

## A meta-synthesis about the study of men's sexual behavior through the lens of hegemonic masculinity

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to understand how men experience sexual behavior in relation to dominant masculine norms in heteronormative social organizations. After a systematic search and a careful study selection process, we analyzed 15 scientific qualitative studies on men's sexual practices that draw on hegemonic masculinity. We then carried out a thematic synthesis of the results that collectively covered 438 male narratives ranging in age from 11 to 71. The results include (hetero)sex as a signifier of manhood, male sexual collectivity; sexual hierarchies; sexual risk; and the invisibility of sexual diversity. This meta-synthesis emphasizes the complex relationship between male sexuality and the influence of hegemonic masculinity, revealing important health and well-being effects on men. Also, this highlights a dynamic relationship that affects not only men but also their partners in sexual relationships.

**Keywords:** *Hegemonic masculinity; Men; Meta-synthesis; Sexual behavior.*

**Uma meta-síntese sobre o conceito de masculinidade hegemónica utilizado como recurso para o estudo dos comportamentos sexuais masculinos:** O objetivo deste estudo é compreender o modo como os homens experienciam o comportamento sexual em relação com as normas da masculinidade e de uma organização social heteronormativa. Após uma pesquisa sistemática e um detalhado processo de seleção, analisámos 15 estudos qualitativos sobre práticas sexuais masculinas e que se baseiam na teoria da masculinidade hegemónica. Depois, realizámos uma síntese temática dos resultados que coletivamente contemplam 438 narrativas de homens com idades entre os 11 e os 71 anos. Os resultados incluem sexo(hetero) como signifiicante da masculinidade; coletividade sexual masculina; hierarquias sexuais; risco sexual; e invisibilidade da diversidade sexual. Esta meta-síntese enfatiza a complexa relação entre a sexualidade masculina e a influência da masculinidade hegemónica, revelando importantes efeitos ao nível da saúde e do bem-estar nos homens. Além disso, destaca uma relação dinâmica que afeta não apenas os homens, mas também as/os seus/suas parceiras/os nas relações sexuais.

**Palavras-chave:** *Masculinidade hegemónica; Homens; Meta-síntese; Comportamento sexual.*

Raewyn Connell (1987) defines hegemonic masculinity as the result of social construction, a gender configuration, assembled about the current and cultural responses concerning the patriarchal system. This, therefore, supports the "dominant" position of the masculine group as opposed to the feminine, which privileges the traits traditionally considered natural in men (Connell, 1987, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity resembles an evaluative look-out for femininity and a vigilant watch-out for expressing masculinity (Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018; Santos, 2019), a true Orwellian big brother<sup>2</sup> of gender social order (Amâncio, 2004). Hegemonic masculinity spans a set of normative and symbolically represented prescriptions that guide and discipline collective and individual thinking about what it is and what it is like to be a man (Connell, 1995; Marques, 2011), a regulatory force but simultaneously the aspiration of men ruled by heterosexuality, referring to the marginal layout of all sexualities that do not fulfill heteronormativity (Santos, 2019). It is important to understand this concept within a dynamic social

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<sup>2</sup> Big Brother is a fictional character in George Orwell's book, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, first published in 1949. An allegory that served to criticize Stalinism and offers a description of the oversight system on which capitalist democracies began to be based. "Big brother is watching you" is an expression often evoked in Orwell's book, thus Amâncio (2004) appropriates this concept to illustrate the constant vigilance and control that our society exercises over men to preserve masculinity.

structure based on gender relations that establish the gender order and are constantly changing due to historical variations and the diversity of human agency mechanisms (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Since gender is relational and stems from power inequalities both between men and women and similarly among men (Connell, 1987, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018), hegemonic masculinity is shaped in relation to an *emphasized femininity*, which makes us recognize the asymmetrical position of masculinities and femininities. Hegemonic masculinity is also built in relation to nonhegemonic masculinities, such as *subordinate masculinities*, constructed as inferior or deviant from hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018). Hegemonic masculinity is a process of surveillance produced over men and among men and has a significant impact on sexualities and sexual behaviors.

Starting from Foucault's definition of sexuality as a set of effects used on bodies, applications, and social relations enacted by a device derived from a complex political technology (Foucault, 1976/1994), we agree with the author insofar as sexuality represents a complex relationship of elements and discourses, a social apparatus with diverse effects on people (Weeks, 1986). Moreover, sexuality appears to Connell (1987) as the main territory of emotional relationships. Thus emotional investment and the routes of sexual desire are confined to standardized gender-based social norms and constraints. In Western societies, this norm is heterosexuality, which infers the exclusion of - or discrimination against - diversity in sexualities (Amâncio, 2004). Therefore, when seeking to understand sexual experiences, we cannot ignore the social organization and context in which they happen and how they are structured according to the set of heteronormativity (Berlant & Warner, 2002; Butler, 1999).

Consequently, the system of values, beliefs, and social customs tends to validate heterosexuality as more "natural" (Carneiro, 2009; Weeks, 1986). People with non-normative sexual practices attract social restrictions due to the contradictions between the norms that control their sexuality and the rules of gender attribution (Amâncio, 2004; Marques, 2004). In the case of men, because of the expectations as regards the representation of hegemonic masculinity, when the rules of sexuality get broken, social vigilance over male bodies reframes them according to a subordinate masculinity (Connell, 1995; Marques, 2004), resulting in discrimination (Marques, 2011). Furthermore, should we seek understandings about men's sexual practices, we gain access to a phallogocentric model centered on genitalization and grounded on the devaluation of emotional and affective expression, deemed feminine (Plummer, 2005). As Tiefer (2004) points out, the hegemonic model of human sexuality promotes, on the one hand, the idea of men as centered on multiple sexual experiences and physical gratification and, on the other hand, women as more concerned with intimacy and emotional relationships. Men are pressured into having sex to prove they are masculine, experiencing pressure from their peers to experience sexuality in a dominant way (Tiefer, 2004). Therefore, men might internalize norms about how they are supposed to act in sexual relations, engaging in many sex activities, preferentially heterosexual, and penetrative (Tiefer, 2004). This can lead to unprotected sexual practices just as gender norms and stereotypes interlink masculinity with sexuality, which may cause feelings of non-masculinity and inadequacy for men who do not pursue this pattern (Connell, 1987, 1995).

In this study, we seek to understand how male sexuality is experienced by accessing studies that contemplate narratives about men's sexual behaviors and understand the power applied by hegemonic masculinity and how this influences men at the level of their sexual behavior dynamics. Thus, we performed a meta-synthesis about men's sexual behavior and hegemonic masculinity to understand how "men are made, not born" (Fausto-Sterling, 1997, p. 244), as well as their sexual practices.

