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**BEHIND THE MASC:
THE ROLE OF
CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND
CONFORMITY TO MASCULINE NORMS
IN DEVIANT BEHAVIOR**

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RESUMO

A literatura tem-nos demonstrado que o crime é - e tem sido desde que há registros - um fenómeno desproporcionalmente masculino. Recentemente, a importância de compreender se e como a masculinidade estará associada a comportamentos desviantes tem crescido. Deste modo, o presente trabalho tem como objetivo explorar a associação entre conformidade a normas de masculinidade e comportamentos desviantes. É também pretendido explorar a associação de outras variáveis, nomeadamente a relação entre experiências na infância e conduta desviante. A amostra é composta por 231 adolescentes do sexo masculino portugueses, com 18 e 19 anos. Os participantes responderam a um protocolo composto por quatro escalas, (Questionário de Historia na Infância (ACEs), Escala de Experiências Benevolentes na Infância (BCEs), Inventario da Conformidade com as Normas Masculinas (CMNI) e Escala de Variedade dos Comportamentos Desviantes) e um questionário sociodemográfico. As experiências de adversidade e a conformidade com as normas masculinas estão correlacionadas de forma moderada e positiva com o comportamento desviante: [$r = .341, p = <.001$] e [$r = .302, p = <.001$], respetivamente. Já as experiências benevolentes apresentaram uma correlação negativa estatisticamente significativa, embora fraca, com os comportamentos desviantes [$r = -.139, p = .035$]. Por fim, as implicações destes resultados são consideradas.

Palavras-chave: comportamento desviante; delinquência; masculinidade; ACE; BCE

ABSTRACT

The literature shows us crime is - and has always been - a disproportionately male phenomenon. In recent years, the importance of understanding if and how masculinity is associated with maladjusted behaviors has risen notably. Accordingly, the main objective for this paper was to explore the association between conformity to masculine gender norms and deviant behavior. The secondary purpose was to explore the association between both negative and positive childhood experiences and deviant behavior. The sample consisted of 231 Portuguese adolescents of 18 and 19 years of age. Participants answered an online questionnaire that included four scales [Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Scale; Benevolent Childhood Experiences (BCEs) Scale; Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI-22) and Deviant Behavior Variety Scale (DBVS)] and a sociodemographic questionnaire. Experiences of adversity and conformity to masculine norms were both significantly positively associated with deviant behavior: [$r = .341, p = <.001$] and [$r = .302, p = <.001$], respectively. Benevolent experiences, however, had a statistically significant, albeit weak, negative correlation with deviant behavior [$r = -.139, p = .035$]. Finally, the implications of these findings are considered.

Keywords: deviant behavior, delinquency, masculinity, ACE, BCE

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INTRODUCTION

“It is perhaps a truism to say that the vast majority of conversations and debates about the issue of crime have, in fact, been largely about the actions of men.”

Collier, 1998

Men consistently commit more criminal offenses than women. This (somewhat taken for granted) fact is one of the most consistent findings in criminology (McFarlane, 2013). Some authors have even argued that this *is* the sturdiest finding in all of criminological literature (Bartusch & Matsueda, 1996).

But why? What is it about men that makes them so much more likely to deviate and engage in this type of conduct?

The scientific community didn't pay much attention to this question until the last decades of the 20th century (Eisler & Skidmore, 1987). It was only after the rise of feminist literature and gender studies, that men started to be seen as “gendered” individuals and not as “the norm”. As a matter of fact, according to Jeftha (2006) for most of history, masculinity had been understood in essentialist and normative terms, i.e., the way men behaved never required any examination or scrutiny because it was always simply regarded as “typical, natural male behavior” which, unsurprisingly, has resulted in a lack of knowledge about masculinity.

Accordingly and still to this day, most criminological studies that do focus on gender tend to treat it as a variable, for instance when drawing comparisons between male and female offenders' trajectories (Carlsson, 2013). However, if gender is, itself, one of the strongest determinants of human behavior (Lutze & Murphy, 1999) and if crime is a predominantly male phenomenon it is, therefore, pertinent to explore criminality through a gendered perspective.

Studies have shown an association between masculine gender roles and specific crimes, such as those related to gender violence (Baugher & Gazmararian, 2015). However, the association between masculinity and other forms of criminal behavior/deviance is seldom analyzed, especially in population-based studies and much less in Portugal.

It is important to clarify what is meant by the term “crime”. Crime is not a psychological concept - it is a legal one. What is considered a criminal offence in one jurisdiction may be legal and acceptable in another. For example, Sweden and Russia, who are relatively close countries, have diametrically opposed legislation and social attitudes regarding LGBT people (Flores, 2019). And even if we focus on Western societies, we can still find large discrepancies, such as in the case of drug use, where Portugal has gained international recognition for drug decriminalization and the United States for taking the opposite legal route, with the so-called “war on drugs” (Bajekal, 2018).

