Male Shaming, Social Representations and Discriminations of Masculinity:
A Socio-psychological Research

By Giuseppe Masullo[*], Marianna Coppola[±] & Miriam Matteo[º]

The shaming process represents the process of marginalization, de-humanization and derision against a person or a group of people for their anthropometric, psychological, social and cultural characteristics (Pacilli 2014). This contribution aims to study the male shaming process, trying to outline psychological, social and cultural characteristics around the construction of the male identity, analyzing the social representations of masculinity and the main discrimination suffered by men within their in-groups, both in development and in adulthood, between hate speech (Di Rosa 2020) and shaming processes. To this end, we asked ourselves the following research questions:

- *What are the main reasons for discrimination for adolescent males?*
- *Is there continuity and historical evolution of the discrimination suffered in adolescence with any discrimination and shaming processes in adulthood?*
- *What are the main contexts where discrimination and harassment are exercised? What are the protective factors that push the subject to "proactive" responses?*

In order to answer the questions posed, a mix methods research design was used, with an anonymous online questionnaire, administered to 150 men aged 18 and 45 years old and a semi-structured biographical interview, submitted to 40 men selected through online questionnaires.

Keywords: *male shaming, masculinity, homosexuality, body shaming, heteronormativity*

Introduction

In May 2020, during the COVID-19 health emergency, the news on the new Coronavirus pandemic formed the 'Infodemic' and an all-encompassing background of a heated debate regarding a culturally transversal and customary fact. It was the episode of body shaming of Giovanna Botteri, the RAI journalist sent to China. She was mocked by the satirical Tg Striscia la Notizia for her way

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[*]Associate Professor, University of Salerno, Italy.

[±]PhD, Researcher Fellow, University of Salerno, Italy.

[º]PhD Candidate, University of Salerno, Italy.

[1]The paper was devised and written jointly by the authors. However, for the sake of authorship, the sections 1, 2 and 2.2 are attributed to Giuseppe Masullo, the section 2.1 is attributed to Miriam Matteo and the section 3 is attributed to Marianna Coppola. The authors co-wrote the conclusions.

of presenting herself during live broadcasts, always wearing the same clothing and having messy hair.

This case of body shaming, which immediately became viral, has divided Italian and international public opinion, focusing attention on the related issues of bullying, cyberbullying and gender discrimination processes.

The shaming process; the process of marginalisation, dehumanisation, and derision to the detriment of a person or a group of people, is attributable to certain anthropometric, psychological, social, and cultural characteristics (Pacilli 2014). Concerning this process, over the last few years, scientific literature has matured an interesting production of contributions and research on the analysis and study of shaming processes; particularly in the field of feminist studies on body shaming against women (Simone 2012, Mattucci 2017).

This contribution, on the other hand, aims to study the processes of shaming to the detriment of man (male shaming), starting from the psychological and socio-cultural characteristics that contribute to the construction of male identity.

The theoretical reference exposition is divided into two sections, which represent the conceptual frame of orientation and anchoring of the empirical data proposed in the section dedicated to research.

The first part will define the concepts of social groups, reference groups, and processes of social marginalisation of which, specifically, the concepts of hate speech, online hate speech, the shaming process, and male shaming will be explained (Bandura 1997, Volpato 2012, Pacilli 2014, Bennato 2011, Di Rosa 2020). In the second part, the concept of masculinity will be addressed within a broader theoretical framework, through the analysis of the construction and representation of male identity, gender, and gender expressiveness, taking into consideration the contributions and theories of Men's Studies.

The analysis of this reference literature will focus on the contributions and research of its main exponents, including Connell (1995), Brod (2014), and Kimmel et al. (2004), through which the complexity of the treatment of male identity will be highlighted, considered mostly normative and hegemonic, to which non-conforming masculine identities are considered out-group by the reference heteronormative group.

In the final part, the results of the research conducted with mixed methods will be presented and discussed, consisting of a quantitative phase of mapping the processes of male shaming, through the administration of an online questionnaire to 150 men and a subsequent qualitative phase of semi-interviews (structured, aimed at 40 men selected from among the 150 participants in the questionnaire). The answers they adduced contribute on the one hand to orient the understanding of the processes of dehumanisation, discrimination, and derision to the detriment of certain men. On the other hand, they highlight the need to construct positive narratives of non-conforming masculinity, promoted by social policies, major socio-educational agencies, social network communities, and the State.

Social Groups between Identification Processes and Social Discrimination Processes

In order to understand the processes of discrimination and social exclusion, it is necessary to clarify the concepts of social group and reference group.

By social group, we mean a set of people who interact habitually, aware of their respective social status within the group. Conventionally, in sociology and the human sciences, there are two types of social groups: The Primary group and The Secondary group.

By Primary group we mean a set of people who establish regular interpersonal contacts, lasting and with a significant emotional and relational bond: they are influential socialization agencies, which regulate most of the value systems and social norms of reference (Ghisleni and Moscati 2001).

By Secondary group, we mean a social context in which people act in a relatively impersonal way, generally for the achievement of a common goal or goal. There is a lesser degree of intimacy and emotional involvement and, consequently, the group exerts less influence on the internalisation of the value and moral system. However, the globalisation of social systems and their collapse within the web and social media has led to a less clear-cut and rigid distinction between primary and secondary groups: in fact, a 'Primatisation' of secondary and social contexts is created. A 'Secondaryisation' of primary social contexts (Rogers 2012).

In the processes of socialisation and formation of the Self, mirroring with the other and with the members of social groups constitutes a fundamental evolutionary stage, aimed at defining the reference group - that is the group or all groups - with which the individual decides to measure himself and to mirror himself. Target groups can be family members, circle of friends, work colleagues, and social categories of reference. In the construction of gender identity, for example, the processes of gender mirroring and sexual role constitute a fundamental dividing line for the typical process. Conversely, the lack of internalization or mirroring process leads to the formation of non-normative and non-binary forms of identity (Lingiardi 2014).

