



# Balancing the equation: Reflections on masculinities, femininities and gender hegemony in Spanish *paremias*

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## Abstract

Proverbs remain an excellent channel for the propagation of gender stereotypes in that they are considered as age-old truths, making it easy for them to evoke a certain form of social normality through discourse. Whereas sexism in proverbs has been widely studied from the perspective of women, the same cannot be said for research on how masculinities promote gender discrimination. The current study seeks to critique androcentrism in Spanish *paremias* by finding the connection between old arguments and new debates from the perspective of gendered social expectations regarding men. It investigates the sustenance of gender bias within the Spanish context using insights from Connell's (1995) theory of masculinities and Discourse Analysis. By so doing I aim to address concerns of female subordination as well as challenges males face in contemporary times. The analysis of Spanish *paremias* shows how societal expectations of masculinities and femininities work in tandem in sustaining the gender order.

**Keywords:** Masculinities, femininities, Spanish *paremias*, gender ideologies, gender stereotypes.

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## Equilibrando la ecuación: Reflexiones sobre masculinidades, feminidades y hegemonía de género en las paremias españolas

### Resumen

Los refranes siguen siendo un excelente canal para la propagación de estereotipos de género, ya que se consideran verdades milenarias, lo que les facilita evocar una cierta forma de normalidad social a través del discurso. Mientras que el sexismo en los refranes ha sido ampliamente estudiado desde la perspectiva de las mujeres, las investigaciones sobre cómo las masculinidades en los refranes promueven la discriminación de género son casi nulas. El presente estudio pretende criticar el androcentrismo en las paremias españolas al encontrar la conexión entre viejos argumentos y nuevos debates desde la perspectiva de las expectativas sociales de género con respecto a los hombres. Se aborda el tema en el contexto español utilizando la teoría de las masculinidades (Connell, 1995) y el análisis de discurso. Al hacerlo, pretendo abordar cuestiones sobre la subordinación femenina, así como los desafíos que enfrentan los hombres en los tiempos contemporáneos. El análisis de las paremias españolas muestra cómo las expectativas sociales sobre masculinidades y feminidades funcionan en conjunto para sostener el orden de género.

**Palabras clave:** Masculinidades, feminidades, paremias españolas, ideologías de género, estereotipos de género.

## Equilibrando a equação: Reflexões sobre masculinidades, feminilidades e hegemonia de gênero nas paremias espanholas

### Resumo

Os provérbios continuam sendo um excelente canal para a propagação de estereótipos de gênero em que são considerados como verdades antigas, tornando mais fácil para eles evocarem uma certa forma de normalidade social através do discurso. Enquanto o sexismo em provérbios tem sido amplamente estudado na perspectiva das mulheres, o mesmo não pode ser dito para pesquisas sobre como as masculinidades promovem a discriminação de gênero. O presente estudo busca criticar o androcentrismo nas paremias espanholas, encontrando a conexão entre velhos argumentos e novos debates sob a perspectiva das expectativas sociais de gênero em relação aos homens. Investiga o sustento do viés de gênero dentro do contexto espanhol usando insights da teoria das masculinidades de Connell (1995) e da Análise do Discurso. Ao fazê-lo, pretendo abordar as preocupações da subordinación feminina, bem como os desafios que os homens enfrentam nos tempos contemporâneos. A análise das paremias espanholas mostra como as expectativas sociais de masculinidades e feminilidades trabalham em conjunto na sustentação da ordem de gênero.

**Palavras-chave:** Masculinidades, feminilidades, provérbios, ideologias de gênero, estereótipos de gênero



## 1. Introduction

The interconnection between language and gender has been a robust area of research since the publication of Robin Lakoff's seminal work, "Language and woman's place" in the year 1975. Considered the primary instigator and source of research, Lakoff's (1975) book has contributed significantly to the successful modifications and reforms that have taken place in the field of language and gender studies. These successes have however been mainly at the lexical or morphological level. As Freed (2020) stresses, prejudicial language practices which "show[s] relatively little relief from the influence of androcentrism" (p. 4) persist and continue to perpetuate the gender order.

As the title of Lakoff's book shows, scholarship in the field of language and gender has mostly focused on women and femininities. This is understandable because of the prevalence of patriarchy in almost all human societies, past and present. As Staples (1980) notes "the consensus of most historians is that 'men reign dominant in all societies'" (p. 336). Thus, the patriarchal domination of women transcends geographical borders, cultures and religions. Perhaps one way of enhancing the achievement of gender equality is by focusing on the flip side of the gender order as well, i.e., masculinities. Certainly, societal expectations of women (femininities) as well as societal expectations of men (masculinities) both play a

role in society's conceptualization of the gender spectrum and the concomitant discrimination that comes with it. As Fernández-Álvarez (2014) maintains, "patriarchal culture is not a problem for women alone" (p. 50). Feminism and the study of masculinities overlap in that men may suffer some degree of distress through attempting to adapt to and take on impossible patterns of virility (Fernández-Álvarez, 2014).

One way of perpetuating masculinities is through gendered language in *paremias*. An extensive trajectory of research has been conducted on gendered language especially in proverbs but the majority of these focus on English and are conducted solely from feminist perspectives. A few exceptions exist though. An example is Diabah and Amfo (2018) in which the authors examine masculinities in Akan proverbs and their implications for contemporary societies.

The current research is in response to the increasing need for feminist and gender researchers to consider studying how men experience and enact gender. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study that seeks to redress the lacunae in research on masculinities in Spanish *paremias* and examine the interrelation between masculinities and female subordination. It throws light on the relationship between males and females and reveals how societal expectations of maleness contributes to the sustenance of the gender order. This study is also in response to the call by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) for theory and research on hegemonic masculinity to "give much closer attention to the ... historical interplay of femininities and masculinities" (p. 848). Studies such as these are important because as Fernández-Álvarez (2014) asserts, "fortunately, not all men are the same... masculine identity, in all its versions, is learnt and hence can also be changed" (p. 49-50).

## Objectives

This paper engages in gender political activism through the analysis of some Spanish *paremias* with the aim of examining how masculine identity is learnt and how its negative aspects can be changed. In the battle

against gender hegemony, strategies such as these are essential because of the link between language and society. For instance, it is striking that gendered ideologies and stereotypes often centre predominantly on women. This can be observed in Martínez Kleiser's *Refranero General Ideológico Español* (RGIE) (1953, 1978), which has been considered the most exhaustive and authoritative paremiographic work in the Spanish language for decades, and even till now (Fernández, 2022). Fernández (2022) notes that Kleiser's collection contains 1610 proverbs on women, making it the second largest category overall, with 2.47% of the total number of proverbs included in the volume. The category of proverbs on women is only exceeded by geographical proverbs with 2222 items, which make up 3.41% of the total. On the other hand, Kleiser's collection contains only 30 proverbs on men. Indeed, as Fernández (2022) argues, this is "rather surprising as in Spanish, the term 'man', i.e. '*hombre*', has traditionally been used as the neuter to refer to both men and women" (p. 81). In light of the intricate relationship between *paremias*, stereotypes, assumptions, ideologies and power, which will be discussed in Section 3 below, the current study sought to:

1. Examine masculinities in Spanish *paremias*.
2. Analyse how the presentation of men in Spanish *paremias* contributes to the perpetuation of the gender status quo.
3. Investigate how *paremias* enable the sustenance of gender bias within the Spanish context using insights from Connell's (1995, 2005) theory of masculinities and Discourse Analysis.