As is the case with a lot of studies in the field of criminology, we come across data that primarily pertains to criminal behavior, and most studies presented in the literature review will reflect this nomenclature. However, our concern is not only with legal norms but also with behaviors that deviate from social norms.

According to Berntsen and Baker (2015) in industrialized nations, deviant behavior is especially associated with adolescence because children begin to acquire adult responsibilities immediately after puberty. And, as the literature will show, delinquent behavior tends to emerge at around 14 and peak around the later teenage years. For this reason, we focused this study on participants who are in their “peak years” of delinquency to better appreciate the factors at play.

Because the literature also indicates environmental factors as being major predictors of delinquency (Steinberg, 2008), we will look at two constructs which evaluate a constellation of positive and negative experiences that these young participants might have faced in their childhoods, in order to see how they are associated with deviant behavior.

This dissertation is organized in four parts. Firstly, we present a literature review on variables associated with deviant behavior, namely sex, gender, age, and childhood factors. The objectives for the study and its hypotheses will be also formulated. Secondly, the method section will feature the participants’ characterization, the chosen instruments, and the research procedure. Thirdly, the results from the collected data will be presented. And finally, on the last section, we present a discussion of the results, as well as some proposals for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sex, gender and crime

When we look at research on criminal behavior, we will undoubtedly come across one particular stable and consistent finding: men, especially young men, are much more likely than women to commit criminal offences (Smith, 2014; Campaniello & Gavrilova, 2018; Broidy & Agnew, 1997; Hovee et al., 2009; Messerschmidt, 2018). This finding is supported by data from official criminal justice systems all over the world, as well as studies based on self-reports - which also consistently reveal that men report significantly higher levels of criminal behavior (Cusson, 2006). Additionally, all available data seems to point to the fact that this is not a recent phenomenon either. Men have, throughout recorded history and across most regions of the world (wherever records on this matter are accessible) committed more crimes (Smith, 2014).

This disparity between men and women is known as the gender gap and it is a reality most of us probably have noticed in our own societies. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in 2019, 72.5% of the persons arrested in the United States were males. In Australia, in the financial year of 2018-2019, 76% of offenders proceeded against by police forces were male. In the United Kingdom, 95.9% of prisoners were male. Shifting to continental Europe, between 2008 and 2018, 19 in 20 prisoners in the European Union were men. Whilst, in Portugal, in 2020, 86% of youths placed in juvenile detention facilities (formally known as *Centros Educativos*) were male and, in adulthood, the proportion is even higher, with 94% of convicted and imprisoned persons being male.

However, some scholars have pointed to official data and argued that this so-called gender gap has actually been narrowing. In fact, in recent years, a relative increase in female imprisonment has been recorded. According to the fourth edition of the World Female Imprisonment List, from 2000 to 2017, the imprisoned female population increased by 53% in all continents. The document also notes that this increase cannot solely be attributed to the population growth, since the world population only grew by 20% and the increase in males being imprisoned rose by 21%.

Authors like Adler (1975) had theorized that such an increase in female offending rates would be a consequence of women's increased freedom/emancipation secured by advances made in the field of civil rights. Responsible for this emancipation hypothesis, Adler (1975)

presented the idea that because women are now able to demand more opportunities in the world of “legitimate endeavor”, the same would be true for the world of crimes.

Notwithstanding, data from self-reports does not seem to support this thesis. Other authors, such as Stevens and colleagues (2011), reject the thesis that women are committing more crimes and, instead, propose that this narrowing is not explained by a change in girls’ criminal behavior but in the societal response to it. They point to the fact that, despite girls’ self-reported assaultive behavior remaining constant between 1980 and 2000, their probability of conviction and institutionalization significantly increased during this period.

Attending to the fact that the “narrowing of the gender gap” hasn’t been consistently proven in the literature, we must ask ourselves: why does the gender gap continue to be this noticeable? Why *are* men still so much more likely than women to commit crimes?

A widely disseminated explanation, based on biological factors, claims that there is a positive relationship between levels of testosterone and violent or aggressive behavior (Mims, 2007). Such a correlation has, in fact, been observed in non-human animals (Archer, 1988). A meta-analysis found that there was a positive, but weak, relation between testosterone levels and violent behavior in humans (Book et al., 2001). However, a reanalysis of the same meta-analysis done by Archer and colleagues (2005) concluded that there was a lower mean weighted correlation than what had originally been reported ($r=.08$ vs. $r=.14$). Furthermore, a systematic review of 27 studies done by Duke and colleagues (2014) found no evidence supporting the notion that testosterone levels were significantly associated with mood or behavioral changes in adolescent males. Recent literature has, instead, pointed to an association between testosterone and behaviors involved in obtaining and maintaining a high social status in males, rather than aggressive or antisocial behavior, per se (Josephs & Sellers, 2006).