According to Tajfel (1971), each social group creates its own coherent identity construction, with specific reference parameters and expressive methods, to identify "non-compliant" profiles and identities within itself, progressively eliminating them in order to maintain internal coherence 'stable' and 'durable'. In the theory of social identity, with regard to the identification paths of non-homogeneous profiles, the author notes three processes:

- Categorisation: the members of a social group construct functional and discriminative 'categories' of belonging to the reference group, based on a multiplicity of factors (age, sex, social or working position, religion, political affiliation, etc.), with the tendency to maximize the similarities between the subjects within the category, while discriminating the differences with the opposing categories;

- Identification: group memberships describe the psychological and social basis for the construction of one's social identity. Social identity is, in effect, made up of a hierarchy of multiple affiliations.
- Social comparison: the members of a reference group with a well-constituted social identity, continuously compare their in-group with the out-group, activating conduct of evaluation, selection, and social discrimination to maintain the coherent and cohesive social identity of their own group.

Expanding on Tajfel's contribution, Marques et al. (1998) formulate the concept of the Black sheep effect. The Black Sheep effect considers the pressure and social criticism exerted by members of a particular group, considered as a reference, towards individuals who do not have the prototypical connotations of the group; the latter tends to evaluate each of its members severely, maximizing their errors and applying exemplary punishments.

The Black Sheep effect performs three main functions:

- preserves the positive identity of the group and ensures internal consistency in the reference group;
- explicit membership rules and sanctions for violators of the rules and reference parameters;
- distracts members from other problems within the group.

These psycho-social processes are the basis of the main antisocial behaviours such as racism, homophobia, bullying, misogyny, and social exclusion: these are processes attributable to the more general conduct of hate speech, whose common denominator, of a heterophobic and/or devaluing type, coincides with "the negation of the humanity of the other" (Di Rosa 2020, p. 71).

Hate Speech, the Shaming Process, and Male Shaming: Towards a Performative Definition

The anti-social phenomenon known as 'hate speech', has been the subject of international debate on human rights and freedom of expression since the Second World War, a period in which, in the aftermath of Nazi fascists hate crimes to the detriment of entire peoples - Jews, Roma, Poles, etc. - and of social categories considered inferior, useless, in-human, there was the urgency of the reaffirmation of a humanity that started precisely from the fight against racism and anti-Semitism. However, the widening of the anti-discriminatory horizon, consequent to the progressive claim of human rights by socially vulnerable categories, especially women and LGBT, characterized the entire second half of the twentieth century, allowing to build an increasingly articulated definition of hate speech.

In the European context one of the first steps towards the inclusion of the socially vulnerable category of LGBT, in the Community anti-discriminatory guidelines, was taken by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe with Recommendation 20/97, where "hate speech must be understood as any form

of expression that spreads, incites, promotes or justifies racial hatred, xenophobia or other forms of hatred based on intolerance" (Di Rosa 2020, p. 47). The consideration of the discriminatory phenomenon is evident as an open question in which, in the years immediately following, "measures to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity" were also included (Di Rosa 2020, p. 53). Therefore, in 2005 the same Committee, with Recommendation no. 5, "establishes the need to recall the principle that no cultural, traditional or religious value, nor any rule or dominant culture can be invoked to justify hate speech or other forms of discrimination, including those based on sexual orientation or gender identity" (Di Rosa 2020, p. 53). In 2015, the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) arrived at the construction of an overall and almost exhaustive framework, concerning what must be understood by hate speech. In the General Recommendation no.15 / 2015, he argues that:

> "By hate speech we mean behaviour that consists in fomenting, promoting or encouraging, in any form, the denigration, hatred or defamation of a person or group, as well as subjecting to abuse, insults, negative stereotypes, stigmatising or threatening a person or group and the justification of all these forms or expressions of hatred just mentioned, based on race, skin colour, ancestry, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other personal characteristics or status" (Di Rosa 2020, p. 58; emphasis added).

Starting from this definition, it is possible to consider hate speech in performative terms, assuming it as a linguistic act which, overcoming the Cartesian dualism between thought and action - res cogitans and res extensa - does not have a mere locutory value, but rather illocutionary and is able to have consequences on the listener, both in individual terms and in social terms, both in psychological terms and in material terms (see: Di Rosa 2020, pp. 115–151). "It almost seems possible to say, therefore, that every speech act actually consists of an action" (Di Rosa 2020, p. 118). At this point, we can better understand what the performative value that Di Rosa attributes to hate speech and discrimination consists of. Specifically, "hate speech performatively creates this - discriminatory - reality in the collective consciousness, constituting its victims in a position of inferiority that ends up becoming part of a prejudice, a commonplace, which lurks in the lower layers of social consciousness" (Di Rosa 2020, p. 15).

For the purposes of this work, the significance that hate speech assumes with respect to the characteristics of the individual or group it intends to strike is fundamental. This hatred "can be identified in the denial of the other as a subject of human rights, which is expressed in deplore for his very existence, in the reproach for his belonging to a category conceptualised as" the Other." In this sense, therefore, in order for there to be hatred, it is necessary that the conduct is aimed at certain persons by virtue of their belonging to a group in a situation of vulnerability, on the basis of the prohibited grounds of discrimination" (Di Rosa 2020, p. 72).

It is precisely within such conduct that the shaming process is revealed, and specifically the phenomenon of evil shaming, the subject of this work. Male

shaming means the process of discrimination, marginalisation, derision and progressive exclusion from the dominant reference group of non-conforming males, through bullying, body shaming, media pillory and verbal and physical aggression.

Before delving into the processes of male shaming, given the increasingly massive interpenetration, in post-modern societies, of the "virtual world" in the world of the "real world", it is necessary to dwell briefly on the online drifts of the same which, together with the more general just analysed hate speech and shaming process phenomena converge in the online anti-social behaviour of trolling (Bennato 2011) or online hate speech. According to Bennato, in order for online hate speech to manifest itself, it is necessary that those who implement it - hater - possess a system of values which, on the one hand, underlie a certain degree of intolerance towards an individual and/or his group to which he belongs. On the other hand, they must necessarily be shared with the group in which the hater feels an active part, both from an ideological and cultural point of view. This sharing, mixed with a sense of belonging, leads the latter to have the perception that their values are legitimised and justified by the reality in which he finds himself immersed.

