

## ARTICLE

# Hegemonic masculinities as counter resistance in the university context

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### Abstract

This study analyzed the facets of the exercise of hegemonic masculinities as a means of counter-resistance of young men in the face of the rise of female groups in the university context. A longitudinal, qualitative, and interpretive study was developed based on multiple data sources, such as interviews, documents, and organizational artifacts, which were analyzed inductively based on open, axial, and selective coding. As main results of the triangulation of the data, the following stand out: (i) hegemonic masculinities are characterized by leadership in student groups, exaltation of masculinity, and classification of women as subordinate to boys' interests; (ii) there is a resistance of a feminist collective, marked by the fight against situations of machismo in the university context; (iii) there is a male counter-resistance, with the intensification of actions against women, through harassment, aggression, vandalism, and compositions of sexist songs. The article contributes to the discussion about gender and resistance, especially in the organizational context.

**Keywords:** Hegemonic masculinities. Resistance. Counter resistance. Feminist collective. University context.

### *Masculinidades hegemônicas como contrarresistência no contexto universitário*

#### Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo foi analisar as facetas do exercício das masculinidades hegemônicas como meio de contrarresistência de jovens rapazes diante da ascensão de um coletivo feminista no contexto universitário. Para tanto, foi desenvolvido um estudo longitudinal, qualitativo e interpretativista, pautado em múltiplas fontes de dados, como entrevistas, documentos e artefatos organizacionais, que foram analisadas de modo indutivo, com base em codificação aberta, axial e seletiva. Como principais resultados da triangulação dos dados, destacam-se: i) as masculinidades hegemônicas são caracterizadas pela liderança em grupos estudantis, exaltação das masculinidades e classificação das mulheres como subordinadas aos interesses dos rapazes; ii) ocorre a resistência de coletivos feministas, marcada pelo combate a situações de machismo no contexto universitário; iii) há uma contrarresistência masculina, com a intensificação das ações contra as mulheres, por meio de assédio, agressões, vandalismos e composições de músicas sexistas. O artigo contribui para a discussão sobre gênero e resistência, especialmente no contexto organizacional.

**Palavras-chave:** Masculinidades hegemônicas. Resistência. Contrarresistência. Coletivo feminista. Contexto universitário.

### *Masculinidades hegemônicas como contrarresistencia en el contexto universitario*

#### Resumen

El objetivo del artículo fue analizar las facetas del ejercicio de las masculinidades hegemônicas como medio de contrarresistencia de los jóvenes frente al auge del colectivo feminista en el contexto universitario. Se desarrolló un estudio longitudinal, cualitativo e interpretativo, a partir de múltiples fuentes de datos, como entrevistas, documentos y artefactos organizacionales, que fueron analizados inductivamente, a partir de una codificación abierta, axial y selectiva. Como principales resultados de la triangulación de los datos se destacan: (i) las masculinidades hegemônicas se caracterizan por el liderazgo en los grupos estudiantiles, exaltación de la masculinidad y clasificación de las mujeres como subordinadas a los intereses de los muchachos; (ii) hay una resistencia del colectivo feminista, marcada por la lucha contra situaciones de machismo en el contexto universitario; (iii) hay una contrarresistencia masculina, con la intensificación de las acciones contra las mujeres, a través del acoso, la agresión, el vandalismo y la composición de canciones sexistas. El artículo contribuye a la discusión sobre género y resistencia, especialmente en el contexto organizativo.

**Palabras clave:** Masculinidades hegemônicas. Resistencia. Contrarresistencia. Colectivo feminista. Contexto universitario.

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## INTRODUCTION

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“Peaceful but not passive resistance against injustices” (Mahatma Gandhi).

“The new has always aroused perplexity and resistance” (Sigmund Freud).

Gandhi’s and Freud’s thoughts make clear the idea that resistance is everywhere. It’s human nature. We can think of resisting peacefully or resisting the new, the same way we can think of resisting violently or representing the new, which resists those who oppose it. The new, for the context of the educational institution represented in our article, is the rise of women in the fight against masculin hegemony. As for the peaceful resistance, well, this does not seem to best illustrate the reports that we will bring in our study.

From the literature on hegemonic masculinities and theories of resistance, we note that while some men tend to use means such as physical and verbal aggression, homophobia and sexism (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hyde, Drennan, Howlett, & Brady, 2009) to maintain their prevalence over women, those tend to react through denunciations, organization of feminist collectives, affirmative actions and, in certain cases, also through violence (Hercus, 1999; Selbin, 2010; Smith & Johnston, 2002). This action and reaction process, which part of the literature calls resistance and counter-resistance, seems to be accelerated in the university context, especially in recreational activities among young students, which include university games, hazing and parties, in which, sometimes, denunciations of the most varied types of physical and verbal violence against women are reported (Azevedo, 2016; Bandeira, 2017; Linhares & Laurenti, 2018; Martin, 2016).

The phenomenon of resistance has been recurrent in the literature on organizational studies (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Medina, 2012; Mumby, 2005; Ratele, 2015; Scott, 2008; Selbin, 2010; Smith & Johnston, 2002). Despite the strength of this theme, which began to take shape in the academy from the 1980s onwards and which has grown exponentially in importance in the last 20 years, there are still relatively few studies that address the phenomenon of resistance in the educational context, as highlighted by Tildesley, Lombardo, and Verge (2022), Tucker and Govender (2017) and Verge, Ferrer-Fons, and González (2018). There are even fewer studies that address, even more broadly, the phenomenon of counter-resistance (Tildesley et al., 2022). As Kärreman and Alvesson (2009, p. 1120) argue, “all resistance by itself can be resisted,” which is why both the phenomenon of resistance and reactions of groups opposed to it, that is, counter-resistance, deserve to be investigated (O’Connor, 2000).

Among the scarce works is the study on counter-resistance by Tildesley et al. (2022), who identified: i) the forms and types of resistance that hinder gender reform efforts in higher education institutions and ii) the counter-resistance strategies that seek to drive the implementation and reach of institutional changes. On the path of resistance, studies by Tucker and Govender (2017) and by Verge et al. (2018) make important contributions to the theme. The first study departs from feminist institutionalism to discuss educational curriculum reforms related to gender issues, as well as the role of feminist groups in this process, which requires institutional changes (Verge et al., 2018). The second study, in turn, starts from the ethnographic technique, illustrating the construction and positioning of masculinities in spaces of conflict, more particularly, the personal and social resources reproduced by boys in the search for so-called “desirable” masculinities (Tucker & Govender, 2017).

