

PREVENTION, THE ONGOING TASK

# Prevention and anti-sexist masculinities

Rubén Sánchez Ruiz



Illustrator: [Eduardo Luzzatti](#)

When we talk about working and promoting attitudes that are part of egalitarian and inclusive anti-masculine masculinities, we are being structurally preventive, because we want to do the total opposite of what the patriarchy wants to impose. It has always been said that this system cannot be changed, that it is impossible. But we must challenge this patriarchal order, and we must do so by starting to develop attention skills and the ability to care for other people. To do this we need to cultivate the capacity for empathy because it is only that way that can we generate new dynamics, and respectful, free, and equal loving relationships between couples, families and community members. From what is individual to what is more communitarian: here is where the challenge starts.

Being grateful for the enormous work that feminist movements have done and continue doing is an ethical duty. Without faltering, day after day they try to cut the patriarchal concrete and resist against it from all the corners of the world. And it is only thanks to our sisters of the feminist movement that today we can discuss and talk about anti-masculine masculinities.

That being said, it is time to go one step further. Are we prepared enough and aware that we should change how we men are? Are we capable of destroying the internal patriarchal pillars that have been the refuge of a series of masculine privileges that have afforded us

comfort and convenience during centuries, as well as giving us the capacity for extreme destruction? Do we assume the challenge of building common strategies to change all of that?

We must step on the accelerator, because the neo-masculine conservatives advance at full speed and are overtaking on all lanes. Their momentum is, in fact, not limited to the extreme-right lane, where with their army of deniers and incels (*involuntarily celibate*) [1] have, for some time, planned and executed violent actions around the world against women and the LGTBI+ community ruthlessly, both online and offline. Their reactionary discourse must urgently be stopped, because it is everywhere.

What the patriarchal and capitalist system promotes is precisely selling the idea that what defines you as a man is power, status, emotional coldness, competitiveness, demand, hate, and violence against women and also against everything different to “the cisheterosexual middle-class white man”. They strive to keep things this way, sell the idea that injustice, inequality, and discriminations are “natural”. What this patriarchal status quo really hides is the foundation of all types of complexes, starting with neglecting affective and emotional needs, which leaves very little margin for a free emotional expression. Patriarchy fosters that men only allow and value the expression of wrath, joy, and sexual desire. Displaying other emotions is despised and punished, and if anyone shows them in public, the “male ID” given to them by the men’s club for being born a boy can be taken away.