However, the aspect for which it is plausible to speak of online drift of hate speech and shaming processes concerns the reinforcement that online hate speech can receive from internet algorithms and, specifically, from social networks. In particular, Bennato identifies three mechanisms through which online hate speech can be reinforced:

1. 'Filter bubble effect:' people consolidate their values through social media personalisation algorithms. In other words, social networks tend to offer their users the contents they search for and view more often;
2. 'Homophilia:' users of social networks tend to establish virtual social bonds with the people with whom they share their values;
3. 'Spiral of silence:' the more the hater has the perception of having an attitude of legitimacy around him, the more he will express himself in a violent way. As will be seen below, each of these mechanisms must correspond to an adequate contrastive strategy of online counter speech.

Male Identity: Anthropometric, Psychological and Socio-cultural Parameters

To understand the processes of male shaming it is necessary to frame the anthropometric, psychological, and socio-cultural parameters of the dominant male identity so that it is possible to observe that dividing line below which non-conforming masculinity is susceptible to dehumanisation, discrimination, and derision.

While the female gender identity, starting from the last century, has been the subject of numerous contributions, reflections, and theoretical reformulations, for which the successive generations of feminists have questioned its connotations on several occasions, the identity of the male gender is mostly crystallised and resolved within the mono-descriptive characters of the typing 'alpha.'

This construction of the identity of the male is centred on a dominant model, which connotes it as the reference sex, which derives its raison d'etre from the comparison with the female gender, which in this sense assumes the traits of the negative of the masculine, of the male otherness (Kauland et al. 2018, Rinaldi 2017).

Bourdieu (1998) speaks of male domination, highlighting the different forms of manifestation of man's power, over women, over other men, and in different spheres and social fields.

The binary distinction between the male gender and the female gender, which continued in Western culture until the second half of the last century, led to a radical consolidation of the psychological, social, and cultural differences between men and women, which are detectable in all the social dimensions: from family to work, from education to social participation.

Subsequently, in the United States of the late sixties, as part of a more general process of socio-cultural innovation, with the birth of Men's Studies - in synergy with the movements as will be seen below (see par. 4.3), each of these mechanisms must correspond to an adequate contrastive strategy of online counter speech.

Feminists and pacifists no-Vietnam - a process of deconstructing the models of masculinity imposed by the Fordist and capitalist, patriarchal, and anti-feminist system begins (Vedovati 2007, Ruspini 2012, Fidolini 2017).

Starting from the nineties, through the study of emotions, relationships, perceptions, lifestyles, and sexuality of men, there is a growing interest, on the part of social sciences, in the mechanisms of construction of male identity of reference, considered normative above all of the ruling class, which saw in the white, western, upper-middle-class and heterosexual the category considered elite, dominant and normative.

Badinter (1995), in his essay L'identity male, describes the two phases of the crisis of masculinity in the course of modern history: the first, which took place in France and England between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is linked to the movement of French précieuses and the claims of the proto-feminists of the English area for dignity, education, equality and the right of non-abandonment in the event of pregnancy. The second phase, on the other hand, took place in the United States and post-colonial Europe of the twentieth century, following the economic and social contrasts generated by industrialisation and the spread of democracy, phenomena that proposed a new identity of the female gender, with a new type of woman who fought for the right to education, participation in public life and a fair wage.

In his famous Masculinities, Raewyn Connell (1995) formulates the theory of hegemonic masculinity and proposes a historical, philosophical, and sociological excursus on the pre-modern and modern ages, during which certain salient features of men and women crystallised as archetypes of genres up to the contemporary age.

Connell traces in historical, social, and cultural differences, before biological ones, the differences between male and female identities, with a matrix of subordination to the detriment of the latter which, over the centuries, has been

strengthened, rooted, and institutionalized in the collective imagination of Western societies.

The scholar, overcoming the limits of the functionalist theory of social roles, proposes an identity vision of masculinity in terms of how social practices are structured, which allows us to look at masculinity in relation to race, social class, skills, and body construction (Rinaldi 2017).

In such an identity construction, the gender order, that is the set of social models that regulate the relationships between masculinity and femininity, is represented by a sexual differentiation of the different psychological and social spheres (family, work, power, authority, social life) and each context is characterised by a gender regime in which to identify a hierarchy. Connell, therefore, identifies different types of masculinity:

- Hegemon: it is configured as the standard that most men try to embody and outlines the in-group and out-group processes. Built and consolidated through social, value, and media representations, it is a dominant identity construction compared to other types of masculinity and femininity;
- Subordinate: corresponds to the identity construction of the male who does not present the prototypical form of the hegemonic male, from which he undergoes forms of social pressure and discrimination (for example homosexuals, males of different ethnicity);
- Accomplice: it represents the most widespread form of identity construction, which, not being able to rise to a dominant position, allies itself with the dominant profiles, drawing benefits from them;
- Marginal: this is the male belonging to different social categories, unable to become dominant in the social context as he lives a double social role. On the one hand, recognised and authorised in his own subcultural social group, on the other marginal and discriminated against in the social group of reference (e.g., immigrant males).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been widely criticised by the sociological scientific community. Collier (1998) and Petersen (1998), for example, consider the typologies of masculinity proposed by Connell to be static and deterministic, as they do not consider the typologies of masculinity of the non-binary and non-conforming genders.

However, the theory of hegemonic masculinity, although subjected to several revisions, describes a very clear and representative construction of the identity of the male.

In the context of gender studies, sociologists and anthropologists have tried to typify the characteristics of the male, mapping the traits associated with the male identity of reference and the related beliefs, expectations, and social representations.