Sociological explanations for this conspicuous gender gap, include the widely discussed Strain theories, with the General Strain Theory (GST) being the latest and broadest version of them (Brezina, 2017). This theory was developed by Agnew in 1992 and has garnered significant attention in academic circles (Moon et al., 2009). According to Agnew (2015): “Strain theories argue that strains or stressors are major causes of criminal behavior. Individuals would, according to the theory, commit crimes to reduce or escape from strains.” The author illustrates: one might commit theft to reduce monetary strain; one might run away to escape one’s abusive parents; one might use illicit drugs to cope with the negative emotions caused by

strain. GST is relevant to this gender gap question since it is one of the few mainstream theories in criminology addressing both the generalizability problem (i.e., whether theories developed to explain men's crime/delinquency can be applied to women's) and the gender gap itself (Puhmann, 2015).

Broidy and Agnew (1997) reason that GST might answer the question of the gender gap in three ways. (1) Males and females tend to experience different *types* of strains, with male strains being more conducive to serious violent and property crime. (2) Males and females differ in their emotional response to strain. Both may experience anger as a response, but the anger in females is more likely to be accompanied by depression, guilt, anxiety and related states that reduce the probability of aggressive or confrontational crimes. (3) Males may be more likely to respond to a given level of strain or anger with serious property and violent crime, because of differences in coping, social support, opportunities, social control and the disposition to engage in crime. Furthermore, Agnew (2001) has also argued that failure to achieve some goals (i.e., monetary autonomy and "masculinity" goals) is a factor of special importance in contributing to delinquent behavior.

In addition to the fact that the data clearly shows a higher incidence of criminal behavior amongst the male population, recent literature has also examined elements within the traditional masculine gender socialization as factors that may be contributing to violent, antisocial, deviant or criminal behavior.

According to Thompson and Pleck (1986), there are essentially three main components of masculinity - they are toughness, antifemininity, and status. Toughness relates to the idea that men have to be physically strong, emotionally callous, and behave in an aggressive manner. The second is antifemininity, which pretrains to the notion that to be masculine one has to completely reject qualities conventionally considered feminine, such as emotionality or helping behavior. And the third is status, the notion that men need to work toward achieving power and agency (e.g., in social or financial matters), and, consequently, the respect of others.

Kindlon and Thompson (2000) argue that this traditional masculine gender socialization causes young boys to steer away from traits like empathy and towards silence, solitude and distrust. Mahalik and colleagues (2007) found that masculine social norms encourage men to put their own health at risk through a plethora of behaviors, such as: a higher daily alcohol consumption, the refusal to use a seatbelt at all times while riding in a car, physical fighting,

not seeking someone to talk to when dealing with a troubling issue and not getting an annual physical exam by a physician. These behaviors might also be exacerbated when men feel their masculine status is at risk (Mahalik et al., 2007).

Gilmore (1990) conducted an anthropological study on cultural concepts of masculinities around the world and found that there is a recurring notion that manhood is different from simply possessing a male anatomy: “it is not a natural condition that comes about spontaneously through biological maturation but rather is a precarious or artificial state that boys must win against powerful odds” (p. 11). Contrastingly, according to the author, femininity is primarily achieved by biological markers (such as menstruation or pregnancy), which can then be enhanced by body ornament or sexual allure. When women deviate from these gender norms they tend to be judged as “immoral” or “unladylike” but it is rare for them to have their entire gender identity questioned in the more frequent and public way men do when they do deviate from gender norms (Gilmore, 1990). Testing this thesis, Vandello and colleagues (2008) conducted five studies and concluded that manhood requires continuous public proof and validation. According to the authors, in patriarchal societies, masculinity is regarded as an extremely valuable, even elusive, socially awarded, hard won, and easily lost status that necessitates perpetual demonstrations of worthiness. The consequence of this is the need to establish masculinity through its three core elements of toughness, antifemininity, and status, which often result in risky or maladaptive behavior (Vandello & Bosson, 2013; Vandello et al., 2008).

Similarly, other authors have introduced the concept of masculine gender role stress (MGRS), which is different from “masculinity”. While masculinity refers to traits socially desirable for men, MGRS is defined as “cognitive appraisal of specific situations as stressful for men” (Eisler & Skidmore, 1987). In 2015, a literature review of 20 articles conducted by Baugher and Gazmararian found that men with higher levels of MGRS were more likely to have had past violence against gay men, endorse intimate partner violence, endorse antifemininity norms, display maladaptive attachment styles, and conform to rigid gender norms. In short, the authors summarize that MGRS triggers a mechanism used to control people perceived by the perpetrator as feminine.