### Meta-synthesis: a brief explanation

Meta-synthesis, a technique for examining qualitative research, constitutes a systematic approach to identifying and analyzing qualitative studies, through which the findings of a variety of qualitative studies are synthesized, analyzed, and presented following the specific research topics or phenomena selected for study (Edwards & Kaimal, 2016; Thorne et al., 2004). The Meta-synthesis technique seeks to fuse relevant studies' results to generate new interpretations of their findings and provide a transformative understanding of a topic of interest (Thorne et al., 2004). Therefore, the meta-synthesis approach extends further than a traditional systematic literature review because it adds interpretative and inductive analysis (Edwards & Kaimal, 2016; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003) and thereby differs from meta-analysis, a technique for comparing quantitative research because it aims to understand and explain phenomena, whereas meta-analysis aims to increase certainty in terms of cause and effect conclusions (Walsh & Downe, 2005). Meta-synthesis entails a systematic approach to collecting and analyzing qualitative studies with the focus on the findings from those studies and thus applying qualitative methods to analyze their results (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). Barnett-Page and Thomas (2009) identified a total of nine meta-synthesis methods, although other new methods are emerging. Of those, we focus on the thematic synthesis,

developed by Thomas & Harden (2008), that incorporates an inductive and interpretative process. The thematic synthesis approach involves coding the study results line-by-line and then organizing those codes into descriptive themes, which are then further interpreted and combined into analytical themes (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009; Dixon-Woods et al., 2005; Thomas & Harden, 2008). We chose this approach in keeping with the objective of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in the research data and enhancing the understanding of the explicit or implicit meanings in the participant speeches contained in the papers, thereby examined.

### **AIMS, QUESTIONS, AND SCOPE**

This meta-synthesis aims to: (i) understand how male sexuality is experienced by accessing studies that present narratives about male sexual behavior; (ii) understand the power instilled by hegemonic masculinity and how this is manifested in male sexual behavior; (iii) access studies that contemplate narratives about the way men experience sexual behavior in relation to the heteronormative, patriarchal and male hegemonic social world. Moreover, it seeks to answer the following research question: What narratives do men present about their own sexual experiences in studies that engage with the hegemonic masculinity framework? Thus, we undertook a synthesis of qualitative research focusing on male narratives about their own sexual experiences and studies drawing on the hegemonic masculinity concept. To answer our research purpose, we searched for studies that contained interviews with men and, therefore, narratives of men's sexual experiences. Such qualitative empirical studies require fully integrating into the hegemonic masculinity framework and deploying this concept as a resource for studying male sexual behaviors. Therefore, we conducted a systematic search applying the restrictions described below.

### **METHOD**

We carried out and reported this systematic review and meta-synthesis following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol (Liberati et al., 2009), with the appropriate adaptations for this specific methodology. As our study was a review of previously published studies, neither ethical approval nor participant consent was required

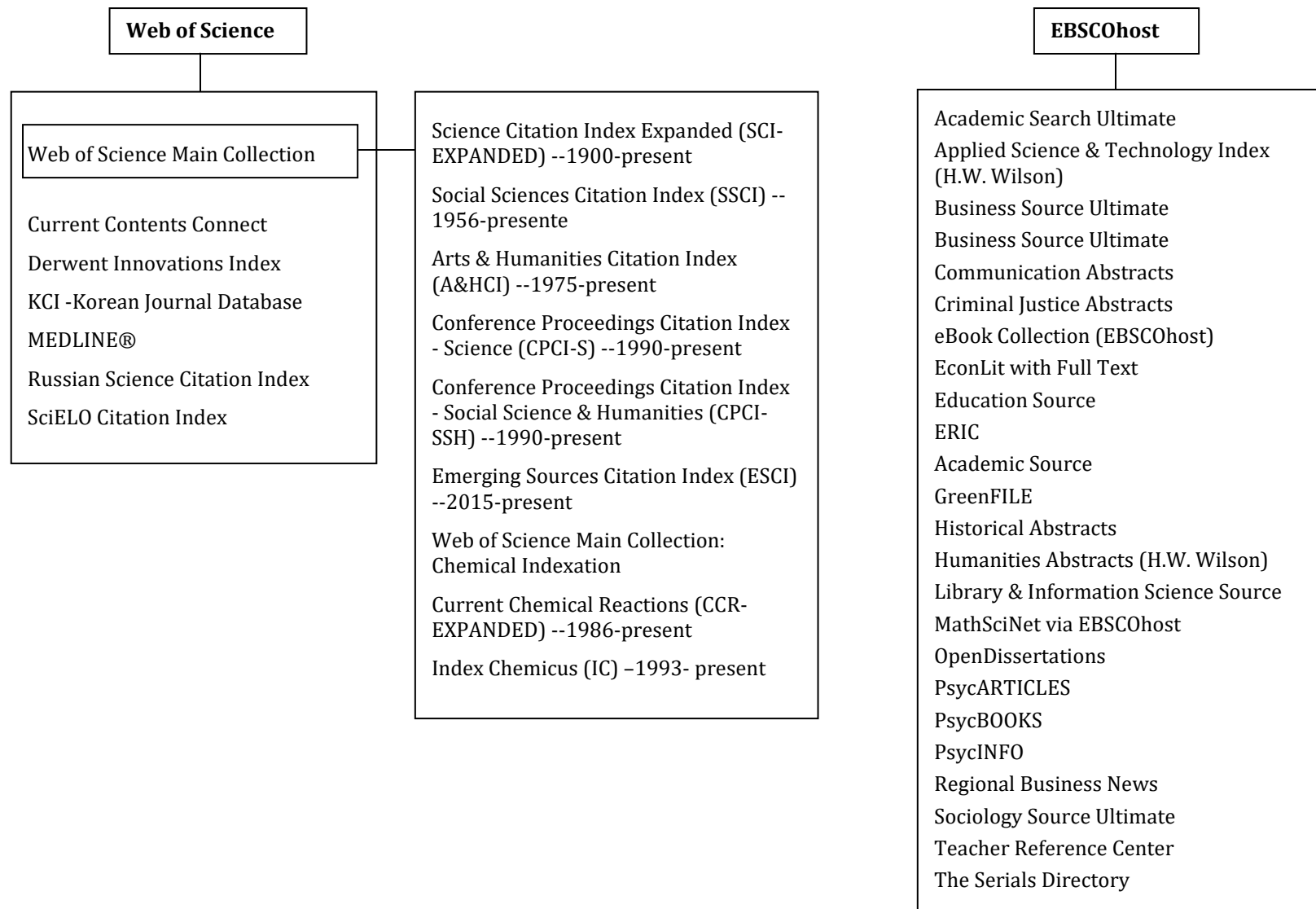
#### **Systematic search**

We conducted a systematic search during November 2019, before repeating the process in March 2020, of the following search engines: the Web of Science and EBSCOhost on the University of Porto servers, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences. To perform a search as extensively as possible, these search engines proved to be an appropriate choice for this work because of their database extension. All databases were selected (see Figure 1), and advice was asked from a librarian.

For EBSCOhost, the search terms were as follows: "hegemonic masculinity" (confine to full text) and interview\* (confine to abstract) and "man" or "male" (confine to abstract); and "sexual behav\*" or "sexual act\*" or "sexual pract\*" (confine to full text). The use of asterisks and quotation marks ensures a comprehensive search for each term. As abstracts must succinctly mention participant and methodology features, we restricted men's search to this section, such as the term interview, thus ensuring access to qualitative studies and including interviews with men. Finally, as we searched for studies that deployed the hegemonic masculinity concept as a resource for studying male sexual behavior, we set out to search for these terms throughout the text.

In the Web of Science search engine, although we intended to perform a search with the same restrictions, as it does not include searching by abstract, and as we chose all databases to ensure a broader search, this platform does not allow to pursue searches of every field, so the search for all fields was replaced by topic (which includes title, abstract, author keywords, and keywords plus). However, the intersections of the terms succeeded as described above.

When concluded, the systematic search returned a total of 637 studies for analysis, 569 from EBSCOhost and 68 from the Web of Science.