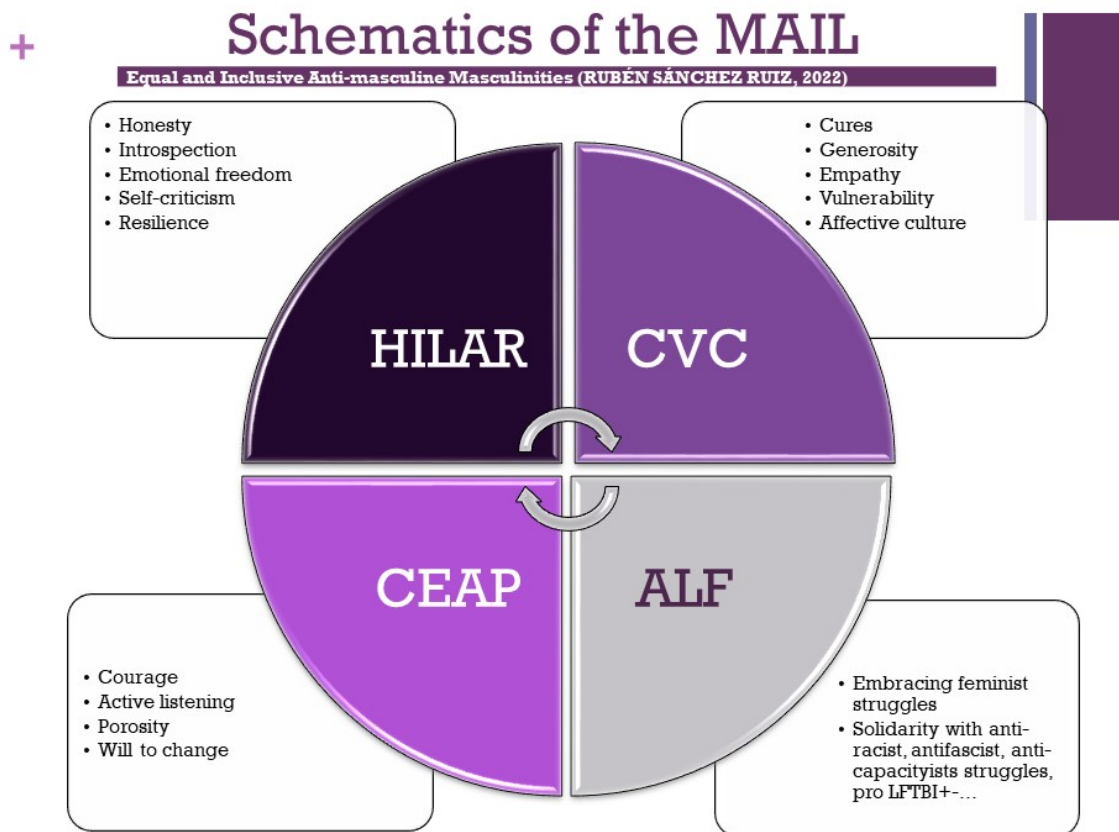
We also urgently need to change the way we men relate to each other so that “masculine companionship” is not a shelter to excuse the sexist attitudes and conducts that we men have in our daily life. Even with the most extreme practices like femicide we hear preposterous excuses such as “We must also talk with him”, “What led him to that situation?”, “He was probably desperate and could not stand it anymore”, or “We must listen to his reasons”. No, there are no reasons that justify practising male violence. We should urgently go a step further beyond the identification of abusive male conducts and attitudes, both our own and other people’s, and this step is called responsibility. We must eliminate these attitudes from our lives and our circle of acquaintances and relatives. Neutrality cannot exist when dealing with this kind of violence, it is purely male complicity and it must be ended.

We need to change the way we men relate to each other so that “masculine companionship” is not a shelter to excuse the sexist attitudes and conducts that we have in our daily life

I present a proposal of the four areas of egalitarian and inclusive anti-masculine masculinities below. It could turn out to be a useful tool, a torch to cast light upon this road full of bumps. These are not rigid categories; they are rather a proposal to structure many of the work that is currently made with men, either individually or collectively. This proposal has been possible thanks to a long work of information collection during training

sessions and workshops given to men. I hope that this proposal will grow and be systematised, and that it will be able to guide public policies to work for a feminist society without male violence, policies that produce changes in men by means of direct intervention with them.

Here I propose a scheme of the four areas of egalitarian and inclusive anti-masculine masculinities:



- The first area proposes working with honesty, introspection, emotional freedom, self-criticism, and resilience. The initials are HILAR.
- The second area includes ethics of care work, domestic labour, generosity, empathy, vulnerability, and affection culture. The name is CVC.
- In the third area we find courage, active listening, porosity, and will to change, which I have called CEAPV.
- Lastly, the fourth area proposes embracing feminist struggles, and generally all struggles for universal human rights, from respect and prudence, without expecting any acknowledgement. I have called it ALFS.

The first and second area are very interconnected, because they are both key to develop the work of managing emotions, but by themselves they are not enough.

## Honesty, introspection, emotional freedom, self-criticism and resilience (HILAR)

Defining where the first changes must take place is difficult without a previous introspection and without an analysis of the main masculine references that have been with us throughout life, especially in early childhood and adolescence. This introspection and analysis would also allow us to find out in what family and institutional structures we have grown up and have been educated, under what values and patterns we have built our personality and the way of relating ourselves to others.