Jewkes (2005) found that the particularly aggressive and violent masculinities (“hypermasculinity”) found among prisoners, is in itself a response, a means of adaptation, to the powerlessness that comes from incarceration. The author states: “the label *prisoner*, with

all its connotations of weakness, conformity, and the relinquishing of power, manliness (or a version of it) becomes the primary means of adaptation and resistance” (p. 61). Furthermore, Pettersson (2014) conducted a study that focused on the staff in youth institutions and found that physically strong men were usually employed with the specific purpose of being able to resolve physical conflicts between boys, however they end up having the opposite effect. The author explains that these men work against the “rehabilitation” goal of the institutions as they often provoke conflicts among boys, contribute to the “laddish” culture and their mere presence provokes the boys into wanting to measure up against them.

To explore a natural case study of the consequences of predominantly male spaces, Baranov and colleagues (2018) turned to Australia, notable in the 18th and 19th centuries for its penal colonies and, therefore, its large sex disparities. The authors found that areas characterized by a higher ratio of males in the past (and not in the present) were still characterized by higher rates of violent assaults and lower rates of same-sex marriage support by voters. Additionally, boys (but not girls) from these areas were more likely to be victims of bullying (Baranov et al., 2018). However, the authors detected no variance in non-violent crime.

Other researchers have postulated that wider societal issues, such as political and economic factors, can also have the potential to threaten men’s masculinities. Researchers have found that economic consequences stemming from the effects of globalization have disproportionately affected young males, creating shocks to males’ relative wages, reducing marriage and fertility rates and heightening male idleness and premature mortality (Autor et al., 2019). Sociologist Kimmel (2018), who interviewed over 100 North-American and European extremists, pointed out that nearly all violent extremists have been young men who experienced what he calls a gendered sense of entitlement. That is, a sense of victimhood by men who felt emasculated by larger economic and political shifts. The author posits that societal factors like downsizing, outsourcing and economic displacement all play a central role in leading these men towards extremism and that the adherence to these organizations/movements is a way to prove one’s masculinity.

On the topic of public displays of masculinity and deviance, a more contemporaneous example could be observed during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic. It was reported that, despite a higher mortality rate, men were still less likely than women to wear face masks, being also more likely than their female counterparts to label the act as: “shameful”, “not cool” and “a sign of weakness” (Capraro & Barcelo, 2020). This association

between masculinity and not wearing masks has been observed not only in the public but also in political leaders.

Two days before his positive coronavirus diagnosis, the then-President of the United States famously mocked his main political opponent for wearing a mask on a televised debate (Collman, 2020). A U.S. Representative publicly declared that wearing masks was especially bad for boys, as it was “emasculating” (Rogers, 2020). The President of Brazil would regularly use homophobic slurs to mock staffers who chose to wear masks (Phillips, 2020). Glick (2020) draws a clear connection between these attitudes and masculinity, postulating that a refusal to wear protective face coverings stems from endorsement of a masculine norm: “show no weakness”. The refusal to wear a mask cannot be considered a strictly criminal behavior, since it varies by jurisdiction and other factors, but the argument could be made that it can be classified as deviant behavior, given the consequences of exposing others to a potentially deadly virus.

This link between masculinity and harmful behavior has recently been recognized by The American Psychological Association (APA). APA has, throughout the years, published sets of guidelines for clinicians who treat people belonging to certain ethnic minorities, or women and girls. It had never produced such a document for the male population though because this group had always been considered the norm (Fortin, 2019). However, in 2018, the APA published such a set of guidelines to be used by clinicians who treat men and boys. Based on more than 40 years of research, the association concluded that traditional masculinity - defined as “a particular constellation of standards that have held sway over large segments of the population, including: anti-femininity, achievement, eschewal of the appearance of weakness, adventure, risk, and violence”, has negative consequences for males themselves and others. APA argues that recognizing this is important in combating problems particularly associated with boys and men viz., aggressive and violent behavior.

Age and crime

For Spector-Mersel (2006), one should not discard the question of age when analyzing masculinity. The author draws parallels to other forms of identity, such as familial or occupational identities and suggests that “masculinities are bound to social clocks that ascribe different models of manhood to different periods in men’s lives” (Spector-Mersel, p.70). The literature does indeed point to an association between adherence to masculinity norms and age.

Adolescence and young adulthood are life stages where gendered expectations of individuals take on a greater relevance (Galambos, 2013). Furthermore, the data also shows that young men tend to report higher scores of conformity to masculine norms, when compared to older men (Rice et al., 2016). Looking at conformity to specific masculine norms, young men have been found to present higher scores of the following masculine norms: *pursuit of status*, *risk taking*, *violence*, and *winning* (Smiler, 2006).