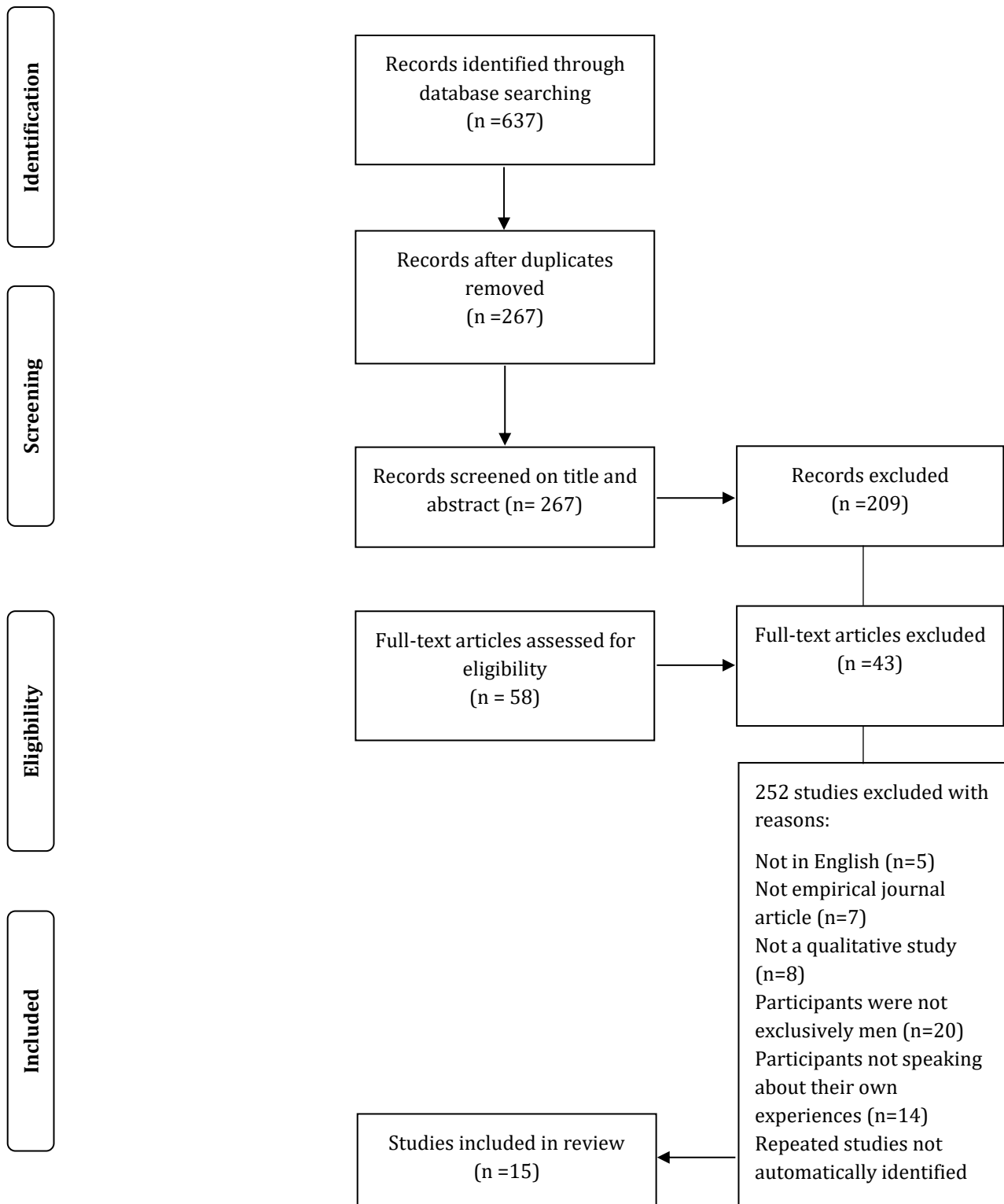
**Figure 1.** List of electronic databases, information retrieved from Web of Science and EBSCOhost search engine websites in November 2019.

### Selecting and processing data

The 637 studies were exported to *Zotero* software for treatment. This resulted in a database in which we were able to analyze these studies' main contents and select whether or not to include them in our research. After removing duplicates, we obtained a total of 267 items for analysis and the titles and abstracts of those articles were carefully read to decide on inclusion or exclusion according to the following criteria: (i) Including empirical qualitative studies comprising interviews, thus providing participant narratives, excluding quantitative and other data collection methods that do not provide access to narratives/discourses, and excluding mixed methods because conclusions do not result from exclusive qualitative research, having inseparable methods merge that does not apply to the meta-synthesis protocol; (ii) Including journal articles while selecting only studies published in scientific journals and excluding book chapters, books, reports, among other publications; (iii) Including only studies written in English; (iv) Including studies in which participants are exclusively men and who must be presenting their own sexual experiences, excluding studies in which participants are men but talking about the experiences of others, excluding studies in which participants are women, and excluding studies with mixed participants (men and women) because they impacted the final results and there was no way of separating them from men's narratives and inevitably merged the perspectives and experiences of women about themselves and men. (v) Including studies with the primary aim of discussing male sexual behavior drawing on the hegemonic masculinity framework and thereby reaching our research question.

The screening process involved two stages. First, two reviewers independently read the titles and abstracts of 267 studies. This step identified the relevant articles and recorded the reasons for the exclusion of rejected papers. This initial process aimed at identifying all potentially relevant articles and was thus as inclusive as possible (Gough, 2007), rejecting only those that clearly failed on one or more criteria. As this step was carried out independently, the two researchers then compared results to ensure their decision processes' reliability. Secondly, 58 full-text articles were approved as eligible before the two reviewers advanced with reading the studies in full and discussing the process of inclusion or exclusion on an individual basis.

Regarding the first stage, the researchers found consensus difference in 11 studies. Note that in the 'written in English', 'empirical journal article' and 'qualitative study' items, the agreement was absolute. The disagreement follows in the remaining items, and it occurred for two reasons: the different exclusion criteria, whereas in each case, the researchers discussed and chose the best option for exclusion. And two studies had been selected by one researcher and eliminated by another, so the researchers discussed their arguments about inclusion or exclusion. Thus one was selected and one eliminated. Figure 2 details the summary of the inclusion-exclusion process. Following the rigorous and extensive work of studies analysis, a total of 15 studies matching the inclusion criteria remained.



**Figure 2.** Selection process for the studies included in meta-synthesis.**Analysis**

The analysis then took place according to "three stages which overlapped to some degree: the free line-by-line coding of the findings of primary studies; the organization of these 'free codes' into related areas to construct 'descriptive' themes; and the development of 'analytical' themes" (Thomas & Harden, 2008, p. 4).