Butler (1990, 2017) talks about gender unity as the result of a complex regulatory process, which aims at the stability and uniformity of sexual genders through compulsory heterosexuality, which is a cultural, social, and symbolic hegemonic model, which exercises a system of exclusion and repression of identities considered 'deviant'. According to the author, it is possible to identify

different anthropometric, psychological, and socio-cultural parameters that allow us to live in the norm with respect to the social and value constructions of the Western world. In particular:

- Masculinity is heteronormative: according to the models proposed by Scientia Sexualis, based on a naturalistic and normative matrix, sexuality is expressed by a binary gender model (male/female) with a functional reproductive orientation (heterosexual);
- Masculinity is virile: the psychological and relational norm is explained by a series of constructions and beliefs around the figure of the male, which differentiate 'being a man' from 'not being a man' (for example: man does not cry, man is a hunter, man betrays by nature);
- Masculinity is healthy and strong corporeality: the physical norm of man refers to very clear anthropometric parameters, which delineate the boundary between in-group and out-group of the male reference group. The man must be attractive, sexually attractive, thin: otherwise, his access to the reference group of hegemonic masculinity must take place through other social, economic and cultural vestments;
- Masculinity is power and success: the social and cultural norm of the hegemonic male is represented by the social and economic power, which he exercises in society and over other categories and social classes; the man must be able to support himself economically, must be able to support the family and must have a higher social status than the woman.

Badinter (1995) instead considers contemporary male identity as a mutilated masculinity, severely tested by socio-cultural changes triggered by feminist movements and by LGBT and queer movements. According to this view, the male is anachronistic, the bearer of values and beliefs that do not correspond to the needs of the contemporary age. In other words, the progressive emancipation of women and the processes of self-determination of non-conforming and non-binary identities have led to an obsolescence of the hegemonic male described by Connell.

Petersen (1998), however, criticizes Badinter's position as it does not analyse in-depth contemporary society, in which a model of masculinity based on a construction of identity persists, in a rooted and conservative way, which derives its power from social asymmetry; establishing in a clear and identifying way the anthropometric, psychological, and socio-cultural vestments of the male and, consequently, delineating the normative boundary within which subjects can activate processes of discrimination, dehumanisation, and male shaming.

Research Objectives and Methodological Aspects

The purpose of this research is to analyse the social representations of masculinity and the main discrimination suffered by men within their reference groups, both in development and in adulthood.

To this end, the following research questions have been set as an empirical guiding thread:

- What are the main reasons behind discrimination for adolescent males?
- There is continuity and historical evolution between the discrimination suffered in adolescence and any discrimination and shaming processes in adulthood?
- What are the main contexts where discrimination and harassment are exercised? Which can they represent protective factors that push the subject to "proactive" responses?

To answer these questions, a mixed methods research design was used, through the administration of an anonymous online questionnaire (with the aim of creating a "mapping" of discriminatory and shaming phenomena) to 150 men aged between 18 and 45 years old through an "avalanche" sampling procedure. Subsequently, a semi-structured interview was constructed (to investigate qualitative and content aspects), subjected to 40 men selected from the online questionnaires, based on the results that emerged.

Specifically, the semi-structured interview investigated the following dimensions:

- Evolutionary history of discrimination and shaming processes, in terms of biographical reconstruction in developmental age (6-18 years), in an attempt to outline the salient features, the emotions experienced, the coping processes and the protective factors activated for well-being psycho-physical in the historical-evolutionary period;
- Discrimination and shaming processes in adulthood: qualitative analysis of discrimination and processes of marginalization and denigration in adulthood, aimed at identifying factors of continuity or of discontinuity with childhood and adolescence, highlighting the characteristics and aspects that can define the social representations of masculinity;

- Male shaming online: analysis of the peculiarities and implementation methods of online shaming and discrimination phenomena and comparison of discriminatory and face-to-face shaming processes.

The research participants were selected in Italy in the period May-July 2020.

Analysis and Discussion of Data

The Online Questionnaire: The Mapping of Male Shaming

150 men aged 18-45 completed the online questionnaire, with the distribution by cohort shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Distribution by Age*

Age range	Percentage
18 – 25 years	22.2 %
26 – 35 years	44.4%
36 – 45 years	33.3%

As regards the geographical distribution, men residing in the regions of Campania (40%), Lazio (20%), Tuscany (10%), Lombardy (10%), Emilia-Romagna (10%), and Sicily (10%), participated in the research.

The first block of the questionnaire (three questions in sequence) asked the research participants if they had suffered discrimination, harassment, and bullying at school age (6-18 years) and, if so, to indicate in which teaching cycle and for which motivation.

The results show that 40% of the participants suffered bullying, discrimination, and shaming at school, identifying the period most exposed to such antisocial behaviours in the lower secondary school (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. *Discrimination and Bullyng During School Years*
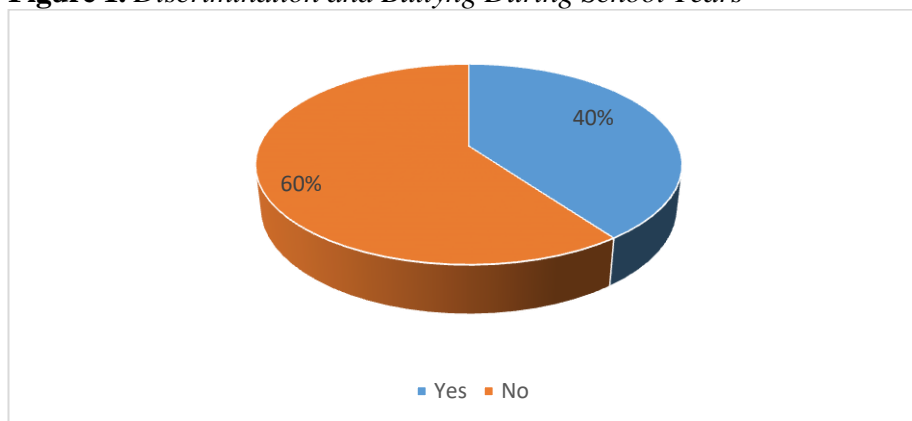
Figure 2. *Discrimination and Bullying in Schools - Degree of Education*
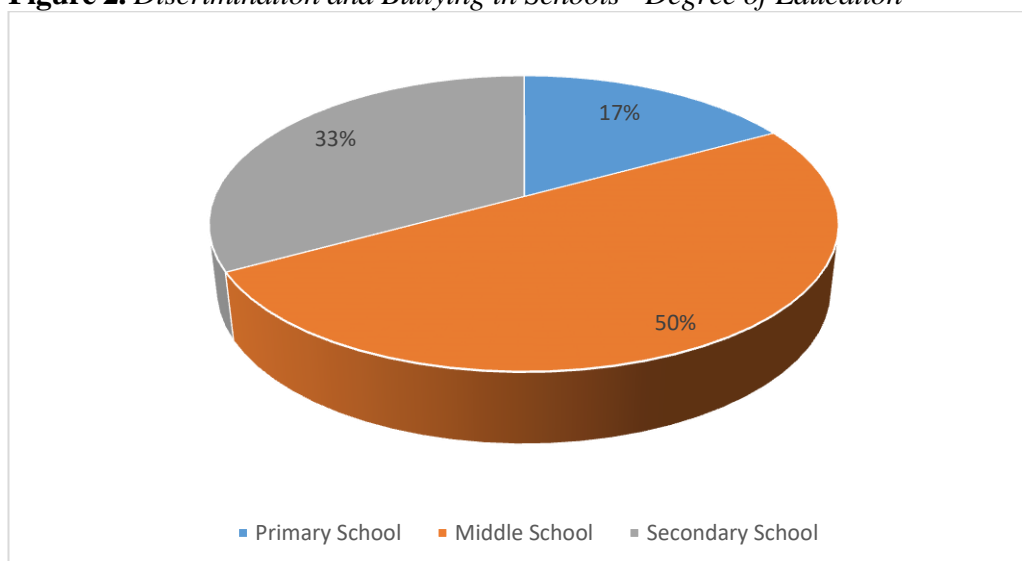
The motivations and aspects characterising discrimination, bullying, and shaming for males of developmental age, are important for the construction of the social representation of masculinity. Specifically, the constructions of non-conforming males in developmental age would concern two important aspects. On the one hand, these constructions concern identity and sexual orientation: since in line with the studies in the literature on hegemonic and heteronormative masculinity (Connell 1955, Rinaldi 2017, Fidolini 2017, Masullo and Coppola 2020a), the male who does not manifest security and does not reflect the expressiveness of heteronormative gender is discriminated against, harassed and marginalised. On the other hand, weight and build represent the second demonised and stigmatised aspect, as the male body must be agile, slender, and handsome, otherwise, it does not find the possibility of inclusion in the in-groups that count in the evolutionary phase (sportsmen, game).