In order to see what factors might be at play and theorize on future preventive initiatives, it is relevant to scrutinize the context in which these deviant behaviors emerge. The peak of adherence to masculine norms that occurs in adolescence and young adulthood seems to also be accompanied by the widely discussed “age-crime curve”. This curve illustrates how criminal activity usually starts at the beginning of adolescence, around the age of 14, will then peak in the later teenage years and decline after the early 20s (Loeber & Farrington, 2014).

Authors have proposed many explanations for this distinct peak of criminal activity. Some attribute it to biological factors, since psycho-social capacities that improve decision making and reduce risk taking only mature during young adulthood (Steinberg, 2007). Others argue that this peak happens as a consequence of socialization processes (McCord, 1991). But, to date, there hasn’t been much consensus on which specific mechanisms are responsible for this curve, making it a noteworthy lapse in knowledge (Bekbolatkyzy et al., 2018).

A gendered perspective on this matter might shine some light. Carlsson (2013) interviewed 25 men with a history of early onset delinquency (i.e., prior to 13 years) and found that the individuals who were not able to meet social expectations of manliness, such as obtaining lawful employment, forming and providing for a family, described their crimes as a mean to achieve a masculine status.

Moffitt (1993), author of one of the most discussed theory on this matter, recognizes this age crime curve and proposes that there are two types of offenders, one category of individuals will engage in antisocial behavior at every stage of their life, the life-course-persistent and the other is adolescence-limited, with the latter being, by far, the more prevalent type. The author posits that the adolescence-limited offenders have no known previous behavioral problems and do so as “an adaptive response to contextual circumstances” and then stop offending as they age. However, there is still a large gap in knowledge regarding the factors that predict this persistence or desistance, in other words, there isn’t consensus on why some

juvenile offenders go on to have adult criminal careers while the others do not (National Institute of Justice Study Group, 2014).

Furthermore, while many authors posited that this age crime curve would be “virtually identical” (i.e., parallel) for both men and women, albeit with men having higher levels of offenses (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983), the literature seems to indicate it is not. Laub and Sampson (2001) concluded that men’s desistance of crime was a more “gradual” and “intermittent” process, while for women, desistance seemed to occur abruptly as they moved into adulthood. Liu (2015) also found evidence of relatively early and faster desistance of arrest among females. This is relevant to our study because, besides reaffirming gender differences in terms of quantity (i.e., men committing more crimes) it also points to certain qualitative differences, i.e., it seems desistance from crime is also a slower and harder process for men. Looking at desistance through our gendered lens, Carlsson’s 2013 study also examined this issue and found that individuals would abstain from their criminal behavior (i.e., desist) depending on their ability to perceive desistance itself (and its associated attributes of self-control, autonomy and determination) as evidence of masculinity.

Childhood factors

The existing literature underscores the importance of considering a plethora of environmental factors related to childhood when studying delinquent behavior. A meta-analysis on the association between parenting and delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2009) found that negative aspects of support (which include: rejection, hostility and neglect) and psychological control (i.e., intrusions into the psychological development of the child, such as love withdrawal, keeping the child dependent and the use of guilt to control the child) had the strongest links to delinquency. Another meta-analysis by Assink and colleagues (2015), focusing on risk factors for persistent delinquency organized them into 14 domains: *criminal history*, *aggression*, *alcohol/drug abuse*, *sexual behavior*, *relationship*, *emotional and behavioral problems*, *school/employment*, *family*, *neurocognition/physiology*, *background*, *attitude*, *physical health*, *neighborhood*, and a final domain which encompasses various other factors. The authors found that the risk domains contributing most to life course offending were *criminal history* and *aggression*, followed by *alcohol/drug abuse*, *sexual behavior*, *relationship*, *emotional and behavioral problems*, and *school/employment*.

In 1998 Felitti and colleagues proposed the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) concept, which encompassed a host of environmental factors, such as childhood abuse, household dysfunction, family mental health, domestic violence, and family criminal behavior. Leban and Gibson (2019) studied these ACEs in connection with delinquency and substance abuse, with a focus on gender differences. The authors found that there was a significant relationship between ACEs and delinquency for boys especially, while in girls ACEs were a better predictor of substance abuse.

Because most of the research done on delinquent behavior focuses on risk factors, like the ones that have already been mentioned, which are certainly vital in understanding any phenomena and predicting it, the protective or promotive factors tend to be left out of the question (Farrington et al., 2012). And since it is harder to change or to reduce risk factors by themselves, it is of relevance to also explore protective factors, so that these can be promoted as a complimentary or alternative approach in reducing the risk of offending (Simões et al., 2008).

In order to aggregate positive influences into a brief and effective index and to match the already existing ACEs scale, Narayan and colleagues (2018) created the benevolent childhood experiences (BCEs) scale, which is designed to assess positive early life experiences in individuals with histories of childhood maltreatment and other adversities. Merrick and colleagues (2019) studied the association between BCEs and psychological distress, sociodemographic risk, and parenting stress in homeless parents and found that higher levels of BCEs predicted lower odds of psychological distress.

OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESIS

Taking into consideration the literature review, the main goal of this study is to explore the role of conformity to masculine norms in deviant behavior. Secondly, we also aim to explore the association between adverse childhood experiences, benevolent childhood experiences and deviant behavior.

As this is an exploratory study, no formal hypothesis were formulated, however based on the previously highlighted research, three exploratory hypothesis were devised, in order to guide our research:

Hypothesis 1: Conformity to masculine norms will be positively associated with deviant behavior.

Hypothesis 2: Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) will be positively associated with deviant behavior.

Hypothesis 3: Benevolent childhood experiences (BCEs) will be negatively associated with deviant behavior.

METHOD

Participants

For this study, participants were selected by a convenience sampling process. The final sample consisted of 231 adolescent males, from continental Portugal and its two autonomous regions, with 128 (55,4%) being 19 years old and 103 (44,6%) being 18 years old. These participants were recruited online, via advertisements on social networking services Facebook (www.facebook.com) and Instagram (www.instagram.com).

Regarding their educational level, as seen on Table 1, 203 (88.3%) had completed secondary/high school, whilst 23 (10.0%) had completed year 9, i.e., middle school. No participant declared their last achieved qualification as 4th grade. In regard to their parents, mothers appeared to have higher qualifications. More fathers ($n = 153$) had their last degrees described as high school level than mothers ($n = 132$). Additionally, more mothers had a university degree ($n = 92$) than fathers ($n = 63$). Most participants (77.9%, $n = 180$) described themselves as full-time students, as seen on Table 2.

Table 1. Distribution by educational level of participants and their mothers/fathers.

	Participant	Mother	Father
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Educational level			
4 th grade	-	11 (4.9%)	25 (11.6%)
6 th grade	4 (1.7%)	21 (9.4%)	19 (8.8%)
9 th grade	23 (10.0%)	44 (19.6%)	39 (18.1%)
12 th grade	203 (88.3%)	56 (25.0%)	70 (32.4%)
Bachelor's	-	62 (27.7%)	37 (17.1%)
Master's	-	23 (10.3%)	22 (10.2%)
Doctorate	-	7 (3.1%)	4 (1.9%)
Total	230 (100.0%)	228 (100.0%)	228 (100.0%)

Table 2. Distribution by occupational status.

Occupation	n (%)
Student	180 (77.9%)
Worker-student	15 (6.5%)
Worker	23 (10.0%)
Unemployed	13 (5.6%)

Regarding sexual identity, most (70.6%, $n = 163$) identified as heterosexual (see Table 3). Yet, when asked about sexual attraction, approximately only 1 in 2 described themselves as being exclusively heterosexual, i.e., only being attracted to individuals of the opposite sex, (53.2%, $n = 123$), as seen on Table 4.

Table 3. Distribution by sexual identity.

Sexual orientation	n (%)
Heterosexual	163 (70.6%)
Bisexual	39 (16.9%)
Homosexual	25 (10.8%)
Other	4 (1.7%)

Table 4. Distribution along the sexuality spectrum.

Sexuality spectrum	n (%)
0. "Only attracted to people of the female sex, never male."	123 (53.2%)
1. "Almost always attracted to people of the female sex, rarely male."	37 (16.0%)
2. "Mostly attracted to people of the female sex, occasionally male."	13 (5.6%)
3. "Equally attracted to people of both sexes."	8 (3.5%)
4. "Mostly attracted to people of the male sex, occasionally female."	15 (6.5%)
5. "Almost always attracted to people of the male sex, rarely female."	12 (5.2%)
6. "Only attracted to people of the male sex, never female."	17 (7.4%)
"Not sure."	6 (2.6%)

Instruments

Benevolent Childhood Experiences (BCEs) Scale (Original version: Narayan et al., 2018; validated to the Portuguese population by: Almeida et al., 2021)

This instrument is a 10-item self-report checklist of positive experiences that occurred between the ages of 0 and 18 years. Answers are given dichotomously (*yes* or *no*) and positively endorsed items are summed, resulting in a total benevolent experiences (BCE) score. All participants completed the questionnaire in the Portuguese version validated by Almeida and colleagues (2021). Regarding the scale's internal consistency reliability, in our study the Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was .63, a similar value to previous findings (.61 in the Gunay-Oge and colleagues' study, 2020 and .69 in Almeida and colleagues' validation study). Traditionally, a Cronbach's alpha over .70 is preferable, however some authors consider that, within the fields of social sciences, a value over .60 is still considered acceptable (Murphy & Davidshofer, 1988; Taber, 2018). Furthermore, as noted by Almeida and colleagues (2021), a scale with a smaller number of items (10 in this case) is more likely to possess a lower alpha value.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Scale (Original version: Felitti & Anda, 1998; adapted by: Silva & Maia, 2008)