## A review of the literature

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### A brief note on *paremias*

Before proceeding, it is appropriate to provide a brief note on the terminology used in this study. According to Sevilla Muñoz and Crida Álvarez (2013), a *paremia* is a phraseological unit (PU) which consists of a "brief

and pithy statement ...which has been fixed in speech and which forms part of the socio-cultural heritage of a linguistic community” (p. 106). The term (*paremia*) has been used by Spanish language researchers since the 1980s as an archilexeme or hypernym for paremiological terms such as *refranes*, ‘*proverbios*’, ‘*aforismos*’, ‘*máximas*’, ‘*apotegmas*’, ‘*adagios*’ and ‘*sentencias*’ (Sevilla Muñoz & Crida Álvarez, 2013). Kleiser’s RGIE contains examples of all of these genres (translated as proverbs, aphorisms, maxims, apothegms, adages and dictums). These phraseological units are generally known in Spanish as ‘*dichos*’ (sayings) (Calvo-Sotelo, 1978). They share several characteristics<sup>1</sup> which often lead to them being used interchangeably (Calvo-Sotelo, 1978).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, previous studies (Calero Fernández, 1999; Fernández, 2022; Anna María Fernández Poncela, 2012 etc.) on Spanish proverbs do not distinguish between these paremiological taxonomies and neither does Kleiser’s seminal compilation (the RGIE) which is the primary source of data for the present study.<sup>3</sup> Calvo-Sotelo (1978) clarifies that the RGIE subsumes “all these different ‘sayings’... under the generic term proverbs” (p. vii). That notwithstanding, it is worth providing a brief outline of the subtle differences between these nomenclatures in order to obtain further insights in the present study’s analysis from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Calvo-Sotelo (1978) notes that *refranes*, proverbs, and adages “form a triplet that can be used, depending on the circumstances, without really fearing serious errors” (Calvo-Sotelo, 1978, p. vii). He explains that the *refrán* is a saying that is, strictly speaking, used to affirm an evident reality; the proverb constitutes an observation which includes an advice or a warning, whereas an adage has similar characteristics as the first two but is more poetic (Calvo-Sotelo, 1978). Regarding the others, he notes that

1. Frequency of usage (popular and repetitive—they are used extensively but they also have the possibility of becoming outdated), they have fixed structural patterns, dogmatic contents, as well as an idiomatic and pragmatic nature etc. (Sevilla Muñoz & Crida Álvarez, 2013).
2. Calvo-Sotelo (1978) notes that although there are subtle differences between them, some of them are almost synonyms.
3. Calvo-Sotelo (1978) however provides a brief note on the differences between them in his prologue to the second edition of the collection.

apothegms are distinguished by the person who says them rather than the text, maxims usually have transcendent backgrounds, dictums are highly doctrinal whereas aphorisms<sup>4</sup> can be considered as providing a rule of conduct (Calvo-Sotelo, 1978).

The problematic nature of these definitions can be observed in the work of Sevilla Muñoz and Crida Álvarez (2013), which Limei (2019) describes as one of the most important attempts at classifying terminology in Spanish paremiological studies. The most basic criteria used by Sevilla Muñoz and Crida Álvarez (2013) for differentiating between *paremias* is by their origin (known or anonymous) and their context of usage (erudite or popular). Among these terminologies, Sevilla Muñoz and Crida Álvarez (2013) identify three core ones namely, *proverbio*, *aporismo* (of known origins) and *refrán* (of unknown origin). For Sevilla Muñoz and Crida Álvarez (2013), the terms *máxima*, *sentencia*, *adagio*, *apoteagma* and others are synonyms of *proverbio* and *aporismo*, and their usage is “due to diachronic criteria that ... create unnecessary overlaps” (p. 109). They note that *máximas*, *apotegmas* and *sentencias* (among others) are all expressions used by learned persons and they have similar features to the aphorism for which reason they consider them synonyms of aphorisms. They explain the slight differences between them as follows: maxims contain a norm of moral conduct or a philosophical reflection; apothegms are *paremias* that are born because a character utters them, or they remind one of a famous fact and dictums are distinguished by their moralizing and solemn nature (Sevilla Muñoz & Crida Álvarez, 2013). Moreover, Sevilla Muñoz and Crida Álvarez (2013) also point out that other romance languages such as French and Italian do not distinguish between *refrán* and *proverbio* since they only have the term *proverbio*. The same applies to English.

Following seminal works done by scholars in the field such as Calero Fernández (1999), Fernández (2022), Poncela (2012) as well as (Calvo-Sotelo, 1978) and Kleiser (1978) himself, the term ‘proverb’ will be used in the present study

4. A further definition can be added from Sevilla Muñoz and Crida Álvarez (2013) who define aphorisms as “often said by or ... attributed to famous people, whether real or fictitious, of all times, such as philosophers, generals, politicians, writers, etc” (p. 109).

as an encompassing term when referring to the existing literature. However, for the purposes of precision, '*paremia*' (Limei, 2019; Sevilla Muñoz & Crida Álvarez, 2013) will be employed as an umbrella term when referring to the PUs analysed in this study. Before concluding this discussion on paremiological taxonomy, it would be appropriate to further clarify the term 'proverb' with the following quotation from Sevilla Muñoz and Crida Álvarez (2013):

The proverb is a *paremia* of anonymous origin and popular use, which generally has a two-part structure, the presence of mnemonic elements, the potential presence of humorous elements, and is based on experience and has universal truth value, for the most part. (p. 111)

Sevilla Muñoz and Crida Álvarez's (2013) definition of proverbs is of great interest here because, it probably explains why the term 'proverb' is often used to encompass the other paremiological categories: "proverbs constitute the largest group of *paremias* of anonymous origin and popular use" and additionally, "some *paremias* of known origin fall into the group of proverbs when the majority of speakers use them without knowing their origin" (Sevilla Muñoz & Crida Álvarez, 2013, p. 111).