To make this introspection we must be brave and honest with ourselves in order to make use of self-criticism. And after discovering many of our wounds, we must learn how to stitch them up. Do not let them be stitched up by someone else, you must do it yourself. And if the needed resources are missing, then visit a professional therapist (it's even better if they have a feminist perspective of mental health) and they will surely come with you in this long process of recuperation and personal growth. This will generate discomfort during the process in each man and most likely in his close environment, but if it is not uncomfortable, it will produce no change in his internal structure [2].

Without a previous introspection and an analysis of the main masculine references, it is difficult to define where the first changes must take place

Emotional freedom is the prize when one reaches the end of this first process that I call *deconstruction of hetero-patriarchal hegemony masculinity*. With no explicit renouncement of each and every masculine privilege we have accumulated over centuries, there is no territory for change. Starting from this responsibility is essential to develop the second area, called CVC.

## Care work, generosity, empathy, vulnerability and the culture of affection (CVC)

The affection and care work culture is totally contrary to violence [3]. They are two faces of the same coin, male violence is opposite to caring, destruction versus compassion, selfishness versus the delight proven when the other person is enjoying or feeling pleasure. Loving and taking care of others in a healthy way is directly related to self-care, to the responsibility of one's own emotions, attitude and conduct, to the connection with others. This task must be done consciously and in a way that it is closely related to the work done previously in the first area. Self-love and loving others, in this order, mean going against the current, mean disobeying the patriarchy, because they break with the emotional coldness and the disconnection that only add pain and social isolation, which end up being

a source of mental health problems.

Vulnerability is connected to self-esteem and the support that we need from other persons who are part of the same community as us. In order to live well with vulnerability, we have to understand that life is not a fight, but rather constant learning. The one who gets their own way is not the winner; the one who can cede and negotiate in everyday life is. And this implies showing oneself vulnerable. We need interdependence to survive physically and emotionally. The sooner we accept it, the quicker the change will be. We must break the pillar of self-reliance of the deconstruction of hetero-patriarchal hegemony masculinity.

I want to also talk about the difference between receiving an education with a feminist perspective and the work we must do with our vulnerability. For years the notion of “sexual vigour” has been the main topic, disregarding the pleasure of others to focus on ours. This is a huge mistake that has led to many negative consequences. Let’s build a pleasurable and kind free sexuality, from permanent respect and negotiation, from the freedom of consensus. Let’s end the culture of abuse and sexual terror [4].

To live well with vulnerability, we have to understand that life is not a fight, but rather constant learning

Another of the patriarchal dogmas, the one of not showing emotions, or only the very few accepted by the hetero-patriarchal normativity (wrath, sexual desire, euphoria...), constitutes one of the 7 P [5] in the emotional pressure cooker, a recipient where contained emotions are accumulated. It is filled until it explodes in the worse way, many times violently and blaming the rest for awakening the monster, excusing any responsibility.

## Courage, active listening, porosity and will to change (CEAPV)

In the first area (HILAR) we have spoken of stitching our wounds up. We need to be able to be receptive to criticism and comments about us, especially if these come from our sisters in the fight. At first, we will feel rage and anger, but wait and reflect, and surely you will find a good lesson out of it. Porosity opens our sense to all the information. Afterwards we can analyse it and learn from this change. Porosity and active listening go hand in hand listen with attention to receive all the information.

But at this point, we cannot settle for an individual and non-transferable change, we need a collective change. We must mobilise other men who are unaware of all this, which cannot be done individually. We must organise ourselves; we need the complicity of entities and communities to advance in this transformation. In this way we will arrive to the last area of egalitarian and inclusive anti-masculine masculinities, which I call ALFS.

## Embracing feminist struggles from respect, solidarity, balance and prudence (ALFS)

Not demanding any acknowledgement for doing this task, maintaining a good welcoming attitude and being committed with the struggles for the defence of universal human rights and against any type of oppression (classism, racism, ableism or fascism).