Given these important research efforts and due to the scarcity of further investigations, we have the opportunity to analyze counter-resistance in the educational context, which is why we were guided by the following research question: how do young university students seek to exercise their hegemonic masculinities as a means of counter-resistance in the face of the rise of feminist collectives in the university context? Through this research question, we sought to fill a gap in the literature pointed out by Tildesley et al. (2022), when proposing studies in university contexts in different countries. These authors’ research was carried out in Spanish higher education institutions, and in it they argue that studies that include university characteristics from different contexts are needed to provide insights that help to understand factors that lead actors from dominant groups to resist gender equality and also shaping the agency and capacity of feminist actors in different ways. Authors argue that capturing gender power struggles in higher education institutions, mapping resistance and counter-resistance in this organizational context, becomes even more important in times of growing global opposition to gender equality and gender studies (Tildesley et al., 2022).

With the present study, we seek to contribute theoretically by continuing the work of Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), which suggest the reformulation of hegemonic masculinities concept through a more complex model of gender hierarchy that emphasizes the role of women, with a more specific treatment of incorporation in contexts of privilege and power, and to the research of Kärreman and Alvesson (2009), who developed the concept of counter-resistance to expand understanding of the resistance dynamics. We also seek to bring a practical contribution, through reports that can serve as valid forms of denouncement so that organizations - especially educational institutions - reflect on gender power struggles and are prepared to deal with situations similar to those that will be exposed in the article. In particular, we contribute so that women and men can think and act so that we have greater equality between the different genders in our organizations and in society as a whole.

## THE MULTIPLE FACETS OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES

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Research on hegemonic masculinities has covered, since the 1980s, when their first studies appeared (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1987; Connell, 1982, 1987; Kessler, Ashenden, Connell, & Dowsett, 1982), an extensive discussion in the academic debate around its meaning and modes of operation, forming part of the dialogue of different fields of social sciences and humanities, such as psychology, sociology, education, gender studies and organizational studies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993).

Although there are controversies about its definition, the concept of hegemonic masculinities can be delineated based on the different forms and strategies of masculinities exercised by men that enable the perpetuation of their domination over women in our society (Beasley, 2008; Connell, 2020; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2013; Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2019; Moller, 2007; Nogueira & Miranda, 2017; Rodriguez, 2019). One of the central assumptions is in the conception that the relationship between men and women is oppressive and, consequently, specific strategies of domination and subordination of women are used and institutionalized, through different means and instituted social groups (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993; Harrington, 2021; Kimmel, 1998; Silva, 2006; Sweet, 2019). In this regard, Carrigan et al. (1987, p. 92) define hegemonic masculinity as follows: "A matter of how specific groups of men inhabit positions of power and prosperity and how they legitimize and reproduce the social relations that generate their dominance." In this sense, Connell (1995, p. 188) brings us the following explanation for the masculinity concept:

What is meant by 'masculinity'? Let me offer a brief but reasonably accurate definition. Masculinity is a configuration of practice around the position of men in the structure of gender relations. There is usually more than one such configuration in any given gender order in a society. In recognition of this fact, it has become common to speak of 'masculinities'.

The term "hegemony," present in the study by Gramsci (1971), is relevant to the understanding of this theoretical framework, considering that masculine domination is not presented only in a personal and direct way through the use of force or violence, such as observed in studies on masculinities (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In addition to these uses, the hegemonic nature of masculinities is not always exercised directly and explicitly (Beasley, 2008), as it is intertwined in the different institutions and cultures of our society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and, more specifically, in its symbolic forms of representation in organizations (Collinson & Hearn, 1994). This scenario ends up benefiting part of the men in our society, even if many do not practice some kind of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The exercise of hegemonic masculinities, according to Donaldson (1993), is constituted mainly through the maintenance of power of certain social groups to the detriment of others, in which the dominant group, directly or indirectly, defines situations, moralities, habits taken for granted and issues to be discussed. Such persuasion ends up extending through different means and social actors, such as the media and educational institutions, and can even be legitimized by the public power in its different spheres of government (Donaldson, 1993). For Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), this process is represented through practices of men's domination over women, whether collective or individual, in which the understanding goes far beyond the different roles or identities in our society, but how such practices are effectively carried out and represented in everyday social activities.

## RESISTANCE TO HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES

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As with discussions about hegemonic masculinities, the concept of resistance is used and understood under different theoretical lenses in different fields of knowledge, which leads to a plurality of perspectives and conceptions (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). In general, the idea of resistance is closely linked to the notion of power relations in our society (Foucault, 1978). According to the understanding constructed so far, resistance seeks, intentionally or not, collectively or individually, to challenge and deconstruct the most varied dominant forms of masculinities present in our society and which are deeply rooted in existing oppression systems in social structures (Medina, 2012).

Hollander and Einwohner (2004), when reviewing the literature on this topic, point out some of its characteristics. Resistance can be expressed in different ways, material or physical, and involve the use of their bodies or other material objects by the resisters. Some acts of physical resistance are revealed as behaviors as severe as violence or as subtle as working slowly, pretending to be sick, wearing certain types of clothing or stealing from the employer (Scott, 2008). It can also manifest itself on different scales, individual or collective, global or local. Its targets can be individuals, groups and, in a broader context, institutions and social structures. Their directions may be to change existing social or local structures or to prevent certain changes from taking place. Although there is such a plurality of aspects, the fact common to all these characteristics is that all resistance will always involve the act of acting in opposition to someone or something (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

The concept formulated by Scott (2008), “everyday resistance,” is used to encompass a different type of resistance. In this concept, resistance is not as dramatic and visible as rebellions, manifestations or other articulations of organized, collective or confrontational resistance (Scott, 2008). This form of resistance – the everyday one – is silent, disguised or apparently invisible. Thus, Scott (2008) suggested a categorization of resistance based on two main forms: public resistance and disguised resistance. These two forms of resistance are related to three forms of domination (material, status and ideological), which result in six types of resistance. In publicly declared resistance, we have open revolts, petitions, demonstrations and land invasions, among others, which act against: i) material domination; ii) the assertion of value or desecration of status symbols against status domination; iii) ideologies of ideological domination. In disguised resistance, we have those that are discreet, undisclosed, infrapolitical, which are everyday – such as poaching, occupation, desertion, evasion – and act against: iv) direct resistance through disguised resistance against material domination; v) the hidden transcripts of anger or speeches disguised as dignity against status domination; vi) dissident subcultures, such as ancient religion, class heroes and ideological domination (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013).