### Proverbs, stereotypes, assumptions, ideologies, and power

As mentioned above, it is striking that gendered ideologies and stereotypes hardly centre on men. That there exists rather so many *paremias* about women is an indication of the diverse stereotypes about women—and also, a reflection of the force of stereotypes and ideologies. Indeed, the wide variety of societal expectations of women as evidenced by this abundance of *paremias* shows how society monitors women through the use of language that judge and appraise them. These societal expectations, couched in *paremias*, are stereotypes that limit and constrain women, placing them within specific boundaries which they must not transcend. In the same vein, the comparatively limited number of *paremias* on men reflects the patriarchal freedom they enjoy, although they are also stereotyped nonetheless and expected to conform to society's expectations of them.



Hilton and Von Hippel (1996) define stereotypes as “beliefs about certain groups” (p. 240). On their part, Eagly and Koenig (2021) define them as “beliefs about the attributes of people classified into a social category” (p. 343). Stereotypes about social categories classified by sex are basically consensual and since stereotypes are often considered as ‘common knowledge’ within societies, they have significant power to shape social life (Eagly & Koenig, 2021). Stereotypes are commonly perceived as negative, but as Czopp, Kay, and Cheryan (2015) observe, stereotypes can either be negative or positive. On one hand, negative beliefs (i.e., stereotypes) can adversely affect individuals’ well-being and opportunities by promoting discrimination (Eagly & Koenig, 2021). On the other hand, positive stereotypes which are defined as subjectively favourable beliefs about social groups, have beneficial as well as adverse implications for the target group (Czopp et al., 2015). Czopp et al. (2015) point out that “positive stereotypes, more so than negative stereotypes, may contribute to and perpetuate systemic differences in power and privilege” (Czopp et al., 2015, p. 451). As we shall observe in the current paper, the majority of Spanish *paremias* on men fall within the category of positive stereotypes; that is, they depict typically valued attributes (e.g., strength, independence, superiority etc.)—and they play a significant role in perpetuating gender-related differences in power and privilege while at the same time, posing adverse implications for the target group (men).

As demonstrated in several of the existing literature (e.g., Lomotey & Chachu, 2020), proverbs easily sustain stereotypes. They are excellent containers of societal beliefs because of their rhythmic and aesthetic qualities which make them catchy for language users. Additionally, proverbs contain some humour as they are often said half-jokingly (Calvo-Sotelo, 1978). This facilitates the proliferation of gender related beliefs because humour is often described as “harmless talk” (Kabaji, 2008) or “this is play” (Bateson; as cited in Dynel, 2011, p. 220). In his prologue to Martinez Kleiser’s *Refranero General Ideológico Español*, Calvo-Sotelo (1978) adds that proverbs are philosophical and doctrinal sayings which are the result of experience and wit, and they require conformity from society:

The proverb is a small capsule that contains a milligram of philosophy, a brief reflection whose goodness guarantees the fact that it has been tacitly adopted, throughout time and generations, and has reached our shores so valid that we dare to repeat them, incorporating them into our repertoire, in short: giving them credit and demanding that others conform to them. (Calvo-Sotelo, 1978, p. vi)<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, people who employ proverbs are considered as wise and this contributes to making proverbs excellent propaganda tools. According to Kleiser, “far from being a trivial hobby as some believe”, the study of proverbs “is an approach to the knowledge of the people, their customs and thoughts, which have been embodied in them over time with success, grace and power of conviction” (as cited in Cuadrado, 1999, p. 274). Thus, proverbs often reflect the philosophy of a people and ultimately their cultural values—including gender relations. Within the Spanish context, Rubio (2018) stresses that, “Spanish phraseology... reveals above all the very same division of almost all dimensions of life into two discrete groups—men and women” (p. 1727). Proverbs may therefore be a window on a society and a means of regulating the social interaction norms of adults. In formal or informal interactional discourse, they are used to serve numerous illocutionary functions (e.g., advising, persuading, rebuking, ridiculing or strengthening an argument). They play powerful roles in perpetuating ideologies, lifestyles, norms and expectations although this often goes unnoticed because they are considered as ‘collective truths’ and hence, readily accepted by society. Michel Foucault’s seminal work *History of Sexuality* stresses the power inherent in what is considered as ‘truth’:

In the end we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power. (as cited in Philp, 1983, p. 36)

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5. All translations mine except otherwise indicated.

Hence, proverbs play an important role in upholding gender hegemony. They conceal male power through the crystallization of gendered norms and practices without having to provide much justification. Through their status as ‘collective wisdom’, male power is projected as a legitimate and neutral power based on the natural order of things. As Foucault notes, “power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (as cited in Philp, 1983, p. 45).

In the analysis of proverbs, we see an interesting interplay of power and ideologies which Fairclough (2003) defines as “representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation” (p. 9). He notes that “language is a material form of ideology, and language is invested by ideology” (2010, p. 59). Ideologies work in tandem with assumptions. Norman Fairclough (2003) explains this as follows:

All forms of fellowship, community and solidarity depend upon meanings which are shared and can be taken as given, and no form of social communication or interaction is conceivable without some such ‘common ground’. On the other hand, the capacity to exercise social power, domination and hegemony includes the capacity to shape to some significant degree the nature and content of this ‘common ground’, which makes implicitness and assumptions an important issue with respect to ideology. (p. 55)

A critical study of gender ideologies reveals how manipulative beliefs are born out of assumptions which are often camouflaged in apparently neutral occurrences of language use such as proverbs. They (ideologies) are often engendered by stereotypes which involve “simplification, reduction and naturalization” (Talbot, 2003, p. 470) and they help to “interpret and motivate behaviour” (Philips, 2003, p. 272).

## The Refranero General Ideológico Español

The first edition of Kleiser's *RGIE* was published in 1953 after Matinez Kleiser was encouraged to do so by some friends of his. The second edition was published in 1978. The author notes that he gathered proverbs collected by some friends of his, who were "apparently repositories of the convictions handed down by modern and ancient peoples to human memories" (Kleiser, 1978, p. 10). To these, he added sayings from early folklorists starting from D. Iñigo Lopez de Mendoza and extracts from his own readings and oral rural accounts. As mentioned above, the collection contains an extensive number of *paremias* on women (1610) but a surprisingly limited number on men (30). Those on women are placed in subcategories whereas those on men are not.