Starting from these first aspects that emerged, it is clear that the male body image is already outlined in the evolutionary phase and is able to communicate heteronormativity and physical agreeableness, both in terms of incidence and in terms of usability in social activities. As can be seen from Figure 3, the aesthetic aspects - especially body weight (31%) - represent the main reason for discrimination, while gender identity and sexual orientation represent the other important expression object of possible behaviours of shaming and bullying.

Figure 3. *Motivation and Characteristics of Discrimination and Acts of Bullying*
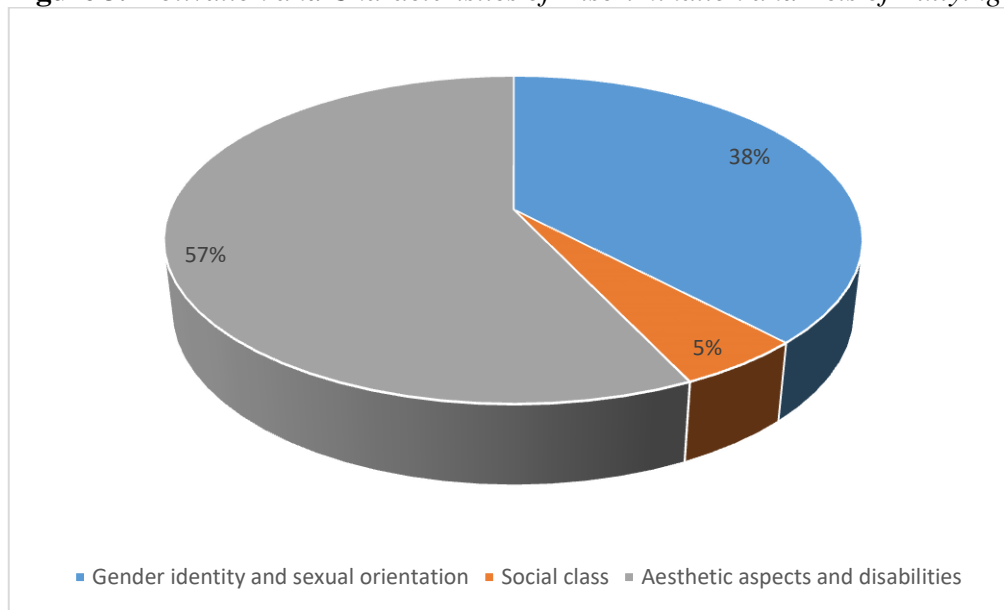
The second block of the questionnaire (three questions in sequence) presents the same questions (in terms of frequency, social context, and motivations) declined in adulthood, to identify elements of continuity/ discontinuity and social and contextual areas in which discrimination and shaming processes are implemented.

The results show that, in terms of frequency, the percentage of subjects who have undergone discrimination and shaming processes is 40% (in line with the

data reported in the evolutionary phase); of this percentage, 25% also answered affirmatively to the first block of questions, while 15% had not suffered discrimination in the school context, but in adulthood.

On the other hand, as regards the analysis of the social contexts and areas in which discriminatory and shaming behaviours take place, school is replaced by University (23%) and work context (34%), areas in which episodes of marginalisation and social pressure intensifies. The data relating to discrimination and shaming processes within the social network of reference is interesting: 18% of respondents said they were discriminated against by their friends, 9% by their family members.

The data relating to the reasons for discrimination and shaming processes confirm the results that emerged from the two macro-areas identified in developmental age (Gender Identity/Sexual Orientation and weight/build), compared to a construction of masculinity focused on virility/heterosexuality and prowess physics (Figure 4). However, a new motivation behind discrimination and shaming processes emerges, namely geographic origin and political ideologies (12%). This data would highlight how, based on a more articulated and complex social network, in-group and out-group processes involve multiple aspects of identity and of the Self.