Thus, as it does not represent a specific locus of manifestation, resistance can also originate and be coordinated in various ways, such as through revolutions and rebellions (Selbin, 2010), social movements (Smith & Johnston, 2002), activism (Wapner, 1996), collectives (Hercus, 1999) and forms of work (Mumby, 2005) and also through everyday resistance, in which it is expressed in an ordinary way, because of the few resources that individuals and groups usually have to resist to the ruling power (Scott, 2008).

Regardless of how it is articulated in the context of hegemonic masculinities, resistance always occurs in opposition to the different forms of masculinities expressed in the most varied contexts in which it manifests itself (Beasley, 2008). Put in another way, resisting in this context is related to actions against the dominance and subordination of women in relation to men, illustrated by phenomena such as aggression, violence, homophobia and sexism, among other diverse masculinities that are internalized in our society and that hinder the implementation of gender policies in organizations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Engeli & Mazur, 2018; Hyde et al., 2009; Mergaert & Lombardo, 2014; Verge & Lombardo, 2021). Despite not being part of the scope of our article, we can see, based on the illustrated phenomena, that resistance to hegemonic masculinities is not restricted to women, in the same way that the “targets” of such masculinities can be both men and women, as in cases of homophobia, for example (Messerschmidt, 2019).

Such a challenge does not only occur in collective and social change, that is, at the level of global and national institutions and policies, since it is strongly rooted in the daily life of the population, that is, in the ordinary way of life and local practices. constituted in the different spheres of social life. Not only because of the strength and intensity with which different masculinities are cognitively marked in social structures, but mainly when they are intentionally manifested by men at individual or group levels (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

## **RESISTING RESISTANCE: THE ANSWERS OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES TO RESISTANCE**

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One of the aspects still little explored in the literature is the possibility of investigating the modes of hegemonic domination to resist resistance, as emphasized by Kärreman and Alvesson (2009, p. 1120), when they argue that “every resistance alone can be resisted.” In this sense, hegemonic masculinities can exercise what is called by the authors of “counter-resistance.” Although this concept was coined in a broader context than the discussion on masculinities, its understanding can be easily transposed to the phenomena discussed here, given that such a notion “points out and highlights the potential of resistance movements to evoke countermovements that undermine, contradict and subvert them” (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009, p. 1120).

One of the central logics of this clash between resistances resides in what Coles (2009) calls the “field of masculinity.” Based on Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital and fields (1977, 1984, 1990), the author argues that existing power relations take place at levels of subfields that confront each other, since masculinities do not have the same meaning for the different social actors, also because they are lived and experienced differently in everyday practice. Such antagonism is illustrated by Coles (2009, p. 40):

Men use their dominant position in the field of gender to maintain male hegemony (orthodoxy) that privileges men, while feminists seek subversion and change (heterodoxy). Influenced by a variety of other fields (most notably the field of economic production), feminism has managed to ground its struggle against male hegemony and legitimize women’s rights and push for a movement towards equality in certain social spheres, both public and private. In turn, men tried to defend their position of dominance by resorting to essentialist arguments that necessarily separate men from women. This struggle in the field of gender influenced struggles in the field of masculinity. The essentialist argument creates instability in the field of masculinity as subordinate men use the essentialism argument (i.e., that men are genetically predisposed to masculine behaviors such as aggression, promiscuity, and risk taking) generated in the gender field to subvert hegemonic masculinity.

The disputes illustrated here do not only take place in the great discussions and clashes in the establishment of a dominant discourse on masculinities in our society, but are also present in everyday practices in groups socially located in space and time. If, on one hand, the most common in both spheres is to investigate the different forms of resistance in relation to hegemonic domination, on the other hand, little is known about how the opposite occurs, that is, about what are the different practices and existing counter-resistance strategies and how such forms of resistance are manifested against different social groups.

In this sense, O’Connor (2000, p. 218), when investigating the types of resistance among women in Irish academia, identifies the exercise of varied counter-resistance by men, as the “stigmatization of any initiative in favor of women, the demonization of prominent women, the establishment of organizational hurdles, and the rendering of hard-won procedures irrelevant by the introduction of new ones that contain implicit positive discrimination in favor of men.”

## INVESTIGATION METHODOLOGY: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

This study is one of the results of a broad research project on gender in organizations, which began in 2017. Starting from a qualitative approach, the research project as a whole presents a longitudinal perspective. Based on the precepts of Hakim (1997) and Ruspini (2000), we understand that longitudinal data enable the recognition of similarities or changes in different periods of investigation, which meets our objective with this article, to analyze the facets of the exercise of hegemonic masculinities as a means of counter-resistance by young men in the face of the rise of feminist collectives in the university context. We understand, therefore, that the analysis of processes involving action and reaction of individuals, which is the case of our study, can be deepened by establishing a longer period to investigate the phenomenon. In the case of our article, this analysis was possible, through records, between 2010 and 2019.

This text presents multiple data sources, among which we highlight: i) in-depth interviews; ii) documents contained in repositories of feminist collectives; iii) reports expressed in groups on Facebook; iv) song lyrics composed by students; v) videos published on YouTube; vi) student drum diary; vii) artifacts present in higher education institutions.

In-depth interviews (i) were carried out with 20 students from a traditional Brazilian higher education institution, between 2017 and 2018, with an average duration of 81 minutes, totaling 27 hours of interviews and 378 pages of transcripts with single spacing in font Times New Roman, size 12. As the main criteria for selecting cumulative respondents, we heard from girls and boys who study or studied at this institution and who are or were part of student groups, such as the feminist collective, the academic directory, the drums and the athletics. As our study is based on reports about the exercise of hegemonic masculinities, we listened in particular to nine girls who are part of the history of the feminist collective, as this is a group responsible for collecting denunciations of violence against women in the context of the investigation's teaching institution, which involves, in addition to the institution's internal environment, parties, hazing and sports competitions.