This thematic synthesis began with familiarization with the data, which involved an attentive and careful re-reading of the selected articles. Then, we proceeded with the production of the initial codes and, as such, formulated a list of ideas about the most relevant data, later grouped into codes. In the knowledge that each sentence and paragraph of the results, discussion, and conclusion of the studies had been read and reread and with the codes inductively created, we, therefore, searched for themes that involved grouping several codes into broader units of analysis with broader meanings. Subsequently, the themes identified with the codified analysis units were cross-checked, so we could refine the analysis and improve the specificities of each theme, with the definitions and titles of the themes becoming correspondingly more concrete. We concluded the analysis by organizing and writing about the results so that the most significant and appealing extracts were incorporated into this meta-synthesis analysis (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009; Thomas & Harden, 2008).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION****Description of the synthesis studies**

Table 1 sets out the characteristics of these studies. These 15 studies collectively contain the narratives of 438<sup>3</sup> men, ranging from 11 to 71 years of age. The most common method of data collection was individual interviews, with eleven studies exclusively applying this method (Doull et al., 2013; Duckworth & Trautner, 2019; Eck, 2014; Fileborn et al., 2017; Fleming & Davis, 2018; Javaid, 2017; Kong, 2009; Lamb et al., 2017; Prohaska & Gailey, 2010; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017; Stern et al., 2015), with three opting for a mix of both individual interviews and focus group (Kalish, 2015; Limmer, 2016; Moolman, 2015), and with one study using a blend of online discussion board posts and individual interviews (Bishop & Limmer, 2017).

The settings were diverse; four studies recruited participants from community settings (Eck, 2014; Fileborn et al., 2017; Javaid, 2017; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017), with another four collecting their participants only from college settings (Fleming & Davis, 2018; Kalish, 2015; Lamb et al., 2017; Prohaska & Gailey, 2010). One study recruited participants from an online and sex work environment (Bishop & Limmer, 2017), one from non-governmental organizations and the sex work environment (Kong, 2009), one from middle school, high school, and college settings (Duckworth & Trautner, 2019), one from an institutional context (Limmer, 2016), one from a sexual health clinic (Doull et al., 2013), one from prison (Moolman, 2015) and one from community and non-governmental organizations (Stern et al., 2015).

The earliest study was published in 2009 (Kong, 2009), and the most recent published in 2019 (Duckworth & Trautner, 2019). Four studies were conducted in the UK (Bishop & Limmer, 2017; Javaid, 2017; Limmer, 2016; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017) and six in the USA (Duckworth & Trautner, 2019; Eck, 2014; Fleming & Davis, 2018; Kalish, 2015; Lamb et al., 2017; Prohaska & Gailey, 2010), one was conducted in China (Kong, 2009), one in Canada (Doull et al., 2013), one in Australia (Fileborn et al., 2017), and two in South Africa (Moolman, 2015; Stern et al., 2015).

<sup>3</sup> The 1237 individual discussion board posts on Bishop & Limmer (2017) study were not counted as participants.

**Table 1.** Studies included in meta-synthesis: characteristics

	Authors, country	year,	Title	Focus of study	Participants	Data collection	Data analysis	Setting
1	Bishop, S., & Limmer, M. (2017). UK.		Performance, power and condom use: Reconceptualized masculinities amongst Western male sex tourists to Thailand	To examine how understandings and performances of masculinities may inform the sexual risk-taking behaviors of Western male sex tourists.	14 men aged between 37 and 71 attempted interviews.	Online discussion board posts and face-to-face interviews	Thematic analysis	Online and sex work environment.
2	Doull, M., Oliffe, J., Knight, R., & Shoveller, J. A. (2013). Canada.		Sex and straight young men: Challenging and endorsing hegemonic masculinities and gender regimes	To understand how young men perceive, interact with, and deploy power within intimate heterosexual relationships.	13 men aged between 17 to 22.	Semi-structured interviews	Social constructionist gendered analysis	Sexual health clinic
3	Duckworth, K., & Trautner, M. N. (2019). USA		Gender goals: Defining masculinity and navigating peer pressure to engage in sexual activity	To understand boys definitions of masculinity and experiences with peer pressure regarding sexual behavior.	87 boys aged between 11 and 23.	Semi-structured interviews	Reported an open coding approach	Middle school, high school, and college
4	Eck, B. A. (2014). USA.		Compromising positions: Unmarried men, heterosexuality, and two-phase masculinity	To understand how men claim a mature heterosexual identity outside the institution of marriage and how men's enactment of manhood through sexuality changes over the life course.	26 men, ages between 40 and 62.	Semi-structured interviews	Reported an open coding approach	Community
5	Fileborn, B., Hinchliff, S., Lyons, A., Heywood, W., Minichiello, V., Brown, G., Malta, S., Barrett, C., & Cramer, P. (2017). Australia.		The importance of sex and the meaning of sex and sexual pleasure for men Aged 60 and older who engage in heterosexual relationships: Findings from a qualitative interview study	To understand the relation between hegemonic masculinity ideals and heterosexual experiences of older men.	27 men, aged 60 years and older.	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis	Community
6	Fleming, C., & Davis, S. N. (2018). USA.		Masculinity and virgin-shaming among college men	To explore and document how college men experience and navigate acts of "virgin-shaming," receiving criticism or being belittled for their virgin status.	10 men older than 18.	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis	College

7	Javaid, A. (2017). UK.	Masculinities, sexualities, and identities: Understanding HIV positive and HIV negative male rape victims	To understand how HIV intersects with male rape and how the virus challenges and weakens male rape victims' sense of masculinity.	15 men. Mean age: 26 years old.	Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews	Thematic analysis	Community
8	Kalish, R. (2015). USA.	"I'm not gonna not have sex": The male peer group and men's sexual decision-making	To examine the link between expectations of masculinity and sexual behavior.	17 men, ages between 19 and 26.	Semi-structured interviews and focus groups	Reported an open coding approach	College
9	Kong, T. S. K. (2009). China.	More than a sex machine: accomplishing masculinity among Chinese male sex workers in the Hong Kong sex industry	To examine male sex workers' masculinity and understand how people who engage in sex work cope with the job.	18 men, ages between 17 and 39.	In-depth interviews	Grounded theory approach	Non-governmental organizations and sex work environment.
10	Lamb, S., Kosterina, E. V., Roberts, T., Brodt, M., Maroney, M., & Dangler, L. (2017). USA.	Voices of the mind: Hegemonic masculinity and others in mind during young men's sexual encounters	To understand what goes in the mind of young men during sex, particularly, hegemonic masculinity inputs.	13 self-identified men, ages between 19 and 25.	Semi-structured interviews	Combination of thematic and discursive analysis	College
11	Limmer, M. (2016). UK.	"I don't shag dirty girls": Marginalized masculinities and the use of partner selection as a sexual health risk reduction strategy in heterosexual young men	To explore how young men attempt to mitigate sexual risk by assigning labels to particular young women and using them as a basis for their decisions regarding sexual activity, contraception, and condom use.	46 men aged between 15 and 17 years.	Focus groups and semi-structured in-depth interviews	Reported a thematic framework	Institutional
12	Moolman, B. (2015). South Africa.	Carceral dis/continuities: Masculinities, male same-sex desire, discipline, and rape in South African prisons	To examine the in/visibility of sexual and sexually violent performances and practices in prison and the body's regulatory boundaries in the production of hegemonic masculinities.	72 men aged between 18-70.	Interviews and focus groups	Discourse and thematic analysis	Prison
13	Prohaska, A., & Gailey, J.A. (2010). USA.	Achieving masculinity through sexual predation: the case of hogging	To explore hogging from a sociology of masculinities perspective.	13 men, aged 18-42.	Semi-structured interviews	Coding based on Brannon's (1976) four components of masculinity	College