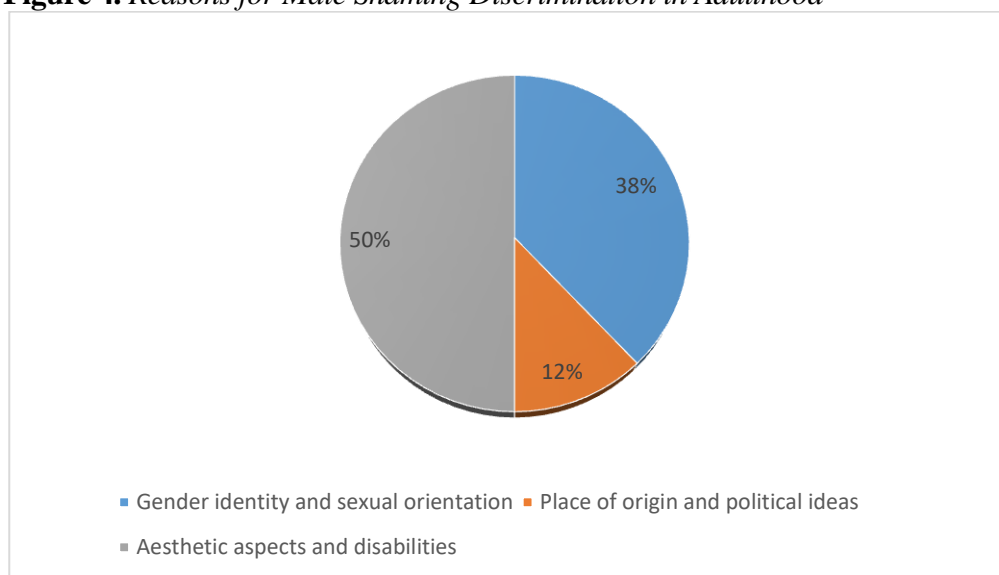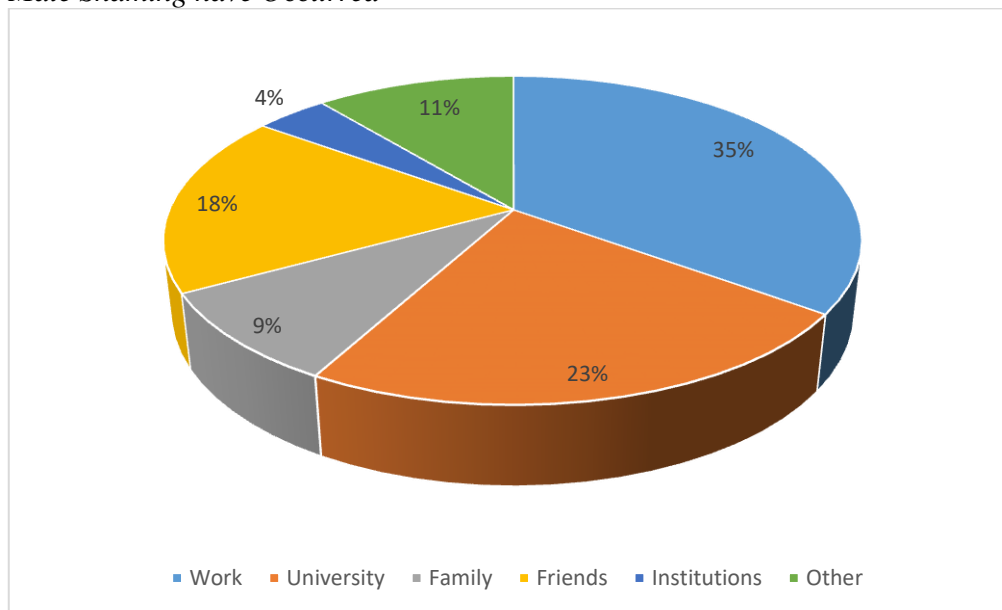**Figure 4.** *Reasons for Male Shaming Discrimination in Adulthood*

Figure 5. *Social Contexts in which Discriminatory Episodes and Processes of Male Shaming have Occurred*

Finally, the third block of questions (three questions in sequence) examines the frequency and implementation methods of discrimination and male shaming processes on the web and social networks.

In-depth Interviews: Between Heteronormative and Corporeality

To outline the qualitative and peculiar aspects of male shaming, semi-structured and in-depth interviews were carried out with 40 participants in the online questionnaire. Twenty subjects declared that they had suffered discrimination and shaming on their gender identity and/or sexual orientation, and twenty subjects identified the reasons underlying the episodes of discrimination in weight and body size.

The dimensions investigated in the questionnaire refer to the onset and developmental history of discrimination and male shaming phenomena, to the continuity/discontinuity between developmental age and adulthood, and episodes of online male shaming.

Heteronormativity in the Male Shaming Process

From the qualitative interviews carried out on the 20 subjects participating in the online questionnaire who had indicated gender identity and/or sexual orientation as the cause of the discrimination suffered, a clear picture emerges for how heterosexuality (declared or underlying) constitutes one of the main characteristics that male conforming must possess, in order not to be stigmatised and marginalised by one's reference group.

In line with the studies on heteronormativity (Connell 1995, Fidolini 2017) the male, to exercise dominance within his social category, must possess a series

of criteria and characteristics in terms of virility, predation, strength, and power. These characteristics are essential to finding a safe, recognised, and stable position within the social group of reference.

From the analysis of the interviews, it emerged that the identification, by the group of males, of male non-conforming profiles occurs early and the dynamics of stigmatisation and marginalisation follow a very clear and recognisable evolutionary trajectory.

At the base of the process of discrimination and male shaming, by heteronormative masculinity, there is a specific episode, which acts as a watershed on the social identity of the subject, for example: choosing a certain hairstyle, following a certain television program, having a diary, wearing certain clothes and accessories not clearly circumscribable to the gender they belong to all constitute events that "inform" the other members of the group, of the non-conformity of the subject in question to the heterosexual male ideal.

> "It all started immediately after the beginning of middle school. A few weeks later one of my school friends started saying I looked like a girl because I had long hair. After a few months, hell began. I had terrible anxiety about going to school." (Giovanni, 33 years old).

The specific start-up episode is followed by an exponential growth in episodes of discrimination, bullying, and shaming by a large part of the group of males in the class, up to the peak of marginalisation, which can represent an act of physical violence or total isolation of the subject from the category of 'males of the class'.