We also heard six girls who are part of other university groups mentioned above. In order to establish points of agreement, disagreement and complementarity, in relation to the reports brought by the girls, we heard, following the precepts of Patton (2002), five boys who are part of all the student groups of the institution, with the exception, obviously, of the feminist collective. The five boys converged, in general, with the reports brought by the girls and, as we found a pattern of responses in interviews with the boys, we concluded the interview phase of the study and proceeded to analyze other sources for triangulating data and increasing the study internal validity (Creswell, 2009; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Our semi-structured script, used for both girls and boys, was organized into three categories of questions: the student's trajectory at the HEI, reports of situations of gender violence within the HEI, and response actions to situations of gender violence. Box 1 summarizes the profile of interviewees:

**Box 1**  
**Profile of interviewees**

(N)	Pseudonym	Interview Duration	Course Stage	Age	Activities in Student Groups
Phase 1 of interviews (university women)					
1	Mariana	01:19	Intermediate	21	Collective
2	Ângela	02:10	Final	21	Collective
3	Patrícia	00:59	Final	21	Athletics
4	Joana	01:28	Final	21	Collective (founder)
5	Melissa	02:05	Final	23	Collective (founder)
6	Catarina	00:40	Intermediate	19	Drums
7	Jéssica	00:59	Final	21	Athletics
8	Pietra	01:33	Intermediate	20	Collective
9	Jaciara	01:32	Completed	24	Collective (founder)

*Continue*

(N)	Pseudonym	Interview Duration	Course Stage	Age	Activities in Student Groups
10	Queli	01:21	Intermediate	20	Collective
11	Julieta	01:29	Initial	21	Collective
12	Adriana	01:32	Final	23	Directory
13	Izis	01:13	Final	21	Directory
14	Olívia	01:58	Final	23	Collective
15	Elizabete	00:40	Final	29	Athletics
Phase 2 of interviews (university men, complementary in nature)					
16	Lucas	00:58	Initial	26	Drums
17	Vítor	01:15	Completed	23	Drums
18	César	01:16	Interrupted	23	Directory
19	Carlos	01:26	Final	22	Athletics
20	Henrique	01:36	Initial	23	Athletics

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The repository documents of the feminist collective (ii), produced between 2013 and 2019, were also used in a complementary way to the girls' reports. Based on this source, we have selected for this article the result of a survey carried out by the girls of the collective, which aimed to portray situations of sexual, physical and verbal violence against women in the context of a famous university party. The data contained in groups on Facebook (iii) were intended to report the reactions of girls and boys after the prohibition, by the educational institution, of the execution of lyrics of an offensive nature composed by students of the student drums. One of the authors of this article was able to access two private groups, the first with 488 members, organized by the feminist collective, and the second, of a broader nature, composed of 9,496 students and alumni of the higher education institution. Despite being private groups, access by their administrators to external members who wish to participate in the group is generally granted, thus, we were able to collect important evidence for our investigation.

We also had access to 63 songs composed (iv) by the boys from the student drums between the years 2010 and 2019 which, together with the interviews carried out and after their full transcription by the authors of this article, generated 346 citations that included 41 codes of analysis. The lyrics, being authored by the boys, are valuable portraits of the exercise of hegemonic masculinities. This is because they are the result of practices exercised directly by them and that illustrate the attempt to perpetuity of men's domination over women (Beasley, 2008; Demetriou, 2001; Moller, 2007), as we can see in the lyrics exposed in our section on results. Additionally, we analyzed five videos (v) published on YouTube between the years 2010 and 2015. Two of these videos demonstrate the execution of lyrics composed by drums members, accompanied by other students of the institution, and three videos portray situations of subordination of girls by boys in hazing within the educational institution.

After interviewing the young men who make up the history of the student drums, we had access to an important document, of a more intimate nature, prepared by them between 2014 and 2017: it is the diary of the student drums young members (vi), presented in the form from a notebook with about 68 valid pages, since many pages of this document were removed before our access. This material is essential because it brings content that was freely thought of by the boys, given that, at first, it was private. To this day, there are reports that students keep diaries of their own.

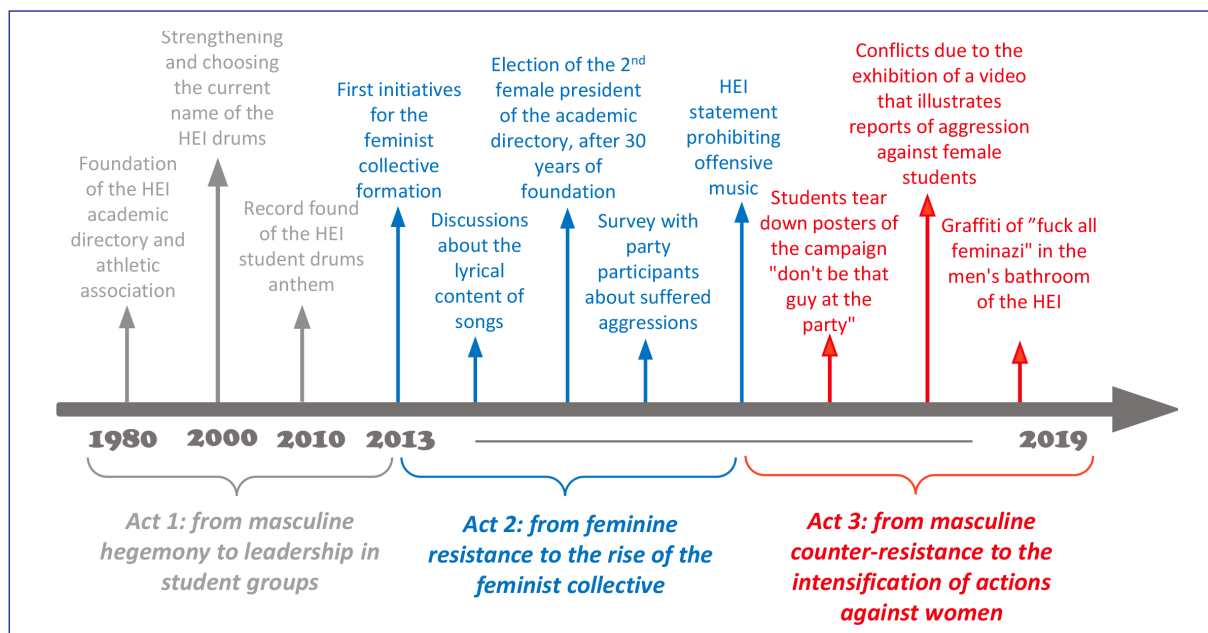
As a last source of data, we also analyzed artifacts present inside the higher education institution (vii) between the years 2017 and 2019. Such artifacts mainly include several posters placed by the feminist collective on the institution's premises, as well as their tampering and destruction by boys, as well as graffiti made by young people as a form of counter-resistance to the girls who make up the feminist collective. One of these graffiti was found in the men's bathroom cabin by one of the authors of this study.

After processing the collected data, we proceed to analyze them. The interviews and analysis of song lyrics (sources i and iv) were carried out after detailed coding, classification and analysis control, following the precepts of Miles and Huberman (1994). We imported the transcripts into the Atlas TI software, indicated for qualitative analysis (Friese, 2019), and performed line-by-line coding to find the main concepts and codes present in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Our data were predominantly analyzed inductively, that is, data collection occurred before the analysis of the literature on the subject, based on open, axial and selective coding. With the data in hand and code organization, we deepened the study of the literature on hegemonic masculinities and on the approach of resistance and counter-resistance to refine our categories of analysis, following the precepts of Corbin and Strauss (2015) and Glaser (1994).