14	Ravenhill, J. P., & De Visser, R. O. (2017). UK.	"It takes a man to put me on the bottom": Gay men's experiences of masculinity and anal intercourse	To explore how gay men's beliefs about masculinity were associated with their beliefs about the gendered nature of sexual self-labels and their behavior in anal intercourse.	17 men ages between 20 and 42.	Semi-structured interviews	Discourse-dynamic approach to subjectivity operationalized according to the procedures of interpretative phenomenological analysis	Community
15	Stern, E., Cooper, D., & Greenbaum, B. (2015). South Africa.	The relationship between hegemonic norms of masculinity and men's conceptualization of sexually coercive acts by women in South Africa	To understand men's experiences of pressurized sex in a heterosexual context, concerning hegemonic norms of masculinity.	50 men purposively sampled from three age categories: (18-24, 25-54, and 55+).	Sexual history narrative interviews	Reported a thematic and open coding approach	Community and non-governmental organizations

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### Thematic synthesis

We present the results of the analytical process below. It is important to consider the interconnections in the analytical process to understand these results better. Thus all the facets of the analysis interrelate with each other in a thematic network. It is also important to retain that this analysis results from a particular set of studies that include the narratives of a specific group of men. This results from a contextualized analysis, which illustrates merely the narratives and results presented by each study, never universal nor generalizable. However, it is worth noting the wide variety of contexts and the diversity of participants. To this end, we tried to highlight some sociodemographic data whenever a direct quote is made. Thus more information is presented in table 1. This synthesis embraced five themes, specifically: (i) (hetero)sex as a signifier of manhood; (ii) male sexual collectivity; (iii) sexual hierarchies; (iv) sexual risk; and (v) the invisibility of sexual diversity. We now put forward a detailed description of each theme.

#### (Hetero)sex as a signifier of manhood

Sex "it defines what a man is, doesn't it? (*Aaron* - Australian man, more than 60 years old - in Fileborn et al., 2017, p.22). From the analysis of the studies, we were able to understand that data converge around the idea that sex presents itself not only as a status, as the reason through which masculine sex practices can be constructed, performed, and validated (Connell, 1987), but also as virility, as the construction of the masculine ideal as always embarked on an insistent and incessant search for sex (Kimmel, 2006). This theme runs throughout all the analysis. For instance, in the Fleming and Davis (2018) study, the authors convey how being a virgin violates the norms of what it means to be a man, which leads to loss of status in the male group. Virginity is a stigmatized attribute that implies a failure in the rituals of manhood, to which the policing of male bodies and invitations, or even coercion, is applied for the loss of virginity. Several participants in various studies describe the pressure to engage in sexual activity as in the study of Duckworth and Trautner (2019) where young men, aged 11 to 23, describe this pressure as performed not only by peers but also by significant and older male elements such as father, grandfather, among others. Moreover, what counts for affirmation as a man is not only being sexually active but above all heteronormatively:

It's the concept of, like, you're not a real man yet, you don't know what you're doing, you're still, yeah, you haven't had sex, it's like you're missing something, you're not doing what you should be doing, you're not like fulfilling your role of masculinity. Or if you're having sex that's not heteronormative, you're less of a man. (*Zach* - USA, college man, more than 18 years old - in Fleming & Davis, 2018, p. 12)

Thus, we would highlight the constant presence through the whole analysis of the heteronormative tendency of the studies and the participant heteronormative discourses.

In Eck's (2014, p. 156) study, participants "rely on the heterosexualized construction of hegemonic masculinity in the identity work they do as men". These participants, unmarried men aged 40 to 62, prove their manhood by showing they had enough sex, that they could "get laid all the time" when they were younger but, with their current status of maturity, they may reject the "buffet table" while simultaneously rebuilding their manhood. Now, these men choose maturity over promiscuity. However, the contributions to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity and the valorization of a masculinity that promotes men according to their constant sexual interest and pursuit of women are persistent in this and the other studies analyzed. Political, cultural, and economic practices benefit hegemonic masculinity and subordinate masculinities that distance themselves from heteronormativity (Connell, 1995).

As sex is a signifier of manhood, it implies that men should hold expertise in the subject. Here, we highlight the idea of men as "know-ers" as presented in the study of Lamb et al. (2017) and extending to men's thoughts during sex. Participants, college men aged 19 to 25, mention their sexual skills and knowledge to achieve a good sexual performance. They talk about the ability to anticipate women's desires and reactions, which bestows the status of beginners and controllers of sexual practices, inevitably placing women as passive; "women are positioned as mystifying beings that only a savvy man can read" (Lamb et al., 2017, p. 11), concerning the objectification and subordination of women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) in a clear sexual hierarchy that we return to below.

These studies reinforce the male sexual ideal with the prized and prioritized sexual activity becoming that which happens in quantity, straight and penetrative (Tiefer, 2004). For example, in the study of Fileborn et al. (2017), participants refer to "real sex" as penetrative intercourse and ejaculation. Furthermore, in this study, participants with erectile dysfunction display signs of distress as they cannot respond to hegemonic masculinity references. However, negotiations over masculinities stand out as in Eck's (2014) study where the assumption of subordinate masculinity emerges and enables new encounters, new pleasures, and new sexual experiences and thereby dissociating men from the idea of sex as physical behavior to adopt an approach to the idea of sex within the scope of intimacy and bonding. The

studies of Eck (2014) and Fileborn et al. (2017) also illustrate how sexuality and sexual behavior represent social constructs (Tiefer, 2004), displaying different definitions and meanings of sex for different men who likewise express changes over the course of time. Nevertheless, sex as a signifier of manhood remains "an essential component of being a man" (*Aaron*, - Australian man, more than 60 years old - in Fileborn et al., 2017, p.21).

References are constant to male sexuality as experiencing urgency. Men are thus expected to seek sex at every available opportunity, and hence any refusal of sex might become interpreted as a non-male action (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 2006; Tiefer, 2004). For this reason, this analysis emphasizes how difficult it could be for some man to simply stop a sexual encounter even when not wishing to engage in sexual activity: "I'm not just gonna not have sex" (*James* - USA, college man, aged 19 to 26 - in Kalish, 2015). Therefore, "sex, even if undesired, is a strong signifier of manhood" (Stern et al., 2015, p. 811), which furthermore drives the denial of sexual violence against men. The Javaid's (2017) study identifies the effects of rape on male victims and thereby conveying how the victim's "identity" induces "weakness", being incompatible with masculinity that represents power and control, resulting in silence out of the fear of losing masculine status. This renders it difficult for these men to embody hegemonic masculinity:

I am not supposed to be a victim, especially of a 'female crime' [rape]. I don't feel like I can ever be a 'man' because I became a victim of rape. So, I feel ashamed to ask for help from society, trying to get medical help and counseling. (*Ahmed* - UK, male rape victim, mean age of 26 years old - in Javaid, 2017, p. 331)

The consequences of silencing these victims can be severely harmful. The silencing of victim status leads many men not to seek medical help, which is aggravated when victims contract HIV due to rape. Furthermore, this may lead to more emotional and psychological stress and not only individually but also socially, as these men encounter difficulties in establishing new relationships or suffer social stigmatization (Javaid, 2017).

Similarly, the study by Stern et al. (2015), held in South Africa with men aged 18 to more than 55, illustrates the sexual urgency that assigns masculinity status while harming men. In an attempt to understand men's experiences of pressurized sex, in a heterosexual context, where women are the perpetrators and men the victims, the authors found that many men report experiences of coerced sex, involving emotional or verbal abuse, threats of physical abuse, or even being taken advantage of when drunk. However, these practices are not perceived as coerced sex as the social system engages with hegemonic masculinity: "always be responsive to women's sexual desires" (Stern et al., 2015, p. 797).