This version is an adaptation of the *Family Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire* (Original version: Felitti & Anda, 1998; Portuguese adaptation: Silva & Maia, 2008). Similarly to the BCE scale, this is a self-report scale for individuals over the age of 18 designed to evaluate childhood experiences, albeit adverse ones. Items that are endorsed are summed, resulting in a total ACE score. The instrument is comprised of ten dimensions: *emotional abuse* (items 1 and 2); *physical abuse* (items 3 and 4); *sexual abuse* (items 5 and 6); *emotional neglect* (items 7 and 8); *physical neglect* (items 9 and 10); *exposure to domestic violence* (items 12, 13, and 14); *parental separation or divorce* (item 11); *violence* (items 12, 13 and 14); *household substance abuse* (item 15); *household mental illness* (item 16) and *incarcerated household member* (item 17). The original North-American version demonstrated

reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .76 and the present study's application of the instrument resulted in an alpha of .82.

Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI-22) (Original version: Mahalik et al., 2003; adapted by: Leitão, 2015)

In 2003, Mahalik and colleagues developed the *Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory* (CMNI), a self-report scale to examine the conformity to masculine gender norms present in Western societies. This instrument differs from other measures of gender norms since it measures not only “cognitive conformity” (i.e., approval) but actual behavioral and affective conformity. The original version has 94 items, which evaluate 11 dimensions: *winning; emotional control; risk-taking; violence; power over women; dominance; playboy; self-reliance; disdain for homosexuals; pursuit of status and primacy of work*. There are also brief versions, that retained the same number of dimensions: the CMNI-11, with one item per dimension and the CMNI-22, with two items per dimension (the latter being the most used). Individuals answer on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*). In 2015 the CMNI-22 was adapted to the Portuguese population by Leitão and was also the chosen instrument for this study. At the request of the original author two items were removed from two dimensions. Cronbach's alpha was .70 in the male group in the Portuguese adaptation study (Leitão, 2015). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha was .64. However, as already stated, a value over .60 can be considered acceptable in the context of social sciences investigations (Murphy & Davidshofer, 1988; Taber, 2018).

Deviant Behavior Variety Scale (DBVS) (Sanches et al., 2016)

The Deviant Behavior Variety Scale was developed by Sanches and colleagues in 2016 and is validated to the Portuguese population under 20 years of age. It is comprised of 19 items that pertain to a variety of deviant behaviors. Answers are given dichotomously (*yes* or *no*) and positively endorsed items are summed, resulting in a total DBVS score. Items are grouped in two categories: *minor infractions* (items 1, 2, 6, 8, 10, 13, 17, and 18) and *serious infractions* (items 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, and 19). In its original study, Sanches and colleagues (2016) reported high internal consistency (Cronbach's α of .83) and in the present study, we obtained a Cronbach's α of .86.

Sociodemographic questionnaire

The last section of the questionnaire was composed by items collecting sociodemographic data.

Firstly, information was collected on the participants' age (i.e., whether they were 18 or 19 years old).

Another item pertained to participants', their mother/female caregiver's and their father/male caregiver's educational level. This item was codified in 7 options, where the first meant the individual had completed basic education (*4th grade*) and the last was the highest formal educational level (*doctorate degree*).

Participants could classify their occupational status in four categories: "*student*", "*worker/student*", "*worker*" and "*unemployed*".

Furthermore, participants were also asked to describe their sexual orientation in two items. On the first one, they labeled their sexual identity - with three standard classifications ("*heterosexual*", "*bisexual*", and "*homosexual*"). The second sexuality item pertained to sexual attraction and asked the individual to place himself along a 7-point sexuality spectrum scale, where one end represented exclusive sexual attraction to women (0) and the other exclusive attraction to men (6), with the middle point being equally attracted to both men and women (3); there was also an option for participants who experienced no sexual attraction and another one for those who weren't sure.

Participants could submit the questionnaire without answering these socio-demographic questions.

Procedure

Initially, a study protocol was submitted to and approved by the ISPA–Instituto Universitário Ethics Committee (Annex A). Subsequently, authors of the "*Benevolent Childhood Experiences (BCEs) Scale*" (Almeida et al., 2021), "*Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Scale*" (Silva & Maia, 2008), "*Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory*" (Leitão, 2015) and "*Deviant Behavior Variety Scale (DBVS)*" (Sanches et al., 2016) were contacted to obtain their permission for the use of their respective scales. Following their approval, the protocol was constructed on the Google Forms platform (www.docs.google.com/forms). The

estimated response time for the questionnaire was 10 minutes. To complete it, a computer, tablet, or smartphone were required, as well as an Internet connection.