After reaching the analysis categories of the study, which emerged from the interviews and songs lyrics and which were fine-tuned after reviewing the literature on the subject, we returned to the other data sources (ii, iii, v, vi and vii) for the selection of more illustrative evidence of our categories of analysis, with a view to triangulating data sources and increasing the study internal validity (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). As this is a longitudinal study, we organized the analysis of categories in time, divided into three acts. Figure 1 illustrates the most relevant facts that occurred in each act:

**Figure 1**  
**Main events of the longitudinal study**



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Although we bring information from the 1980s in this timeline, we consider that our analysis substantially comprises the period between 2010 and 2019. Some dates have been suppressed to protect the anonymity of research participants and the HEI, as well as their names, which have been replaced by pseudonyms. In the following section, we will bring the categories that supported the analysis of results, namely: we highlight, in act 1, the masculine quest for leadership, for maintaining power and for prosperity in relation to women; in act 2, we explore the feminist collective formation, as well as its purpose and fight against sexism; in act 3, we deepened our analysis, highlighting boys' view of the feminist collective and emphasizing the attacks made against this movement.

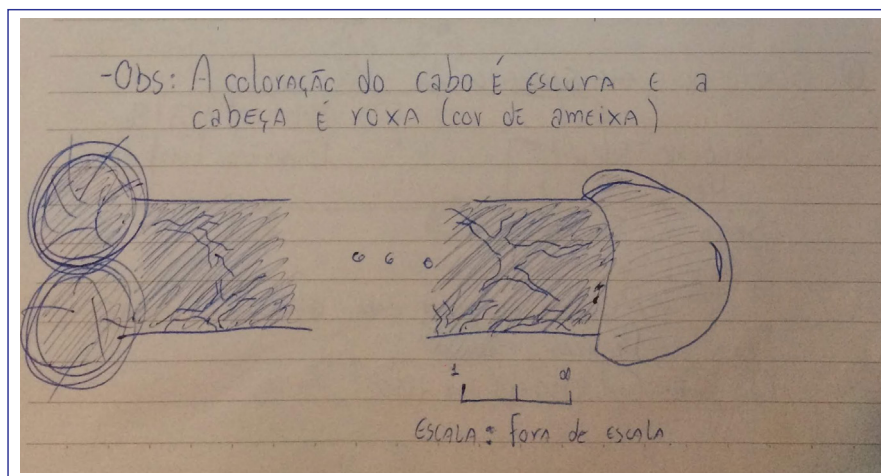


## ACT 1: FROM MASCULINE HEGEMONY TO LEADERSHIP IN STUDENT GROUPS

This act reflects the masculine quest for leadership to maintain their power and prosperity over women. The reports presented here deal with a time when the feminist collective had not yet consolidated in the HEI selected for the study. Masculine leadership occurred more freely, in which the central focus of male members of different student groups within the HEI was on exalting their masculinities and, at the same time, involving the classification of women as being subordinate to the interests of boys, who were then responsible for defining the rules and situations relevant to the student context at the HEI.

About the internal dialogues between members, we note that they refer to the characteristics of masculinities, in which the strongest and most sexually prepared seem to be the ones who should lead. This dispute involves aspects of masculinities and sexualities, as shown in the diary of drums members:

**Figure 2**  
**Male genital organ as an aspect of power**



Note 1 (on top): - Obs.: The stem coloration is dark and the head is purple (plum color).

Note 2 (underside): Scale: out of scale.

Source: Student drums diary (2014).

This drawing was made by drums boys in order to portray the male genital organ of one of their most prominent leaders. We had to remove some excerpts from the original text, but it is clear that the drawing seeks to revere the power of this leader, through the exposure of an organ supposedly of superior masculinity. Power through sexual capacity is also present in the lyrics of songs from this period, according to an excerpt from one of them:

So let's drink and fuck. You have to fuck. You have to bang. And release it to anyone who wants to fuck. I'm smoking, I'm drinking, like I always wanted. But my dick is the happiest (dick refers to the male genital organ). I smeared the mouths of frosh all over town, then I didn't even kiss or befriend them. I was despising her so much, she fell in love with me (lyrics to song 1).

The exaltation of masculinities also involves the diminution of women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This could be observed in the HEI hazing, as Melissa portrays: "In my hazing, we were forced to eat a pouch of cat food on all fours. They, seniors, made us drink tequila from a rubber dick." Elizabete's speech goes in the same direction: "My hazing was traumatic. A friend of mine came out with hypothermia because they threw too much beer on her; it was July and it was cold; she was taken away in an ambulance, and the guys still wanted to take advantage of her."

These statements portray what Donaldson (1993) defines as the hegemonic group's attempt to establish habits considered right, which is easily illustrated by the types of scavenger hunts considered appropriate by the young leaders of student groups, but which, in fact, caused violence and embarrassment for the girls. Carrigan et al. (1987), in the same sense, point out that maintaining power can mean belittling other groups and determining what they should do, which is also illustrated by Ana's speech about one of the parties and about the occurrence of the day following the event:

There was an event that was like a beauty contest and the most beautiful student was chosen. The girls had to go on stage and do something to show why she had to win the contest. They said “I get you drunk, no problem, you drink a lot and you won’t even realize you’re up there.” One girl took her clothes off and all the boys loved and encouraged her. What shocked me was that, the next day, at college, everyone was calling her a whore (Melissa, 23 years old).

We observe here a scenario of determination of rules of conduct followed by contempt. Melissa, Elizabete and Olívia reported situations in which girls submitted themselves to scenes of humiliation because they believed that, thus, they could gain social approval from their peers. It was possible to confirm these reports through videos available on YouTube that show freshmen in scavenger hunts at the HEI who, under the screams of the boys, are pressured to spread mayonnaise on their bodies in a sensual way, show their private parts and kiss other girls.