### Male sexual collectivity

Throughout the analysis, a male collectivity emerges concerning individual sexual practices. We call it collectivity in referring to the peer group that collectively interferes with men's individual sexual experience. We have already mentioned peer pressure regarding the loss of virginity (Fleming & Davis, 2018). We may also highlight discourse from men who felt forced to respond sexually to their partners even when not wanting to have sex, particularly to meet peer expectations of 'wanting and having much sex' (Stern et al., 2015). We have also analyzed the discourses of men who avoid this male sexual collectivity, specifically men who choose isolation or the silencing of their rape victim experiences out of fear and shame to keep their masculinity intact (Javaid, 2017).

This male collectivity also appears to interfere with other factors such as deciding on partner selection and condom use, as reported in Kalish's (2015) study. Here, many participants, college men aged 19 to 26, reported that their peers' approval (or perceived approval) was a relevant factor in their partners' choice. Therefore, when having no condom at the time for proceeding with sexual intercourse, they decided to proceed anyway out of fear that avoidance would weaken their masculinity. Additionally, Limmer's (2016) study reports how young men (15 to 17 years old) make decisions about whether or not to use condoms or who to have sex with, based on the information that peers share about their sexual partners and the labeling of women.

Regarding the voices in men's minds during sex, participants report thinking about the group of men who can judge their performance, particularly their friends (Lamb et al., 2017). The following quote illustrates this assumption:

I was thinking about... memorizing every single thing that she did so I can report it to my friends. That's exactly what I was thinking. She did this, she did that ok, I am keeping that in mind. I don't wanna, I don't want to forget anything 'cause I want to give a list of everything I did to show my friends, my older friends that, that's the transition of kid to being a man. (*Tom* - USA, college man, aged 19 to 25 - in Lamb et al., 2017, p. 15)

This passage and the following analysis of the "voices in Tom's mind" become the perfect example of the male sexual collectivity. The participant went on to describe that not only was he thinking of his friends, but he was also naming, sometimes even whispering, their names:

He goes on after the interviewer's questions to explain an unusual practice in more detail: "while I'm doing it I have to think about the names, or say their names" (...) For this man, the friends weren't only there, waiting to hear about the details and to judge a sexual performance as successful, these friends needed to be included in the act. He says his friends' names as if creating a barrier against intimacy with the woman and making the act an act of solidarity with his male friends. They are there with him in spirit; they are all having sex with her. (Lamb et al., 2017, p. 15).

Similarly, in Kalish's (2015) work, many participants, college men aged 19 to 26, report that during a hookup (a term that covers casual sex encounters and other related activities, without necessarily including emotional bonding or long-term commitment), they think about their friends as regards the level of approval of their partner. This masculine collectivity denotes the masculine group's presence, such as peers and friends, in the individual sexual act of a man. Indeed, let us be clear that we are not referencing group sex but rather the symbolic representation of the male group and its constant vigilance even during the sexual act, similar to the Orwellian big brother that Amâncio (2004) proposes to illustrate the power of hegemonic masculinity.

Men become collectively together in individual sexual acts. In the examples hitherto set out, the male group engages in the individual sexual act symbolically. However, in some cases, friends are even physically present and, once again, not referring to mutually consented group sex. The case of hogging, "a practice whereby men seek out women they deem unattractive or fat for sexual purposes" (Prohaska & Gailey, 2010, p. 13) is, as in other examples, a strategy to achieve masculinity and prove one's manhood as happens within the peer group, involving competition and betting, a practice serving as entertainment in challenges with alcohol or cash rewards. In these dynamics, *rodeos* sometimes happen: In these men's group games involving gambling challenges and alcohol, one of the consequences of challenges involves not only hogging but also the physical presence of a friend, hiding in the room, observing the friend's sexual practice, taking pictures and sharing them with the other group members (Prohaska & Gailey, 2010). This kind of male sexual collectivity not only provides a means of accessing status through emotional indifference and independence, in perfect coherence with the demands of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; Kimmel, 2006; Plummer, 2005) but also represents a form of exploitation, humiliation, and objectification of women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), as we shall discuss below.

Another example illustrating this male sexual collectivity comes from the study of Bishop and Limmer (2017) on Western male sex tourists who travel to Thailand, aged 37 to 71, creating bonds and friendships not only through traveling to the same place for the same purpose but also by extending their language and actions, by appropriating Thai terms to name the group, by sharing information about sex workers and encouraging unprotected sex and especially by the (re)negotiations of masculinities as in their homelands these remain subordinate while in Thailand they "were able to collectively construct and perform their masculinities" (Bishop & Limmer, 2017, p. 5).

### **Sexual hierarchies**

Sexual hierarchies arise in this analysis across two dimensions: through the objectification and subordination of women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and the bipolarization of sexual practices operationalized through the *bottoms* and *tops* performances, often enunciated in studies on homosexual encounters (Moskowitz et al., 2008). As we have already detailed, women might be objectified in the system of male hegemony. For many men, and according to hegemonic masculinity, sex means pleasuring women according to the implicit idea that women are passive and receive pleasure from men, correspondingly holding power and ability to please them. Men thus should both know what to do and how to position themselves for a better performance (e.g., Bishop & Limmer, 2017; Doull et al., 2013; Fileborn et al., 2017; Kalish, 2015; Lamb et al., 2017; Limmer, 2016):

I am responsible for pleasing my girlfriend. I have to do it, and if I don't do it, I will not feel any pride in being a man as I cannot even do the one job I am supposed to. (*Tom* - USA, college man, aged 19 to 25 - in Lamb et al., 2017, p. 9)

From men "being knowledgeable" (Fleming & Davis, 2018; Lamb et al., 2017) is expected alongside having lots of experience, of practice and hence the total amount of sexual relations places men in a position of power, revealing the influence of hegemonic masculinity in policing norms and silencing alternative masculinities (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As for women, this promiscuity is not expected, "it doesn't look good" and leaves them with a certain "reputation" as described in Limmer's study (2016):

I chill with my mates and the girls that I know, I know them, you know what I mean, and I have known them near enough all my life—gone to school with them and all that shit—but I wouldn't have sex with none of them because they have probably all got chlamydia or some shit like that. I don't know, they're all slags, aren't they? I don't want to shag a dirty girl or anything. It's just mad. (*Danny* - UK, aged 15 to 17 - in Limmer, 2016, p.134-9).

These young men apply the girl's "reputation" as a risk reduction strategy. In the case of hogging, this "involves a detachment from, or an objectification of, women. Women are seen as objects from which some need or gratification is gained" (Prohaska & Gailey, 2010, p. 21).

