violent men, (b) focusing on the work of involvement and personal reflection with these subjects in such a way that they review their own history and subjective gender construction, (c) produce political and social questioning in the group, on relations of power and inequality, (d) go beyond behavioural change and the end of acts of violence in the group work, (e) seek to at least lay the foundations for personal change and (f) de-naturalise violence for the group participants as a 'normal' and acceptable male characteristic. It should also be pointed out that these need to be thoroughly worked through by the facilitators in their personal work and preparation for leading the group so that they are committed to change and consider political, feminist and cultural aspects and the construction of masculinity during their work in this sector. Future work should highlight the importance of studies that explore more of these aspects and analyse their consequences in group work with violent men. We hope that as the years go by the image of this 'bull' and this 'man' will be more diverse and contemplate values such as fighting spirit, courage and love, among other aspects, more emphatically in favour of the defence of human rights, gender equality and diversity.

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