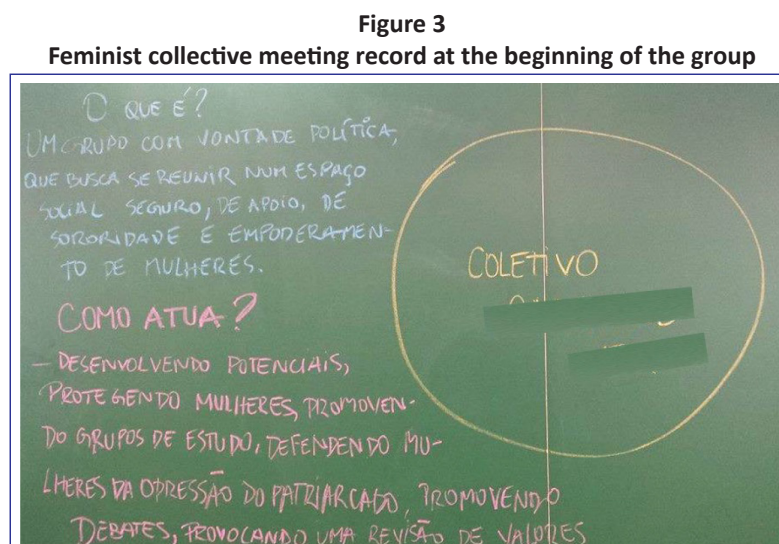
Alternatively, there are reports that bring the quest to maintain hegemony through contempt aimed specifically at women who study at other educational institutions, as shown in song 3: “I know you want me, good for me. If you want to work, just call me. My maid is going to resign. Why are you going to try? Once again, let’s get fucked. The (competing HEI) students and every bitch that crosses.” In the same sense, an excerpt from song 4 argues:

I try to see your vagina. I don’t want a bay or division. Just a very short miniskirt. And little by little go through your big butt. The difference is that I went to (HEI). I will work at the top. And for the xerox you will go down. I’ll hock and you clean the floor. Make coffee, as long as I want.

Founded with the purpose of resistance to the exercise of masculine hegemony, the feminist collective present in the next act ascends, in the context of the investigated HEI.

## ACT 2: FROM FEMININE RESISTANCE TO THE RISE OF THE FEMINIST COLLECTIVE

The first conversations between students for the organization of a feminist collective within the scope of the HEI took place in 2013. However, it was in 2014 that the group became more active, especially after combating offensive lyrics of songs composed by the drums students. Figure 3 brings the record of one of the first meetings of the group, in which the founders defined their main purposes:



Note 1 (in blue color): What is it? A group with political will, which seeks to gather in a safe social space, of support, sisterhood and empowerment of women.

Note 2 (in pink color): How does it act? - Developing potentials, protecting women, promoting study groups, defending women from the oppression of patriarchy, promoting debates, provoking a revision of values.

Note 3 (inside the circle in orange color): Collective.

Source: Collective’s Facebook group (2014).

Girls in the collective had the central purpose of combating situations of chauvinism present in the academic environment in which they lived, which seemed to surface even more at parties, hazing and university sporting events. According to Hollander and Einwohner (2004), this students' movement is characterized as a type of open resistance, in which collective acts, such as social movements and revolutions, become visible and readily characterized as resistance and seek to be recognized as such.

Jaciara was one of the founders of the collective, having therefore initiated a formal discussion on gender equality at the HEI. The influence of professors and situations experienced was the main reason that led to the emergence of the group, as she reports: "I had professors who approached feminism, but what made me create the collective were situations that I experienced at the university and that made me notice chauvinism and violence. I realized that nobody discussed gender issues, and I thought it was important to discuss them."

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) point out that, if there is hegemony of a group over other individuals, it is common for there to be resistance, which can occur individually or collectively, the latter being more frequent due to the strength it brings with it and, according to Scott (2008), due to the need to join forces in the face of a group that has dominant power over another in several aspects. It is in this sense that the feminist collective work begins, in search of changes in the face of the existing social structure and in opposition to the exercise of masculine hegemony.

Authors such as Hercus (1999), Smith and Johnston (2002), and Wapner (1996) point out that the articulation of social movements, the formation of groups and activism are intrinsic characteristics of the act of collective resistance. This seems to be the case in the history of formation of the feminist collective in matter. The idea of seeking activism to change the social structure is clear in Melissa's speech, one of the collective founders: "We don't want to put an end to parties; we can have competitions to see who dances well, but it doesn't have to be the one who takes off her clothes the fastest and puts mayonnaise on her nipple and then is seen as a whore at the university the next day."

The resistance performance of the collective also involved an attempt to raise awareness among students. At first, the collective carried out a survey (which we accessed through the feminist collective repository) about situations of aggression against female students at a famous university party. As a result, of the 212 HEI students who answered the questionnaire, 148 said they had been aggressively approached or harassed at some point during the party by a student. In the description of the forms of approach or harassment, one of the students reported: "The men kept insisting on kissing me, and when I said no, they kept trying to force me. I had to pull away by force or run to a friend of mine." With these results in hand, the feminist collective posted awareness posters on the premises of the HEI with the phrase "Don't be that guy at parties," followed by reports of harassment suffered by the survey respondents.

The rise of the feminist collective continued for the semesters after the party and started to be accelerated when an HEI student, Adriana, assumed the Presidency of the Academic Board, not without difficulties, as reported by her: "In the beginning, it was very difficult to act in the Presidency of the Academic Board, because I was the president, only half of the staff was made up of men and the other half were women who were not proactive about feminism." Even in the face of difficulties, Adriana became more and more involved with the feminist collective group and achieved important advances in the resistance actions of girls, such as the prohibition of presentation of offensive songs composed by the boys of the student drums.

Authors such as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Hyde et al. (2009) argue that resisting, in this context, means carrying out actions against women's subordination in relation to internalized masculinities in different spheres of our society. In the case under analysis, the action achieved was the prohibition of songs presentation and, therefore, the breaking of an internalized situation: that of being considered normal – or at least allowed until now – the adoption of verbal and written discourse with clear intentions exercise of hegemonic masculinities, in this case represented by the speech of the songs lyrics. Results achieved during Adriana's administration were so expressive that the HEI officially issued a statement in which it positioned itself "against behavior that offends, diminishes and depreciates other people in relation to their class, ethnicity and gender, reinforcing the importance of respect the institution's code of ethics," according to a document in one of the analyzed Facebook groups, published in 2015.

Response actions of boys in face of the broad resistance exercised by the feminist collective, now consolidated, would come with increasing strength and intensity, as we will present in act 3, of counter-resistance.