Given the year of publication of the original version, it might be argued that these *paremias* reflect merely the "popular thought" (Kleiser, 1978, p. xii) of that era only. However, as Calvo-Sotelo (1978) observes in his prologue, proverbs may seem to be outdated but they have philosophical value given that they are centred on eternal themes such as love, hatred, friendship etc. He affirms:

It is difficult to eliminate from the work of Martínez Kleiser that slightly sad smell of historical museums. Just as in museums one finds objects, documents, weapons, uniforms that were used in days gone by for war or for peace, in their crowded columns, we stumble upon infinite advice, warnings, that no one repeats anymore, *even though our behaviour intuitively adjusts to what they preach to us.* (Calvo-Sotelo, 1978, p. viii; emphasis mine)

Indeed, Calvo-Sotelo observed as far back as in 1978 that probably proverbs currently evoke nothing but smiles and amusement. However, as we shall see in this paper, even if proverbs are outdated, the ideologies they project may still influence our lives as indicated in the above quotation. Sevilla and Cantera (2002, p. 25) also note that "proverbs help to get out of difficult situations successfully, since any aspect of human life is reflected in them, their field of

application presents a great variety given their thematic breadth” (as cited in Sevilla Muñoz & Crida Álvarez, 2013, p. 111). The powerful nature of proverbs is sustained by other proverbs such as “No hay refrán que no sea verdadero; cien refranes, cien verdades; decir refranes, es decir verdades; quien habla por refranes, es un saco de verdades; refranes heredados, evangelios abreviados; en tus apuros y afanes, pide consejo a los refranes” (Calero Fernández, 1999, p. 128).<sup>6</sup> This concealed power in language confirms Philp’s (1983) observation that “power is a complex strategic situation” (p. 34).

To unravel this complexity and understand the nature of the mechanisms which perpetuate the gender order, it is necessary to investigate through language, the sociohistorical factors that sustain masculinities and femininities. This will facilitate the diagnosis of its constantly replenished sources and help to identify effective measures in the fight against sexism. Certainly, examining such sayings uncovers the roots of misogyny and demystifies male power, enabling resistance against gender hegemony.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Data

77 Spanish *paremias* were selected from Kleiser’s (1978) *Refranero General Ideológico Español* (General Spanish Ideological Proverbs). The *RGIE* was chosen as the source of purposive selection of *paremias* for this study because it is the first and most comprehensive work which gathers *refranes* and other similar sayings and categorises them according to themes. As Calvo-Sotelo observes, the *Refranero General Ideológico Español* “is an arsenal that people who, in the future, feel interested in the world of proverbs should go to, to look for ammunition. It is an essential pivot for its codification... which no researcher will be able to do without in the future” (Calvo-Sotelo, 1978, p. vii).

6. There is no saying that is not true; a hundred sayings, a hundred truths; to say proverbs, is to say truths; who speaks by proverbs, is a bag of truths; inherited proverbs, abbreviated gospels; in your troubles and worries, ask proverbs for advice.

Although this study focuses on masculinities and was thus mainly interested in *paremias* on men, some *paremias* about women in which men were referred to (for example in comparison) were also selected. More *paremias* on men were found in the section on women because some of them could fit in more than one category. Other sources such as Álvarez Díaz (2007), Lacadena (2003) and Anna María Fernández Poncela (2000) were also consulted. In addition to the *paremias* on men, *paremias* on women were also examined in order to identify those that contained lexical gender referring to males (e.g., ‘hombre’ or ‘varón’).

### Analytical framework

The analysis consisted of a critical review of the construction and representation of gender identities in the selected Spanish *paremias*. An exploration of gender ideologies through the analysis of the representation of men and women was conducted in the light of the concepts of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995, 2005) and Discourse Analysis.

Masculinity is defined as what a particular society agrees as characteristics related with males and the expressions of maleness. Recent studies stress that masculinity is culture specific and there are multiple masculinities in each context. In other words, men experience the world and perform their identities in diverse and complex ways giving rise to different types of masculinities. Scholarship on men and masculinities identifies four different forms of masculinity namely, Hegemonic, Subordinate, Complacent and Marginal (Connell, 1995). These are broadly classified as hegemonic and non-hegemonic (marginalized) masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity which is the most debated form in studies on men and masculinities and our main interest here, is defined as a dominant form of masculinity in a given setting (Connell 1995, 2005). Schippers (2007) describes it as “the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 94). On his part, Fernández-Álvarez (2014) notes:

hegemonic masculinity is the form embodying male domination and exercising power and authority over women (and other men), with all the consequences of oppression, violence and privileges. That is, hegemonic masculinity would represent the traditional archetype of virility and male stereotypes in accordance with a patriarchal culture. (p. 49)

## Data Analysis

Emerging themes were categorized by identifying recurring stereotypes and ideologies. The identification of themes was guided by Badinter's (1992) observations on masculinities. Badinter (1992) recognizes four basic features in the male ideal namely, a "true man" must: (1) repress his affection and his humane side; (2) show superiority over other people; (3) show no sign of feminine weakness but rather should be very strong, independent, powerful, autonomous and unmovable; and (4) willing to use violence if necessary.

## Findings

The findings from the analysis are presented below.

### Men as emotionless

One of the basic features identified by Badinter (1992) in the male ideal is the idea that a "true man" must "repress his affection and his humane side" and "show that he is neither a baby, a woman or a homosexual" (Fernández-Álvarez, 2014, p. 50). This assumption is embodied in the ideology that men must not be emotional— they 'must not cry'. On the other hand, crying is associated with women (and babies) who are actually obliged to confirm their feminine identity by being emotional and having a propensity to cry. Men who cry are perceived as effeminate. The following proverb reflects this ideology:

1. Con hombre que llora y mujer que no llora, ni una hora [With a man who cries and a woman who doesn't cry, not an hour]. (Anna María Fernández Poncela, 2000, n.p)

The above proverb is an excellent example of ideologies that contrast societal expectations of masculinities and femininities. This is achieved in the use of the conjunction 'y': *hombre que llora y mujer que no llora*. The polarization of women and men in this sense becomes even more striking when one considers the abundance of *proverbs* on women and tears in Spanish:

2. A toda hora el perro meo y la mujer llora [At all times the dog pees and the woman cries]. – C. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 498)
3. Siempre que lo desea, la mujer llora y el perro meo [Whenever they want, the woman cries and the dog pees]. – R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 498)
4. A mujer que llora y perro que cojea, no los creas [Do not believe a woman who cries and a dog that limps]. – R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 498)
5. El avisado y discreto, sabe que las mujeres, sin maestro saben llorar, mentir y bailar [The informed and discreet person knows that women, without a teacher, know how to cry, lie and dance]. – C. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 498)
6. Las habilidades de la mujer: llorar sin por qué, mentir sin pensar, y cuando quiere, meo [A woman's abilities: cry for no reason, lie without thinking, and when she wants to, pee]. – R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 498)
7. La mujer ríe cuando puede y llora cuando quiere [Women laugh when they can and cry when they want]. – R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 498)
8. Cuando la mujer llorare, no se la ha de tener más duelo que a un ganso que anda en el agua en el mes de enero [When women cry, they should not be mourned more than a goose that walks in water in the month of January]. – C. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 498)