I want to emphasize the role of the feminist struggle. When living within the patriarchy, we men have the tendency of taking over the public image of social movements. We take the megaphone and the banner, and we are not used at all to performing intendency tasks, logistics, spaces for caring or welcoming new militants, that is, all the invisible work done by social movements and political organizations. If we want to transform the spaces where we men are already present and make them feminist spaces, we must work all together to make this possible, from word to action. We can spread the feminist movement actions and make them visible without directly participating, giving support to feminist cultural sessions, reading their books and evaluating their artistic and cultural works.

And outside the feminist struggle, when we participate in other spaces, we must be sure not to reproduce patriarchal and oppressive dynamics. For example, we can take on the task of cleaning of community spaces and other intendency tasks. We can give up on appearing on public spaces and the more attractive first line, and fight from the rear guard. We can give up on more authoritative styles and commit to listening and consensus.

Being grateful for the enormous work that feminist movements have done and continue doing is an ethical duty. Without faltering, day after day, they try to cut the patriarchal concrete

If these four areas of egalitarian and inclusive anti-masculine masculinities can be an instrument is because they generate consensus in the necessary systematisation of the promotion of anti-masculine masculinities. If we can facilitate and motivate a minimum standard when creating and designing programs, materials, and necessary actions in this fight against male violence, surely all of us will come out as winners.

## REFERENCES AND FOOTNOTES

- 1 — Incel or *involuntarily celibate* is a subculture that is shown as virtual communities of men who declare being unable of having romantic relationships and sexual relations with women, as their desire would be. The discussions produced by the incel forums are characterised by resent, misanthropy, misogyny and apology of violence against women and against men who are supposedly sexually active. In academic articles and the press, this sub-culture has been politically related with the so-called *alternative right*. The Southern Poverty Law Center discovered this sub-culture as «part of the masculine supremacy ecosystem present in Internet» included in the list of hate groups. The estimations about its overall size vary considerably, from thousands to hundreds of thousands members. At least eight mass assassinations, with a total of 61 deaths, have been committed since 2014 by men who have self-identified themselves as incels or who have cited names and texts related to this community in their private writings or in Internet publications. Incel communities have been criticised by researchers and means of communication for being misogynists, promoting violence, spreading extremist opinions and radicalising their members. Since 2018, the incel ideology has been increasingly described as a terrorist threat, and an attack in February 2020 in Toronto (Canada) became the first case of violence supposedly related to incels and processed as an act of terrorism.
- 2 — Azpiazu, Jokin (2017). *Masculinidades y feminismo*. Barcelona: Virus.
- 3 — hooks, bell (2021). *Todo sobre el amor. Nuevas perspectivas*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- 4 — Barjola, Nerea (2018). *Microfísica sexista del poder*. Barcelona: Virus.
- 5 — Kaufman, Michael (1999). *Hombres, placer, poder y cambio*. Barcelona: Taller.



#### **Rubén Sánchez Ruiz**

Rubén Sánchez Ruiz is the subdirector of Awareness Raising and Prevention at the General Directorate for the Eradication of Sexist Violence, in the Ministry of Equality and Feminisms of the Government of Catalonia. He holds a degree in Psychology from the University of Barcelona (UB) and a postgraduate degree in Gender and Equality Policies from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). He has worked for nineteen years in the Ministry of Justice in the care of victims of violent crimes, both in adult and juvenile justice. During the same period, he has been lecturer at several master's degrees, such as Gender and Communication (UAB), Gender-based Violence (UAB), and Forensic and Criminal Psychology (Institute of Continuing Education IL3 - UB). He has worked in training professionals to address gender-based violence and its prevention, anti-sexist and egalitarian masculinities, institutional violence, networking and emotional self-defence. He has been one of the contributors of the Amnesty International report on intervention in cases of sexual violence in Catalonia. As an activist, he takes part in associations related to culture, intellectual functional diversity and the defence of universal human rights, and has collaborated with several media. In 2014, he published the guide on feminist self-defence *La mirada de Michonne*, which is now in its third edition. In 2010, he created the blog [El dit a la nafra](#) to raise awareness about gender-based violence and facilitate knowledge and pedagogical resources.