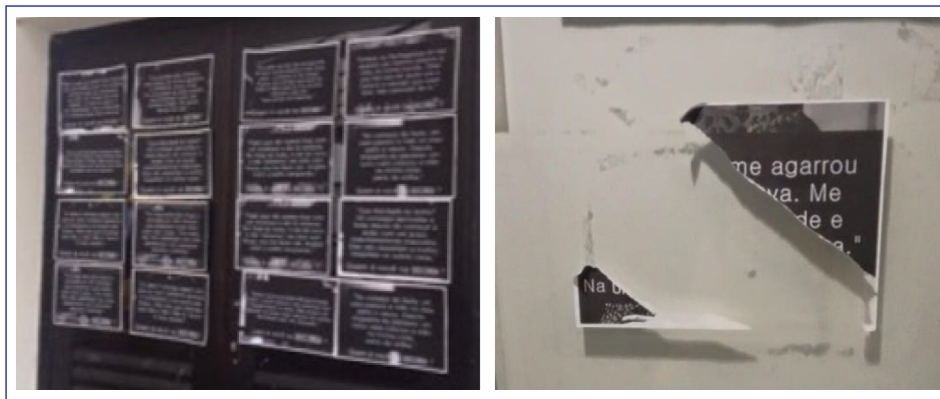
### ACT 3: FROM MASCULINE COUNTER-RESISTANCE BY INTENSIFYING ACTIONS AGAINST WOMEN

Kärreman and Alvesson (2009) points out that the phenomenon of counter-resistance is frequent as a way of reacting to the actions of a certain group that feels dominated by another. In our study, resistance is exercised, in particular, by the feminist collective at the HEI, and counter-resistance, by young men active in student groups. As highlighted by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), counter-resistance can mean an exacerbation of conflicts that previously existed between groups; in this case, this aggravation is marked by the intensification of conflicts in the university environment of the analyzed HEI.

Jaciara comments that students had a negative thought about feminism, which got worse after the banning of the boys' songs: "I remember going to a bar and the students didn't lend me a lighter because I was a feminist, and I got into a fight at the bar because of it. It was very tense." Ângela reports on what she heard from boys: "[...] the feminist collective opposes the lyrics of songs. Let us sing! You are ruining everything." Ângela also reports the following: "There was a guy who told me to fuck off by text message. He said that at the party he would sing the offending songs using my name into the microphone."

The attacks to the feminist movement were not only within the scope of discourse. The campaign entitled "Don't be that guy at parties" caused great conflict among HEI students and was boycotted by some of the students, who tore up the posters placed on the institution's premises, as a sign of denial of its content (Figure 4). Patrícia reports that it was possible to identify who tore up the posters, as the elevator has a camera. The boys involved in the situation did not want to comment on the reason for such behavior and, according to Patrícia, they were students who had no history of problems related to bad behavior at the HEI.

**Figure 4**  
**Campaign posters of the feminist collective before and after the depredation**



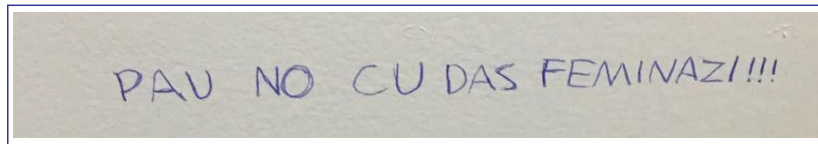
Source: HEI Feminist Collective Repository (2015).

Attacks also began to occur during trips to university games, especially on buses carrying participating students. The degree of offense to the collective worsened, with new songs that expressed the following: "You are a worthless whore, I am different, I will be president, you, secretary, my cleaning lady." Songs were accompanied by offensive screams like: "Fuck the feminist collective"; "feminists are all fat"; "badly fucked feminazis." While singing these passages in provocation to the collective members, some students drew the name of the feminist collective on the bus windows, accompanied by the symbol of Nazism. Jaciara reports this moment:

I was on the bus going with my college friends to the college games. [...] everyone knew that we were from the feminist collective and started to provoke us. They sang the song that I consider the worst, that offends women. They sang a thousand times. A boy started talking about the feminist collective being a Nazi. He drew on the bus window the symbol of the collective associated with the symbol of Nazism. I was looking at it and I thought, "Oh my God, what happens to make this make sense in someone's head?"

The term “feminazi” is used pejoratively to describe individuals who are perceived to have extreme or radical opinions, and the construction of expression is an association of the feminist collective with Nazism, the ideology responsible for one of the greatest massacres of humanity in the period of World War II. Figure 5 mentions this association again:

**Figure 5**  
**Offensive phrase aimed at girls from the feminist collective at IES**



Note: Fuck all feminazi!!!

Source: Photographic record made by one of the authors of the article in the men’s bathroom at the HEI (2019).

The sentence written on the door of one of the bathroom stalls reveals that the term “feminazi” is still used to refer to the feminist collective members, and its content indicates negative feelings nurtured against them during all this time. This demonization of prominent women is one of the forms of counter-resistance identified by O’Connor’s (2000) research.

Another form of counter-resistance according to O’Connor (2000) is the stigmatization of any initiative in favor of women. The expressions used by the feminist collective, such as “chauvinism” and “oppression,” started to be used by the boys in situations out of context, in order to diminish them, as in phrases like “the bus is oppressing me” or “I thought this tapioca is too sexist.” Thus, they label negative situations experienced by women as banal situations.

The use of force or physical violence was also reported as a form of counter-resistance by boys, a situation predicted by studies by Anderson and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Umberson (2001). Patrícia was the victim of physical aggression because of her work in the feminist collective, as she reports: “I became known as the face of feminism in college. On the one hand, it was cool, because they came to me asking for help, but everyone who was against feminism fought with me. I got beer thrown in my face at a college party once.” Izis, another activist, reports aggressions from that time: “[...] there have been guys who bit, who scratched, who hit the girls.”

The fight for the end of the songs lyrics was a long period of conflicts, including in the virtual environment, since some of the students could not understand the problem surrounding the lyrics and sexist behavior during events promoted by the athletic association and the Academic Directory. Jaciara recalls that there was a lot of discussion in Facebook groups after the statement issued by the HEI with the ban on the playing of offensive songs. In a post liked by 166 people and with 684 comments, a former student stated: “I never felt offended by any song. People are worrying about little things. Sad to end a tradition of years.”

As a form of counter-resistance, even after the ban, the drums did not reformulate the lyrics of songs, they just stopped singing the parts that were considered sexist and offensive, but encouraged the public to continue singing these parts of the songs. Mariana says that “when she got to the parties, in the problematic part of the lyrics, the drums directed the microphone for the audience to sing and said that it was the audience who wanted to sing sexist music, not the drums.” The drums members even exchanged forbidden passages for “HEI censorship,” encouraging students to react against the collective members who were immediately attacked with beer glasses on their heads.