9. Llorando, engañó la mujer al diablo [Crying, the woman deceived the devil]. – R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 498)
10. Mujer que llora, judío que jura y zorra que duerme, malicia tienen [A woman who cries, a Jew who swears and a fox who sleeps, are malicious]. – R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 498)
11. De mujer que mucho llora, no fies gran cosa; y de la que no llora en su vida, menos todavía [Do not trust much a woman who cries a lot; and the one who does not cry in her life, even less]. – R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 498)

Women are considered as a special breed of human beings who are excessively sentimental, have talent in faking their emotions, are untrustworthy, malicious and more deceitful than the devil himself (proverb 9). Animal metaphors are used extensively to debase women (*perro*), trivialize women's emotions (*ganso que anda en el agua*) and project them as cunning (*zorra*). Interestingly, for a woman to be considered as trustworthy she must be prone to crying, but ironically, when she has this tendency, she is suspected of mischief and despised for it—such is the complexity and ambivalence of society's expectations for women. Men, on the other hand, are expected to show superhuman qualities by avoiding the natural human act of crying—be it in response to emotional or physical pain or even tears of joy.

### Men as superior

Badinter (1992) observes that a “true man” is obliged to show superiority over other people. In line with this, one of the key tenets of the concept of hegemonic masculinity is the affirmation of “the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Schippers 2007, p. 94). This is projected in *paremias* such as the following:

12. Un hombre de plomo vale más que una mujer de oro [A man of lead is worth more than a woman of gold]. - R.M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 23)

13. Un hombre de diez maravedís, vale más que una mujer de diez mil [A man of ten maravedis is worth more than a woman of ten thousand]. - R.M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 23)
14. Matrimonio de buena fortuna, siete varones y hembra sólo una [A successful marriage has seven sons and only a daughter]. (Lacadena, 2003, p. 31)
15. Parto largo y parto malo, e hija al cabo [Long labour and bad labour, and daughter in the end]. (Calero Fernández, 1999, p. 187)
16. La mujer es la mitad del hombre [The woman is half the man]. - R.M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 488)
17. Dios se hizo hombre, y no mujer [God made himself a man, and not a woman]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
18. Dios, que es el *non plus ultra* del saber, se hizo hombre, y no mujer [God, who is the wisest, made himself a man, and not a woman]. -R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
19. Dios, que, como Dios, pudo escoger, quiso hacerse hombre, y no mujer [God, who, being God, could choose, wanted to become a man, not a woman]. (Anna María Fernández Poncela, 2000, n.p)
20. Antes que Dios se hiciese hombre, el diablo se había hecho mujer [Before God became a man, the devil had become a woman]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 499).

The above *paremias* are examples of positive stereotypes in masculinities which derive their force through comparison with women. They depict men as superior to women both in material terms (*oro* vs *plomo*) and by alluding to religion (*paremias* 17-20). Men are projected as superior by pairing them with the Supreme Being and precious ornaments whereas women are portrayed as inferior by equating them with the devil. Such *paremias* reinforce the belief that women are not sufficiently competent

and thus need to be controlled by men. As Glick and Fiske (1996) affirm, this contributes to the perception of men as having the qualities needed to govern important social institutions while women are perceived as the inferior group resulting in a social justification for male structural power.

In this vein, there are other *paremias* which project the ideology that men have greater authority, power, and physical strength and for that reason have some form of power over women:

21. Tal queda la casa de la dueña ido el escudero, como el fuego sin trashoguero [Such is the mistress' house with the squire gone, like fire without a fireback].– R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 23)
22. Casa en que la mujer gobierna, casa enferma [A home in which a woman rules is a sick home].<sup>7</sup> - (Calero Fernández, 1999, p. 188)

These *paremias* reflect and perpetuate hegemonic masculinity by encouraging men to satisfy their need for dominance in their (intimate) relations with women. Men who are unable to maintain this relationship of dominance vs subordination may feel inadequate, anxious and depressed.

### Men as independent and strong

Another feature identified by Badinter (1992) in the ideal man is the absence of feminine weakness. Men are expected to be very strong, independent, powerful, autonomous and unmovable, and must show an unconditionally firm attitude that may be reflective of stubbornness (see Fernández-Álvarez, 2014). The following *paremias* reflect the Spanish society's expectation that men must be free:

23. Los enemigos del hombre son tres: la mujer, la casa y la espuerta de la plaza. [The enemies of men are three: the woman, the home and the boundaries of the square]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)

7. A similar proverb can be found in Álvarez Díaz (2007, p. 60): “*Con mal anda la casa donde la rueca manda a la espada*” (The house where the spinning wheel rules the sword is in trouble). Here, the spinning wheel and the sword are used to refer to women and men respectively by alluding to which gender traditionally manages each one.

24. El hombre en la plaza, y la mujer en casa [The man in the square, and the woman at home.]
25. La casa es de la mujer, y la calle, del hombre [The home belongs to the woman, and the street belongs to the man]. (Anna María Fernández Poncela, 2000, n.p)

The expectation of strength, bravery and stubbornness in men can be observed in the *proverbios* below:

26. Cuatro cosas ha de procurar tener y sustentar el hombre principal: buena mujer, buena casa, buen caballo y buenas armas [The true man must seek to have and sustain four things: a good wife, a good house, a good horse and good weapons]. (Álvarez Díaz, 2007, p. 53)
27. Al hombre, la espada; a la mujer, la rueca [To the man, the sword; to the woman, the spinning wheel]. (Anna María Fernández Poncela, 2000, n.p)
28. ¿Buen caballo, buena espada y buena mujer ¿qué más puedes apetecer? [Good horse, good sword and good woman, what more could you want?]. (Álvarez Díaz, 2007, p. 53)
29. El hombre ha de tener tres cosas codiciadas: su mujer, su caballo y su espada [A man must have three coveted things: his wife, his horse and his sword]. -R. M (Kleiser, 1978, p. 488)
30. Quien cría varón, cría león [Whoever breeds a man, breeds a lion]. -Z.-R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 23)
31. Quien conoce a un lobo, conoce a todos los lobos; quien conoce a un hombre, solo a uno conoce [Whoever knows a wolf, knows all wolves; whoever knows a man, knows only one]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 24)
32. El oso y el hombre, que asombre [The bear and the man, astonish]. – R.M (Kleiser, 1978, p. 24)

The sword, which is often used as a representation of weapons (*paremia* 26), has traditionally been associated with men. In the above *paremias* (27, 28 and 29) the sword implies strength, bravery or stubbornness and men are compared to wild animals such as lions, wolfs and bears (30-32). The use of wild animal metaphors with men is striking when compared to how women are often depicted in association with domestic animal imagery (*gallinas*). This points to the expectation of aggression in men (as we shall see in the next section) and the subordination of women.