Any coping and resilience strategies to cope with psycho-social malaise during the developmental age can be traced back to three main categories: escape, defence, or social relocation to another target group.

Many children who are marginalised and discriminated against for their gender identity and/or non-conforming sexual orientation, after numerous harassments and humiliations, implement a resolutive strategy of escape from the problem: they leave school, avoid the places they frequent and, slowly, isolate themselves maintaining few social and interpersonal relationships. As is the case of an interviewee who declares himself to be heterosexual, that he had to resort to these resilience strategies due to discrimination suffered due to his gender expressiveness.

> "My adolescence was not a simple one. After high school where I was accused of being homosexual, in high school I thought I was out of it. Instead, a classmate of mine was the brother of a former schoolmate of mine who obviously told everything to his brother. It was hell again, even worse than before. If in middle school, the discrimination was verbal in high school some guys wanted to force me to have sexual performances with them. It was very bad. I left school and got a diploma in a Paritaria." (Angelo, 32 years old).

A second, possible reaction to discriminatory and bullying acts consists of self-defence through the use of force. Some young people reported that they

enrolled in the gym or self-defence courses to be able to defend themselves, safeguarding their psychophysical well-being.

> "I enrolled in martial arts. Not to be more manly but to defend myself. At school and on the street, I had no respite, for them I was not a boy. I learned to hit and not trust anyone." (Luca, 33 years old).

Finally, a third reaction to exposure to the malaise of discrimination and social stigmatisation consists of social relocation to another target group. Some boys reported the need to forge friendships, relationships, and interpersonal relationships with girls (mainly chosen by boys with a homosexual sexual orientation) or with other boys marginalised for different reasons (weight and build, physical defects, geographical origin or ethnicity, etc.), establishing an alliance as an active minority.

> "Well, it was obvious to me that I was gay. I have always been very 'effeminate'. I suffered a lot of discrimination and bullying, but I didn't give much weight. Towards the beginning of the eighth grade, I had only one male friend, with dental braces and discriminated against, and many female friends." (Giulio, 29 years old).

As regards the continuity/discontinuity of discrimination and male shaming from developmental age to adulthood, there is a conspicuous continuum, of which gender identity or a non-conforming sexual orientation constitute the main discriminatory target in the processes of social marginalisation.

Basically, from the interviews carried out, a double channelling of discriminatory processes emerged, in which social capital and coming-out act as the tiebreaker, in particular for those boys with a homosexual orientation.

The respondents who came out early in their life contexts (family, friends and proximal social network) reported greater security in secondary social contexts (e.g., work and institutional settings). The authenticity expressed with emotionally significant people constitutes a significant protection and social empowerment factor, such as perceiving discrimination in a reduced form in life contexts.

> "I declared myself gay at 18. I couldn't continue the charade. Yes, I had a couple of episodes of discrimination at university, the usual jokes, but few things. I have always had the support of my family and friends. Even at work, I don't say it openly, but if you find out it's not a problem!" (Davide, 35 years old).

On the other hand, the interviewees who have not made their sexual identity or orientation explicit; not conforming even with emotionally significant persons, report a greater 'concern' of judgment and suffer discriminatory and shaming acts in many contexts of life, even primary, highlighting how inauthenticity and lack of trust create communication and interpersonal barriers.

> "Nobody knows about me, in the sense many imagine because I am aware that some of my attitudes suggest that I may be homosexual, but it is always my word against theirs! Yes, at work and among friends there are jokes, but I am always careful, and then the keyword is 'deny'. Always deny!" (Gino, 33 years old).

In the world of the web, however, the visibility filtered by a screen and the ability to exhibit an image different from the actual reality are the main protective factors against discrimination and the male shaming phenomena.

In this sense, almost all of the interviewees reported that they have never received attacks and discrimination on social networks and the web, as they are very careful not to publish and post content that could become a target.

Even in this case, however, there is greater pressure and concern from the 'closeted' homosexual subjects who are particularly concerned about appearing 'wrong', so they categorically avoid sharing potentially equivocal content, such as to feed doubts or uncertainties about their sexual identity and/or non-conforming orientation.

> "I have never suffered from hater attacks or discriminators on the web. I am very careful not to be photographed by my gay friends and not to appear compromising, for a moment you can become the laughing stock at work." (Giovanni, 43 years old).

But as emerged above, male shaming is not only related to people who, from the point of view of sexual identity, declare themselves 'homosexual' but also concerns people who, on the contrary, although declaring themselves to be heterosexual are still subject to discrimination and hate speech, in reason for their gender expressiveness, and their personal and social interests. As evidence of what Connell (1995) affirms in believing that the gender order constitutes a burden not only for 'non-hegemonic' male identities, but also for those who refer to this model, in the constant concern of these to self-represent themselves as adhering to the dominant male model.

> "I was discriminated against for my passion for classical music and for my artistic ability... Yet I am heterosexual, I have always been out with girls." (Aldo, 33 years old).

Corporeity in Male Shaming

The other 'pillar' on which hegemonic masculinity is based is the gendered expressiveness of the masculine, which assigns to man virtues and characteristics of strength, physical prowess, and expression of power. From the quantitative analysis of this research it emerged that, after heteronormativity and the model of hegemonic masculinity, the second element of discrimination is the physical aspect.

In particular, weight and build represent an important 'pass' for entry into the reference in-group. From the interviews in which 20 of the participants in the online questionnaire reported weight and build as the reason for the bad shaming suffered, it emerged that the evolutionary history of this discriminatory process is articulated on a double path: weight and build as a central problem of their life; weight and build as a problem in a phase of life that has been and gone, but which has nevertheless conditioned their construction of identity.

As for the subjects in which weight and build still represent the central problem in their life, they report an early onset of a 'discriminated' career and a

continuity in the discrimination between developmental age and adulthood. The subjects tell, for example, of a process of continuous social marginalisation, transversal to all the social contexts to which they belong, such that their placement in the reference groups was never clear and explicit.

> "I've always been fat. By the time I was 8, I weighed twice as much as my friends. My schoolmates always made fun of me about my weight, they called me 'Mammoth'. They never called me to play football, they said I couldn't fit through the door, I felt so alone." (Mimmo, 33 years old).