The study of Doull et al. (2013) explores gender regimes, referring to the more traditional descriptions of heterosexual gender regimes and expressions of hegemonic masculinity (e.g., aggression and control) that illustrate these sexual hierarchies. Participants described these gender regimes, young Canadian men aged 17 to 22, as negative and undesirable. However, the authors realized that while participants seem to move away from the stereotypical image of masculinity and power, many personal experiences resemble this stereotypical image and reflecting a difference between that said and that actually done. Nevertheless, some participants challenge traditional gender regimes, create new gender rules in sexual relations, and rebuild masculinities. Therefore, the hierarchy is defined as privileging men over women or the masculine over the feminine (Connell, 1987). In the study by Ravenhill and Visser (2017), all participants (some contested this while others embraced it) admitted a stereotypical discourse around sexual practices between men. As mentioned in the study, *tops* are most associated with hegemonic masculinity, dominance, confidence, physical strength, greater musculature, hence "more masculine" men. *Bottoms* are more passive, smaller muscles, weaker, submissive, and "more feminine" men (Moskowitz et al., 2008). This dichotomy merely reinforces the idea of sexual hierarchy. Like masculine and feminine, the top and bottom act is built within the heterosexual intercourse discourse (Butler, 1999). Therefore, the *top* would be the man, and the *bottom* would be the woman, with the *top* in control and with power over the dominated and subversive *bottom*:

I guess it's not what I want to be saying, but it [topping] probably does make me feel more masculine. [Laughs] Yeah, sort of in charge of the situation, I guess ... That's not the way I'd like to feel, or describe it; it's just kind of the way it seems to be. (*Adam* - UK, aged 20 to 42 - in Ravenhill & Visser, 2017, p. 7).

So, I think that if I was perceived as a bottom, that's seen as a more effeminate thing, I guess. And obviously as we've discussed prior, it's quite important for me to come across as masculine. In [city] there's always a shortage of tops. I feel there's a lot of bottoms there, so I don't want to be just put aside as saying, "Oh, that guy is definitely a bottom." I think that's quite a bad thing. (*Andy* - UK, aged 20 to 42 - in Ravenhill & Visser, 2017, p. 6).

### Sexual risk

As already expressed in the thematic explorations above, many participants in different studies choose unprotected sexual practices instead of risking losing any masculinity status. Thus, we may realize the impact masculinity has on these men's lives as it receives a greater priority than well-being and health. Thus it seems better to run the risk of sexually transmitted infection (STI) than losing male status. In Kalish's (2015) study, some participants report they would choose to have unprotected sex (even if undesired) rather than suspend their sexual activity: "Once, I had no condom, and she wanted sex, but I didn't. I did it anyway, and I felt bad about it. I regretted it and was worried for a while after" (*Jake* - USA, college man, aged 19 to 26 - in Kalish, 2015, p. 12). Not ignoring the fact that Jake regrets his behavior, he reinforces hegemonic masculinity by not being able to say no. Nevertheless, this man was coerced, and he is also reinforcing hegemonic masculinity through acknowledgments and regrets.

Likewise, in Limmer's (2016) study, some young men with their dislike for condom use resort to labeling young women as a primary risk reduction strategy believing that it is somehow possible to ascertain from the "reputation" of 'girls' whether or not they have STIs: "If she's been with loads of people, she's more likely to have a disease, isn't she?" (*Trevor* - UK, aged 15 to 17- in Limmer, 2016, p. 135). Boys go over how to evaluate a girl's appearance or "reputation" when engaging in sex: "What sort of clothes they wear, or how they walk, how they walk, what their hair's like" (*Martin* - UK, aged 15 to 17- in Limmer, 2016, p. 135) or even "If I know that she's genuinely hygienic, pretty clean, then alright—but if I don't know her, I'll tell her to have a bath and put a johnny [condom] on" (*Mark* - UK, aged 15 to 17- in Limmer, 2016, p. 135). In these examples, the young men not only objectify and subordinate women, as previously discussed, through matching the assumptions of hegemonic masculinity (Amâncio, 2004; Connell, 1995; Marques, 2011), but they also reiterate that condom use does not align with male reputations because condoms equal protection and protection equals fear and fear does not equate with masculinity.

Consequently, assigning labels to those girls enables the young men to validate their antipathy to condom use.

In Bishop and Limmer's (2017) study about Western male sex tourists to Thailand aged 37 to 71, the tensions divide between men in favor of using condoms, on the ground of it being the right and responsible thing to do and that not doing so resembles a "selfish and stupid" action; and men who reported practicing unprotected sex with sex workers in Thailand, and then labeling men who use condoms as "weak and fearful" as not using condoms "made one more of a man" (Bishop & Limmer, 2017, p. 9). This division of tensions reinforces the negotiations over masculinity, a cross-assumption underlying this analysis.

These are sexualized masculinities, where, as discussed above, the status of sexual experience serves as a reinforcer of masculinity (Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018). Moreover, what counts as "proper sex" is heteronormative sex with penetration. Additionally, the contributions made over not using condoms range from fear of impairing erection to the fear of losing masculine status (Bishop & Limmer, 2017).

In this topic, we would highlight the presence of a "strategic misinformation". Although STI transmission rules are well known, many men prefer to be guided by their beliefs and those of their peers rather than deploying health care information as a guide for safe sexual practices. Illustrating the thematic network that constitutes this analysis, we again emphasize the sexual male collectivity and how the male group is always present in a man's individual sexual act. These men choose to be guided by myths such as "heterosexual sex equals low risk" or "STIs as homosexual diseases" (Bishop & Limmer, 2017), or even the belief that assessing the risk of STIs is possible according to the girl's appearance and "reputation" (Limmer, 2016), thus, the woman represents an arbitrary piece of sexual interaction, a plain object.

### **The invisibility of sexual diversity**

Of the 15 studies that make up this analysis, only four focus on non-heterosexual sexual experiences (Javaid, 2017; Kong, 2009; Moolman, 2015; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017). This reveals how the expectations, demands, and social constraints impact on men's sexuality, namely heteronormativity, that is, the maintenance of heterosexuality as the norm for thinking about the behavior of all individuals, in particular the underlying belief system that institutionalizes heterosexuality (Berlant & Warner, 2002) and therefore, driving the invisibility of sexual diversity.

Moolman (2015) examines the in/visibilities of sexually violent performances in prison and highlights the regulation applied to male same-sex desire. Although prevalent in and out of prison, the same-sex desire has been denied, disallowed, silenced, and disciplined. This silencing arises through the discipline of heteronormativity. Thus, the same-sex desire in prisons is denied and established through heterosexual framing. This happens either by attributing circumstantial character to same-sex relationships in prison (saying it is just for pleasure) or performing one's own heteronormativity (e.g., the boy wives' role, the role of husband and wife). This denial results in the projection of homophobia. Although men have sex with men in prisons, they still encourage hatred of gay identities:

That's just lust...Just for sex...Cos why to satisfy himself.....for a man yes.....a man with another man....that is most not right...it is just lust.....because that is wrong...because a man is not made...hiss anus is not made for penetration...a woman is made...she carries what she must carry....the way she is created...we are not created like that...we will not behave like that with each other. (*Fred* - incarcerated sex offender in South Africa, aged 18 to 70 - in Moolman, 2015, p. 6745).

It is important to highlight that this heteronormative system is dangerous for sexual violence issues in prisons. Since sex in prisons is prohibited, and sex is used for economic trading, a blurred line between coercion and consent is built around a tension of confusion and uncertainty because sex as currency trading is shaped through compliance as a mechanism of coercion. Compliance results in silence and secrecy, and silence and secrecy result from a form of surveillance (Moolman, 2015). Therefore, if sex in prisons is prohibited, then sexual favors "do not exist." Thus sexual violence "does not exist either".