One of the main results of this study was to highlight the strength of counter-resistance movements. By declaring that “where there is power, there is resistance,” Foucault (1978, p. 95) brings us an important argument for reflection. The case presented in this text shows that the power on the part of the HEI’s feminist collective was accompanied by strong resistance from the boys of the HEI’s student groups as a way of maintaining its hegemonic power. It is with this look of counter-resistance that one of the main members of the student groups highlighted: “When you’re with people from that era, when you’re drinking with friends who saw that and who saw the whole process of prohibiting that, you always end up singing like a form of personal protest, so to speak” (César). We note that resistance and counter-resistance persist.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

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This article aimed to analyze the facets of the exercise of hegemonic masculinities as a means of counter-resistance by young men in face of the rise of the feminist collective in the university context. To achieve this goal, we start from a qualitative and interpretive approach, with a longitudinal perspective through records between 2010 and 2019, with the help of a data analysis composed of three acts (masculine hegemony, feminine resistance and masculine counter-resistance).

Our evidence is explained by the concepts of masculine hegemony, resistance and counter-resistance present in the literature on gender. According to Hollander and Einwohner (2004) and Scott (2008), hegemony within a group – in this case, the hegemony of male students over female students – has led to the creation of a resistance group that wants to gain strength against the dominant group and modify a current social structure that it considers unfair. In the case of our study, the resistance group is the feminist collective and the dominant group is represented by the students, who exercise hegemonic masculinities. This, in turn, resists the resistance of the feminist collective (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2009; Tildesley et al., 2022), which we call counter-resistance. This students' counter-resistance movement was marked by strong acts of violence committed in response to the creation of the feminist collective and subsequent prohibition of the songs, which leads us to the understanding that these acts of force on the part of women also served as catalysts for violence against them. This phenomenon is illustrated by Patrícia's statement, who mentions the aggression she received (see the report of the students' hostile and violent behavior) because of her role in the feminist collective. Violence, in this situation, is motivated not by the weakness of these students, but by their strength and because, possibly, male students are not willing to share equitable powers and rights with the female students; instead, they see them as a threat to their desire for power and the exercise of masculinity.

In the context of our study, these young people sometimes trivialize the violence they commit against the students. The contemporary philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), a great exponent of the discussion about the banality of evil, postulates that there is radical evil (present in people at the top who perpetrate evil, symbolized by the hegemonic group of Nazi leaders in the context of World War II) and banal evil. The latter is largely responsible for maintaining and strengthening the former and constitutes a mass that closes its eyes and accepts radical evil (according to the philosopher, banal evil is present in a portion of the German population in the context of the concentration camps of the Second World War). By attributing such a view to our study – with care to maintain the degree and scope of violence in their due proportions – young people seem to exhibit a behavior of group alienation that may interfere with the judgment of their actions (see Arendt & Kroh, 1964 on loss of judgment). In this perspective, violence can be seen as a collective privilege, and not as an individual aberration (Connell, 2005).

Based on the deepening of each act, this article presents three central contributions. The first, at a theoretical level, is aimed at the literature on resistance and counter-resistance, through the investigation of this phenomenon in the educational context, considering the interactions that occur between individuals of the same hierarchical level, that is, male and female undergraduate students. The investigation contributed to the management literature in the field of administration by showing how oppression is operated within organizational spaces, through its actors and structure, as well as highlighting the still persistent gender division of labor used to ratify the oppression exercised against women in society in various spheres, by associating the terms "secretary," "cleaning lady," "whore" and "worthless" in song lyrics: "You are a worthless whore, I am different, I will to be president, you, secretary, my cleaning lady."

The second contribution, from an institutional level, presents reports that can serve as a form of denouncement so that managers of HEIs (and other types of organization) reflect on the importance of promoting strategies to deal with situations similar to what was reported in the article. In the study by Tildesley et al. (2022), respondents stated that campus management teams have been instrumental in making gender policies visible and disseminating protocols against practices of violence. The authors defend that the decentralization of the implementation of gender equality policies contributed to soften the institutional resistance or non-action of the university's central bodies or government teams. Departments considered to be more open to gender issues, such as sociology and communication, acted as models and demonstrated to government staff and the university in general that gender equality policy can be expanded. However, even HEIs or departments that remain highly masculinized can also play an instructional role as pioneers, thus establishing a precedent of great legitimacy, even paving the way for this diffusion in other HEIs. By banning the drums anthem, the HEI in our

article set an important precedent in combating violence against female students. These more welcoming spaces provide mutual recognition and collective empowerment. As cited by an interviewee in the study by Tildesley et al. (2022, p. 25): “in this context of ‘gender ideology’, it is important to work in alliances that we recognize, also recognizing each other.” We can see, therefore, that the actors that make up this formal space of educational management must unite to transform their place of work and study.

The third contribution of the article, of an individual scope, provokes reflection for the construction of gender equity in our organizations and society as a whole. Making the context of our study public helps the students to realize that they are not alone in this fight, so that they feel stronger, in addition to enabling them to carry out work, not always visible, that helps them to promote a culture that is more receptive to gender equity policies, constituting a crucial factor in combating different types of inequality and gender violence arising from the exercise of hegemonic masculinities. As an example of this contribution, by recognizing these practices, the different actors involved (such as female students, male students, professors, parents, family members and friends) can alert HEIs about this situation, thus allowing for more effective and timely action.

Despite achieving these three contributions, we understand that the restriction of our analysis to only one educational institution can, to some degree, be highlighted as a limitation of the study, possibly restricting the applicability of our analyses to other organizational contexts, even if it is defensible the idea that several other institutions may present situations similar to those that were brought up in our results.

In our article, we investigate the phenomenon of hegemonic masculinities and counter-resistance, based on the perception of girls and boys who experience or have recently experienced the context of higher education and on a series of documents. Although this was not the purpose of our article, we understand that there are possibilities for future studies that start from the perception of other social actors that interact with educational institutions and their students, such as professors and managers of HEIs. Specifically, we suggest future research that deals with the phenomenon of resistance and counter-resistance among individuals from different hierarchical levels, since, in our study, we analyze the phenomenon from a non-hierarchical perspective when we work exclusively with perceptions and realities of students of the same HEI. We understand, therefore, that the presence of hierarchy tends to change the dynamics of resistance and counter-resistance phenomena in the context of gender. In addition, we suggest studies that depart from the categories of analysis that we found in our investigation, such as: i) the male search for leadership and maintenance of power, in addition to the need for prosperity in relation to women; ii) the formation, purpose and forms of combat of feminist collectives in different organizations and iii) the attacks suffered by feminist collectives as a result of the image created around them.

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