Related to the stereotype of men as independent is the image of “true men” as heterosexual. In their Ambivalent Sexism Theory, Glick and Fiske (1996) indicate that Intimate Heterosexuality is a component of Benevolent Sexism. Intimate Heterosexuality is defined as the belief that a female romantic partner is essential for a man to be “complete”. Indeed, not only are men expected to be heterosexual but also, they are projected as naturally lecherous. Some *paremias* reflect infidelity in men while others stress the need for women to be chaste:

33. La mujer y la viña dan al hombre alegría [The woman and the vineyard give men joy]. - R.M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 488)
34. La alpargata y la mujer a todo hombre le vienen bien [The espadrille and the woman are good for every man]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 488)
35. Rubias y morenas sacan a un hombre de penas [Blondes and brunettes take a man out of sorrows]. - R.M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 488)
36. No fies de los hombres, niña; mal haya quien de ellos fía. [Do not trust men, girl; trouble awaits she who trusts them]. (Anna María Fernández Poncela, 2000, n.p)
37. Para casta, con un hombre basta [For a woman to be chaste, one man is enough]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 491)

38. Cuando nos aman, señoras nos llaman; cuando nos tienen, ya no nos quieren [When they love us, ladies they call us; when they have us, they don't want us anymore]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 24)
39. Hombre sin mujer al lado, nunca bienaventurado [A man without a woman by his side, is never blessed]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 488)
40. Al hombre, el codo, y no todo [To the man, the elbow, and not everything]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 492)
41. No sólo ha de ser casta la mujer, mas débelo parecer [Not only must the woman be chaste, but she must appear so]. - C. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 492)
42. No basta a la mujer ser buena: es menester que lo parezca [It is not enough for a woman to be good: she must appear so]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 492)
43. De mujer libre, Dios nos libre [May God free us from the free woman]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 494)

The license to philander which society gives to men contributes to the constraints women face regarding beauty and age. In relation to this, whereas men are not required to care for their looks, standards are set for women who are judged and evaluated by *paremias* such as this:

La mujer para ser hermosa ha de tener cinco veces tres cosas: ser blanca en tres, colorada en tres, ancha en tres, larga en tres: blanca en cara, manos y garganta; colorada en labios, mejilla y barba; negra en cabellos, pestañas y cejas; ancha en caderas, hombros y muñecas; larga en talle, manos y garganta [To be beautiful, a woman must have three things five times: she must be white in three, red in three, broad in three, long in three: white in the face, hands and throat; with red lips, cheek and chin; black in hair, eyelashes and eyebrows; wide at hips, shoulders and wrists; long in waist, hands and throat].- C. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 503)

On the other hand, the *paremia* “El hombre y el oso, cuanto más feo, más hermoso” (Centro Virtual Cervantes, 2023) and its varieties (“*El hombre es como el oso, entre más feo más hermoso*” and “*El hombre como el oso, mientras más feo más hermoso*”) liberates men from the burdens of concerns about physical appearance. This parameter of beauty in women as is reflected in the above surprisingly and outstandingly long *paremia* is defined by age as dictated by the following:

44. De quince no hay mujer fea [No woman is ugly at fifteen]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 491)- R. M.<sup>8</sup>
45. No hay quince años feos [There is no such thing as an ugly fifteen]. -(Kleiser, 1978).
46. Abriles, hasta los veinte; veranos, hasta los treinta; otoños a los cincuenta; e inviernos desde los sesenta [Aprils until twenty; summers, until thirty; autumns until fifty, and winters from sixty on]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 491) - R. M.
47. De quince, codorniz; de veinte, perdiz; de treinta, vaca, y de cuarenta, caca - o piltraca- o urraca [At fifteen, a quail; at twenty, a partridge; at thirty, a cow; and at forty, a poop]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 491)
48. Doncellita que llegó al tres y cero, ya puede ir cerrando su ropera [Little lady who reached three and zero, you may as well start closing your closet]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 491)
49. La que pasa de cuarenta y cinco, más está para dar gañivetes que para pedirlos [That one beyond forty-five is more suited to give little knives than to take them]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 491)
50. A los cincuenta, ya no hay cuenta [At fifty there is no tally]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 491)

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8. Translations of proverbs 44 – 50 are adapted from (Fernández, 2022).

The issue of age is so delicate in women that a woman's age is supposed to be kept a secret.

51. Asno de gran asnedad, quien pregunta a una mujer su edad [It is the greatest of asses, who asks a woman her age]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 491)

As Caldas-Coulthard and Moon demonstrate, the negative social reaction to ageism is a political issue which is deeply rooted in sexism and it reflects the tendency of male power to “define, control values, erase, disempower and divide” (Caldas-Coulthard & Moon, 2020, p. 38). The above *paremias* clearly testify to the political agenda behind the presentation of older women as unattractive and sexually repulsive and how this leads to their “invisibility, disappearance, marginalization, trivialization and ridicule” (Caldas-Coulthard & Moon, 2020).

This scenario is worsened by the fact that women are perceived as sex objects, whose youth is their most precious asset. Indeed, such stereotypes and ideologies enhance the sexual objectification of women as demonstrated in the following *paremia* which is captured under the subcategory “trato que se ha de dar a la mujer”: “42.941 La dama y la galga, en la cama o en la manga [The lady and the hound, in bed or in the sleeve]” (Kleiser, 1978). As Fernández (2022) observes, this asymmetrical perception of age in males and females perpetuates gender discrimination and has adverse societal consequences:

Age may be seen quite differently depending on whether it applies to men or women and, as usual, it may also be employed to denigrate the latter. Older men being attracted to and courting younger women is a fairly accepted cliché in our society, and often seen as acceptable, desirable, and even a status symbol. This is probably the motivation for examples 42.968 [proverb 29] and 42.969, [proverb 30] which from a present-day point of view can be seen as promoting or justifying pedophilia. (Fernández, 2022, p. 86)



*Paremiás* such as those listed here project the image of men as born to be Don Juans, an assumption which encourages irresponsibility in men. The position of men as the chasers and that of women as the chased is consequently sustained and women must be constantly on their guard as advised below:

52. La que al hombre cree al jurar, ál no gana que llorar [The woman who believes a man when he swears, has nothing to cry about]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 24)
53. ¡Ay, señores, qué malos sois los hombres! [Oh, gentlemen, how bad you men are!]. (Anna María Fernández Poncela, 2000, n.p)
54. Con sus buenas y malas artes los hombres son hombres en todas partes [With their good and bad arts, men are men everywhere]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 24)
55. La mujer es mosca, y el hombre araña, y así, al menor descuido la apaña [The woman is a fly, and the man a spider, and thus, at the slightest carelessness he captures her]. – R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 493)
56. Más tarda el hombre en decirlo que la mujer en consentirlo [The man takes longer to say it than the woman to consent to it]. – R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 493)
57. Todos a engañarla, y nadie por tomarla [Everyone to deceive her, and no one to take her]. – M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 493)

These *paremiás* suggest that men must be heterosexual and that it is common, normal and cool for them to be lecherous. Thus, men who do not fall within this category may feel not ‘manly’ or ‘cool’ enough since society often condones and even sometimes applauds being a ‘ladies’ man’. This is suggested in the *paremia* “Mujer infiel: puta; hombre infiel: héroe [An unfaithful woman is a prostitute; an unfaithful man is a hero]”. As illustrated with the juxtaposition of ‘héroe’ vs ‘puta’, such *paremiás* justify philandering in men while restraining women from doing same.