This invisibility of sexual diversity hinders its agency towards social acceptance and has harmful consequences for the well-being of men. Similarly, Javaid's (2017) study of male rape victims also illustrates this silencing of victims as men are expected to stand firm and defend themselves against any act of rape. Subsequently, the myth that men's rape "does not exist" is widespread. "Denying that rape happens is imposing a silence on the vulnerability of men" (Moolman, 2015, p. 6749) and prevents many men from asking for help.

Hegemonic masculinity supports the dominance of men over women and the dominance of men over other men in subordinate positions associated with factors such as ethnicity, social class, or sexuality (Connell, 1995). Furthermore, while it is already known that discrimination against men follows the basis of sexual orientation when we cross this experience with sex work, we find that the stigma increases. Such is the case with Kong's study (2009), which conveys how male sex work is configured as a subordinate masculinity because, according to hegemonic masculinity, a man's body should not be "sold" with sex work

thereby perceived as "not a proper job" any man should have. Additionally, because sex work is stigmatized in the sense of reducing the sex worker to the status of object without self-control, that is, dominated by their clients, a man must be an active agent and not a passive object. Moreover, the bodies of sex workers are perceived as "dirty bodies", transmitting STIs. Still, according to hegemonic masculinity, a man's body should mirror physical health and general well-being, and this prejudice also contributes to thickening stigmatization:

With backgrounds like ours, what options are open for us?...People always think that we have no choice, or make a wrong choice: 'Are you mad?! There are so many ways of working, why do it?!' 'No one would like to do it'... it is just a quick way of earning money... It's all about money... this is not a proper job for a man...this job has no future... (CC - Chinese male sex worker, aged 17 to 39 - in Kong, 2009, p. 728).

Thus, and from an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989), while sex work already places men in a situation of oppression, the fact that men have sex with men contributes to the withdrawal of privilege.

Within the intricacies of hegemonic masculinity, Connell (1987) explains how men's sexual behaviors are watched continuously, mostly through speeches or clues about sexual practices but, as seen above, sometimes also by being physically present in the room. Since men are representatives of the gender order, that is, they belong to a category perceived as differentiated, with power status that implies obedience to the norms of hegemonic masculinity, in particular the universal norm of heterosexuality, nonheteronormative sexualities break the hegemonic system and are correspondingly signified as subordinate masculinities. (Connell, 1995).

## RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This research has certain limitations, most related to primary studies restraints (Johnston, 2014). First, data were collected for some other purpose distinct from our aims and not to answer our research question specifically. Despite our effort to match studies with inclusion criteria, these restrictions could limit the analysis. Second, as we did not participate directly in the data collection process, we have no way of knowing how interviews, focus groups, or online discussion board posts were conducted in detail. And third, we couldn't access and explore many participants' social and demographic differences. Thus we were unable to generate a full intersectional analysis.

Despite these limitations, our study can contribute to a new and complex understanding of male sexuality through the intricacies of hegemonic masculinity, an innovative and critical study about how masculinity could impact not only men, but people's sexual lives, sexual health, and sexual well-being.

## CONCLUSION

Understanding sexuality as a multidimensional, social and dynamic concept, influenced by the implicit and explicit rules of socialization and varying according to sex and/or gender, age, economic situation, ethnic origin, among other diverse factors, allows us to access differences in the way men perceive, live and experience, sex. By analyzing studies that contemplate men's narratives about sexual behavior, we were able to understand how male sexuality is experienced and influenced by hegemonic masculinity. When sex is understood as status and virility, there are inherent implications for men's well-being and many negative repercussions in their sexual relationships. To satisfy the hegemonic ideal, men are required to be an active agent of sexual practice. Through this mechanism, masculinity can itself be the greatest enemy for men, introducing pressure and artificiality in sexual practices that may be unwanted or even not consented by any of the participants of a sexual act (Connell, 1987, 1995; Kimmel, 2006). This enhances sexual risk, promotes sexual violence (Caridade & Machado, 2013), and increases STI transmission since, according to the results of this meta-synthesis, masculinity might override health. Thus, we could capture the power instilled by hegemonic masculinity and how this manifests in male sexual behavior.

Furthermore, we were able to access understandings about how men experience sexual behavior concerning this heteronormative and patriarchal social world. This study proves how hegemonic masculinity exercises constant vigilance and control over men and imposes - while emphasizing - the masculine collectivity in sexual thoughts, decisions, and practices. This analysis illustrates how masculinity reinforces heteronormativity while silencing sexual diversity (Butler, 1999).

Therefore, these results highlight the relational attribute of gender and sexuality and the power divergences among men and between men and women (Connell, 1987, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This heteronormative and patriarchal context promotes women's subordination and objectification. Thus women might be used as a measure of competition (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). For instance, in some heterosexual dynamics, some men appeal to the number of sexual partners they have achieved as proof of masculinity. Similarly follows the construction of femininity and masculinity in sexual practices

among men, resulting in the subordination of non-dominant masculinities that do not reply to the heteronormative ideal.

This environment creates difficulties for men to be aware of certain violent sexual practices and leaves an open way for sexual violence against women and men (Caridade & Machado, 2013). Moreover, men could be both perpetrators and victims in violent sexual relationships, added difficulties in recognizing the violent nature of some actions, or struggling to recognize victim status both by themselves as by general society. Silencing sexual victims can lead to very serious consequences for men's health and well-being and severe consequences for their interpersonal relationships. Therefore, masculinity can promote non-consensual, forced, and unprotected sexual practices, which can lead to sexual violence and increase the spread of STIs.

These findings introduce an innovative theme, the male sexual collectivity and the way men could get together in sexual decisions, thoughts or practices, symbolically or even physically present, which illustrates the way masculinity might watch and control men, a true Orwellian big brother of gender social order (Amâncio, 2004), showing how hegemonic masculinity is a process of surveillance produced over men and by men. This study reveals that masculinity is, in fact, hegemonic, widespread in the behavior of many men, despite the diversity of settings, different geographical locations, cultural contexts, and other categories such as ethnicity, social class, or age. Furthermore, we highlight the relevance of using meta-synthesis in social sciences, a recent technique that has been mostly adopted in health research areas, such as medicine and nursing (Walsh & Downe, 2005). Through this meta-synthesis, we were able to access a rich analysis that crosses 438 men, from 11 to 71 years old, from settings as diverse as prison, community, sex work, sexual health, school, or other institutions, and from around the world. And despite the diversity achieved, we cannot disregard the magnitude of hegemonic masculinity that illustrates the system of gender norms with a significant impact on many people's lives. Meta-synthesis methodology has the potential to enrich understandings of these complex, dynamic, and multi-faceted experiences and contexts.

Through this study, we gained access to various understandings about the construction of heterosexuality and how it assumes a normative role (Butler, 1999; Foucault, 1976/1994) and defined hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). This meta-synthesis illustrates how sex is not a natural act (Tiefer, 2004) but rather a performance imbued with meanings built on contexts, cultures, experiences, and discourses on gender and power. Men are pressured to experience sexuality in a male-dominant way, internalizing norms about sex through heteronormative norms (Berlant & Warner, 2002; Butler, 1999) and settings of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1995). Human sexualities resemble complex historical actions, relationships, and performative practices developed through metaphors and languages, shaped by social divisions, class, and gender (Whitehead, 2001), anchored in political processes, and continuously exposed to change (Plummer, 2005). This study has accessed the complexity of sexuality and its experiences produced and modified according to a contextualized, culturally, and historically situated and constantly changing sexual discourse (Fausto-Sterling, 1997; Tiefer, 2004).

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