Coping and resilience strategies would be limited as the body is perceived as a central aspect of the individual's life. However, some interviewees reported that during the developmental age they diverted their social relocation resources to psychological and intellectual aspects, within a different target group.

> "My drawing and my maths skills saved me. In high school, I was obviously discriminated against by the most vulgar part of the class, but I was a point of reference for girls and boys who did well in school and who had goals. Yes, it was my revenge!" (Fabio, 34 years old).

The subjects interviewed in whom the problem of weight and build is central, show an important continuity of discrimination and male shaming between developmental age and adulthood. They report discrimination at work, in the contexts of daily life, and in secondary social groups (institutions, contexts of the tertiary sector), confirming how the lack of physical prowess and aesthetic pleasantness is a problem for the standards and the canons imposed by the reference society.

> "Weight is still a problem today. I have a hard time getting a girlfriend, finding someone who accepts me for who I am, even when I go for a medical visit I hear giggles and jokes. For many I do not exist, indeed perhaps I exist too much but not in the way they want!" (Nico, 39 years old).

The interviewees who instead had a childhood/adolescence with weight problems, but who reached a healthy weight in adulthood, report a significant decrease in the episodes of discrimination and male shaming compared to their childhood and adolescence. However, early exposure to continuous and repeated stigmatisations has radically changed their perception, their anxieties, and their concerns about the dimensions of corporeality.

Some interviewees admitted that, since they have reached a healthy weight and a body in line with the standards set by society, they have shown attention/concern for possible weight gain, practicing a sort of 'cult of the body and healthy life'. Many of them embrace alternative lifestyles and are projected towards new generation philosophies, such as new age, vegan and probiotic.

> "Look, I am currently a health worker. I go to the gym, I am vegan and I do not skip a workout. It took me a long time to get to the body I have. My life has changed considerably, and even with girls, it's much better. Let's face it, women look at the

body first and then focus on who you are. The dress makes the monk!" (Luigi, 38 years old).

Concerning, however, the discrimination and the processes of male shaming suffered by the interviewees on the web or social media, they reported the almost total absence of weight and corporeality as reasons underlying the online discrimination.

This is due to the fact that anthropometrically non-compliant subjects show profile images that cannot be traced back to their own image and corporeality, preferring images of third parties or macro-categories (for example, images of flowers, animals, landscapes). They tend not to share photos of everyday life. Conversely, subjects who have overcome their problems with weight tend to publish many photos, emphasising images and characteristics that lead to a gendered expressiveness of the masculine that recall elements such as virility, physical prowess, and strength (for example: muscles, tattoos, and physical exercises).

"Yes, I have Facebook and Instagram profiles. I have never been discriminated against, and I publish photos of my cat or landscapes. I take care not to put a photo up of myself!" (Giacomo, 34 years old).

"After all the sacrifices I've made to get this body, I'm posting photos of my body! Of course for me it is like a sanctuary; it must be kept in shape and shown." (Kevin, 30 years old).

Conclusions

In the second half of the last century, the specialised scientific literature on gender identities has focused attention on the one hand to the processes of discrimination, social marginalisation, and shaming against women; and on the other hand, to the processes of social disparity, distribution of power, and social emancipation between male and female gender, in purely binary terms.

However, shaming processes also exist to the detriment of men and, specifically, towards 'types of men' and non-conforming sexuality. From this research - while considering the methodological limits corresponding to a small representativeness of the male population, recognizable in the diffidence to participate in online questionnaires and due to mechanisms of social desirability in terms of reinforcement of the hegemonic male identity, which does not come under discussion - interesting data emerge both in terms of mapping the phenomenon and in qualitative and typical terms of the processes of male shaming.

From a quantitative point of view, a photograph of male shaming emerges as a behaviour with 'early-onset,' as it is more distributed in lower secondary school, in conjunction with pubertal development and the discovery of sexual identity.

Therefore, the two main target motives of male shaming would be on the one hand the identities and non-conforming orientations, identified and stigmatized

throughout the school course as a parameter of discrimination and as the main denigrating label (terms such as fag, sissy, gay are widely used among preteens and adolescents as an offense, mockery, and denigration). On the other hand, the second discrimination parameter is represented by the anthropometric indices, which refer to a dimension of a virile and athletic body, such as height and weight.

As regards, however, the historical evolution of discrimination suffered in adolescence and the continuity of such shaming processes in adulthood, there is a carrer discrimination between gender identities and non-conforming sexual orientations and identities associated purely with anthropometric indices. Specifically, the subjects interviewed and characterised by anthropometric indices that are not acceptable to the dominant reference group (short stature, overweight), report that the processes of social discrimination decrease in adulthood and, in some cases, are eliminated through re-educational and compensatory processes (for example diets, gym and / or social mobility paths on the rise).

Conversely, for those with gender identity and non-conforming sexual orientation, discriminatory harassment tends to continue even into adulthood. Therefore, the only feasible coping strategies correspond either to the construction of social relationships in other target groups - LGBT groups or minimal groups in which coming out and authenticity are favoured - or to passing for normal processes, in which the subject omits his own non-conforming identity and creates a social avatar to conform to the identity of hegemonic masculinity (Rinaldi 2017, Masullo and Coppola 2020b).

Such coping strategies can be favoured by the wider society in which non-conforming subjects are immersed, where they equip themselves with the socio-educational tools necessary to construct positive narratives of non-conforming sexual orientation, corroborated by counter speech opposed to the hate speech and the shaming process.

Ultimately, the data collected show a poor correspondence between offline male shaming and online male shaming, as the processes of homologation and/or creation of second identity conforming on the web have the advantage of immediacy, gratuitousness, and the deconstruction of corporeality -elements that are important protective factors against discrimination and attacks by haters.

In conclusion, from the point of view of identity, contemporary man is less tied to the choice of gender expressiveness models dictated by binary canons (both gender and sexual).

It is particularly within the new generations that the adhesion to forms of expression defined as gender-fluid emerges (albeit to a lesser extent among males), in which the choice not to express oneself through visible and easily recognisable signs of one gender rather than the other constitutes aspects of the broader process of self-determination; an aspect that does not necessarily find a connection with a non-heteronormative sexual identity.

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