## Masculinity as synonymous with aggression

In relation to aggression in men, this can be observed in *proverbs* that advise men about what treatment to give to women. Several of such *proverbs* exist and many of them exist in different varieties. The following are some examples:

58. A la mujer y a la gallina, tuércele el cuello, y darte ha la vida [Twist the neck of the woman and the hen and give yourself life]. -Z. -M. -C. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
59. La mujer y la candela, tuércele el cuello si la quieres buena [The woman and the candle, twist her neck if you want her to be good]. -N. -C. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
60. La mujer y lo empedrado, siempre quiere ser hollado [The woman and the floor, always wants to be trampled upon]. -N. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
61. El asno y la mujer, a palos se han de vencer [The donkey and the woman must be controlled by beating]. -N. -M. -C. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
62. La burra y la mujer, apaleadas quieren ser [The donkey and the woman, want to be beaten]. -C. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
63. A la mujer y a la burra, cada día una zurra [To the woman and the donkey, every day a spanking]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
64. Al nogal, a la mujer y al asno, palo [To the walnut tree, to the woman and to the donkey, a stick]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
65. Espuela quiere el bueno y mal caballo; y la mujer mala y buena, palo [The good and bad horse want a spur; and the bad and good woman, a stick]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)

66. La mujer y el asno se enderezan a palos [Women and donkeys are straightened with sticks]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
67. Mujer muerta y olla quebrada se sienten poco o nada [A dead woman and a broken pot feel little or nothing]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
68. A la mujer y la carne, mientras chillen, darle [The woman and the meat, while they squeal, hit them]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
69. A la mujer y al hierro, dale sin duelo [Hit women and iron unrestrainedly]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
70. La nuez y la mujer, a golpes se han de vencer [Walnuts and women, are conquered through beating]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
71. Manda San Roque que a las mujeres no se les toque; y explica su hermano que no se les toque con la mano. - R. M.  
Sino con cosa que más les duela. (N. de R. M.)  
[San Roque commands that women should not be touched; and his brother explains that they should not be touched by hand.  
But with something that hurts them most]. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
72. El raso y la mujer, prensados o acuchillados han de ser [Satin and women, must be pressed or stabbed]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
73. La mujer y el raso, o prensado, o acuchillado [Women and satin, pressed, or stabbed]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
74. A la mujer y al papel, sin miedo tirarle. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)  
Para rasgarle por el dobléz. [The woman and paper, tear them without fear.  
To rip it by the fold].
75. Al papel y a la mujer, sin miedo de romper [Papers and women, break them without fear]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)

76. Gozallas, sacudillas y dejallas [Seduce them, beat them and leave them]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489)
77. Asnos y mujeres, por la fuerza entienden [Donkeys and women, understand through force]. - R. M. (Kleiser, 1978, p. 489).

In the above *paremias*, words belonging to the semantic field of gender violence are employed abundantly. An imagery of women as lesser human beings—and even worse, the basest of animals—is created by equating women with beasts of burden (*asno, mula, burra*) and objects (*raso, empedrado, hierro, nogal, carne, nuez, papel*). Commonly killed animals (*gallinas*) which are frequently associated with femininity are also used as metaphors. Instructions are given with specific words denoting violent acts against women (*tuércele el cuello, hollado, a palos, a golpes, apaleadas, se enderezan, chillen, accuillado, tirarle, prensado, romper, sacudillas*). Additionally, directives on the frequency and degree of the assault (*cada día, siempre, dura*), and instructions that the assailant should feel neither remorse nor sympathy for the victim are common (*darte ha la vida, sin duelo, sin miedo, mientras chillen*).

Furthermore, the imperative is used in many of these *paremias* (e.g., 58) and some of them imply that women actually desire to be treated as such (*quiere ser hollado, apaleadas quieren ser, espuela quiere el bueno y mal caballo; y la mujer mala y buena, palo*). They thus naturalize gender violence and assert that all women—good and bad—must be battered: *la mujer mala y buena, palo*. The ideology that violence against females is a necessity is also projected with words which imply obligation (*se han de*—61 and 70). Other *paremias* employ the use of dark humour as can be observed in 71: “Manda San Roque que a las mujeres no se les toque; y explica su hermano que no se les toque con la mano”. These *paremias* naturalize, justify and rationalize violence against females while making light of crimes that abuse women’s rights. As Fairclough (2003) points out, legitimation is achieved by rationalization, which is to mention the “utility of the institutionalized action and to social wisdom in order to give them cognitive validity” (p. 98). The expressions *si la quieres buena,*

*quieren ser* and *se han de vencer* are examples of how *paremias* which are considered as ‘social wisdom’ rationalize violence against women and, in consonance with hegemonic masculinity, encourage aggression in men.

It is necessary to note that in Spanish the same word is used for ‘woman’ and ‘wife’ (*mujer*). However, in the above *paremias*, the context suggests that the advice is directed especially at men in romantic relationships who are expected to ensure submissiveness in their partners. This can be observed in the use of words like *enderezar* (straighten) and *vencer* (dominate) and especially in *paremias* 59 (*si la quieres buena*), and 77 (*por la fuerza entienden*). Fortunately, during the data collection one positive *paremia* was found under the category “Trato que se ha de dar a la mujer [How a woman must be treated]” which advised that: *No trates a tu mujer como a burra de alquiler* [Do not treat your wife like a rented donkey] – R. M. (Kleiser, 1978). This advice was however drowned in the deafening repetition of the innumerable *paremias* that directed men to use violence in their bid to safeguard their position of power. Fernández-Álvarez (2014) affirms:

What would appear clear is that hegemonic masculinity is at the root of patriarchal tyranny, and the injustices and violence to which so many women (and so many men, too) are subjected around the world. Furthermore, it has nothing to do with any supposed essence of masculinity that condemns men to be as they are and to act as they act, but rather is an outcome of a cultural link between traditional forms of masculinity and power. (p. 50)

In line with this assertion, the above *paremias* reveal the fact that gender violence which is so common all around the world is not natural, but rather, a result of centuries of conditioning through culture and tradition. As Fernández-Álvarez (2014) points out, men feel the need to manifest their strength (even if they are rather weak), and this desire to demonstrate a macho identity may result in them being culturally violent. He points out that “constantly proving their masculinity, which may be doubtful, obliges them to give public demonstrations that can involve rash actions, abuses

of power, humiliation and subjection of anybody he feels is a threat” (Fernández-Álvarez, 2014, p. 50). Unfortunately, as the above *proverbs* show, women are often perceived as those who pose this ‘masculinity threat’. For that reason, men may feel the need to ensure that they dominate women while maintaining their position of male power. It is worthy to note that it is not only women who suffer as a result of this because as Fernández (2022) stresses, there are “unperceived effects of male power on men” as well and this includes the “high moral and emotional cost of machismo” (p. 50). Ultimately, as the author maintains, “in the end, such a man is better prepared for death than for marriage and the care of children, somebody whose affections have been amputated” (Fernández, 2022, p. 50). Rice et al. (2021) further explain the connection between gender norms and mental health as follows:

Gender norms around masculinity commonly confer power and status to boys and young men, which might in part explain why norms around masculinity are difficult to shift. Paradoxically, these dominant masculinities carry risks for poor mental health. Globally, the rate of male suicide is two to four times that of females, and males fare poorly on indices of substance misuse, risk taking-related injury, conduct problems, violence, aggression, and by extension incarceration... Sex differences in mental health typically emerge across late childhood and adolescence. This time is also when gender norms become entrenched, persisting into later life whereby they continue to shape mental health and help-seeking. Traditional gender norms commonly drive young men to present [themselves] as strong, competitive, in control, and unburdened by vulnerability. These cultural scripts prize toughness, anger, hostility, and emotional control. Conversely, emotions characterised by vulnerability, including sadness, anxiety, and fear, trigger shame and become a barrier to help-seeking. (Rice et al., 2021, p. e541)

### 3. Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to 1) examine masculinities in Spanish *paremias* 2) analyse how the presentation of men in Spanish *paremias* contributes to the perpetuation of the gender status quo and 3) investigate the sustenance of gender bias within the Spanish context using insights from Discourse Analysis and Connell's (1995, 2005) theory of masculinities. The study looked at how *paremias* serve numerous illocutionary functions (e.g., advising, persuading, rebuking, ridiculing or strengthening an argument etc.) that influence gender relations.

The findings of the current research show that the selected *paremias* are effective ideological propaganda tools because they advise men to demonstrate strength, independence and superiority and keep women under control. They promote traditional constructions of hegemonic masculinities which include risk-taking, emotional and physical toughness, aggression, violence, and overt heterosexual desire. Such *paremias* thus censure traits of subordinate masculinity such as being effeminate or overly emotional. The ideologies they transmit are often projected through the juxtaposition of societal assumptions and expectations of femininities and masculinities. As Fairclough (2003) explains, for an assumption to be considered as “an ideological assumption, one would need a plausible argument that is indeed effective, along with other related propositions and beliefs, in sustaining relations of power” (p. 59). In line with this, animal metaphors are commonly used to effectively reinforce male superiority and female subordination. Whereas men are frequently alluded to in reference to wild animals, women are often paired with domestic animals. Several of these *paremias* project negative gender stereotypes and ideologies with the intent of controlling women by inducing fear and pain through psychological, sexual and/or physical assault. The *paremias* persuade men to be emotionless—even aggressive, if necessary—while educating women to acknowledge their subordinate position.

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This study shows the possible causal effects of PUs on gender hegemony. As Fairclough (2003) argues, “we can attribute causal effects to linguistic forms, but only through a careful account of meaning and context” (p. 13). In the

current research, the examination of meaning and context of the *paremias* show how they stereotype gender differences and propel the polarization of masculinities vs femininities. On the one hand, such discourses project ideologies which are instrumental in rebuking men who do not conform to society's expectations of masculine ideals. On the other hand, it ridicules women in so many ways— women are labelled as if they were goods which quickly expire—they are tagged as emotional, fickle, deceitful, cowardly, subhuman and gullible etc. Women are also equally rebuked if they do not conform to society's expectations of them (e.g., *paremia* 11). These *paremias* reveal the foundations of gender hegemony—how beliefs regarding societal expectations of gender are justified, naturalized and legitimized. Most importantly, they teach us that the distinction between masculinities and femininities is not natural but rather, is a result of centuries of programming through culture and tradition.

As Fairclough (1989) argues, “language cannot be ruled out in matters relating to power relations in modern society” (p. 3). Even if most of these *paremias* are no longer in use, a focus on them is necessary in the investigation of the roots of such sexist ideologies and why they are so common within a society (and worldwide) that they are perceived as truisms. Indeed, the common nature of these occurrences across cultures and not just in the Spanish society (Schipper, 2010) shows how such ideologies spread easily through language and reinforce hegemony. As Fairclough (2003) notes, “seeking hegemony is a matter of seeking to universalize particular meanings in the service of achieving and maintaining dominance, and this is ideological work” (p. 58). Such representations universalize the gender status quo and put undue pressure on men to fulfil societal expectations and keep the gender order rolling.

## 4. Conclusions

Before concluding, it is important to stress that the aim of this paper was not to discuss the *use of paremias* on today's Spanish society, as many of these proverbs are not part of it (except in dictionaries). Indeed, I agree with Rubio (2018) who notes that one of the concerns on “inferring extralinguistic conclusions from the analysis of proverbs is that most of them



represent archaic states of the language and they are not used (or even known) by the majority of the contemporary speakers of the language in question” (p. 1713). Rather, the author sought to examine the *roots* of these gender stereotypes and how they explain the *origin* and *development* of certain social behaviours. The point being made is that these *paremias* are a good source of information about Spanish society in the past, which is the basis of today’s society.

These *paremias* might appear to be outdated but barbaric acts against women continue—and so long as they do, *paremias* will remain an invaluable source from which we can seek the answers to our questions, find solutions to them and educate society on the roots of these gender ideologies which have for long projected gender imbalance as legitimate and natural. In the words of Rice et al. (2021), “redefining and reshaping the socialisation of boys and young men will promote their better mental health and those of others around them” and “in a world that needs men with different social and emotional capacities, this approach could promise to lay a foundation for greater productivity and wellbeing across men’s life-course” (p. e542). In sum, it is essential to identify inaccurate gender stereotypes—both negative and positive—in order to create an awareness of their harmful effects on the day to day lives of both men and women and eliminate them. As Bordalo, Coffman, Gennaioli, and Shleifer (2016) observe, “stereotypes can change – or rather, be replaced – if new information changes the group’s most distinctive trait” (n.p).

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