Data was collected online for two reasons. Firstly, because the stay-at-home orders (colloquially known as lockdowns) put in place by the Portuguese government as a response to COVID-19 pandemic meant that, at the time, schools and universities were indefinitely closed. And, secondly, because of the hard-to-reach nature of the population (having to fulfill both the sex and narrow age criteria).

Before being presented with the five scales, an informed consent page was included which required the participants to read and agree to the conditions of the study. Facebook was chosen to advertise and distribute the questionnaire because, of all the web-based platforms from which to recruit participants, it has, by far, the largest user base. Using the Facebook advertising feature, the questionnaires were disseminated over a period of two weeks. The advertisements reached the estimated total of 60,629 individuals' screens of the target population, on all 18 Portuguese districts and its two autonomous regions, with a total of 231 participants consenting and fully answering to the survey.

Data analysis

In this dissertation, all statistical analyses were executed operating the software IBM SPSS Statistics (version 27.0) (IBM SPSS, Chicago, IL).

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the distribution responses for each item. Internal reliability was estimated through Cronbach's alpha. Afterwards, correlation coefficients were also calculated to measure the correlation between the sets of data from the variables, namely the Pearson correlation coefficient and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. Kruskal-Wallis tests were also utilized to examine the distribution of our main variables across socio-demographic variables. Finally, we executed multiple linear regressions to explore how our main variables could predict deviant behavior.

RESULTS

BCEs

Every item of the scale had a proportion of *yes* answers above 60% ($M = 8.1$, $SD = 1.8$). As can be seen on Table 5, items related to internal safety had the lowest rate of *yes* responses – specifically, items 9 and 3, meaning 38.1% of our participants reported not liking/not feeling comfortable with themselves and 35.1% reported not having beliefs that brought them comfort. Contrastingly, most items pertaining to external safety ((1) having one caregiver with whom the person felt safe; (2) having at least one good friend; (5) having one teacher that cared) and item 8 (which related to opportunities to have fun)) had the higher rates of *yes* responses.

Table 5. Percentage of positive answers by each BCE item.

"Growing up, I had..."	%
1. "At least one caregiver with whom you felt safe?"	93.5%
2. "At least one good friend"	93.9%
3. "Beliefs that gave you comfort"	64.9%
4. "Enjoyment at school"	75.8%
5. "At least one teacher that cared"	92.2%
6. "Good neighbors"	78.8%
7. "An adult (not a parent/caregiver or the person from *1) who could provide you with support or advice"	79.9%
8. "Opportunities to have a good time"	94.8%
9. "Like yourself or feel comfortable with yourself"	61.9%
10. "Predictable home routine, like regular meals and a regular bedtime"	78.4%

Note: we applied the Portuguese version of this instrument. As such, these are English translations of the items and should not be considered as being validated for English-speaking populations.

ACEs

When comparing the mean scores of BCEs to ACEs, our participants reported much higher levels of positive experiences, $M = 8.1$ ($SD = 1.8$), rather than negative ones, $M = 3.0$ ($SD = 3.2$). Experiences of emotional and physical abuse were the most common ones, with 27.7% ($n = 64$) of boys reporting being frequently insulted or humiliated by a parent/another adult in their household. Another 36.8% ($n = 85$) reported being frequently afraid of being

physically hurt by a parent/another adult in their household. And approximately 1 in 3 (29.4%; $n = 68$) reported being struck with enough physical force to leave marks at least once. Similarly, 1 in 3 (29.4%; $n = 68$) also report having parents with psychological problems or that had gone through suicide attempts. Additionally, 9.5% of boys reported being sexually touched or forced to sexually touch by an adult.

Table 6. Percentage of positive answers by each ACE item.

"While you were growing up during your first 18 years of life..."	%
1. "Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often swear at you, insult you, or put you down?"	27.7%
2. "Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often act in a way that made you afraid that you would be physically hurt?"	36.6%
3. "Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often pull, grab, or threw something hard at you?"	13.4%
4. "Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?"	29.4%
5. "Did an adult or person at least five years older ever touch or have you touch them in a sexual way?"	9.5%
6. "Did an adult or person at least five years older ever attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?"	6.9%
7. "Did you feel often or very often that no one in your family loved you or thought of you as special or important?"	23.8%
8. "Did you feel often or very often that people in your family didn't look out for one another, didn't feel close or weren't there for each other?"	31.2%
9. "Did you feel often or very often that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes and had no one that looked after you?"	5.2%
10. "Did you feel like your parents or caregivers were too drunk or altered to take care of you or take you to the doctor if necessary?"	4.3%
11. "Did your parents separate or get a divorce?"	37.7%
12. "Was an adult sometimes, often, or very often grabbed, pulled, bitten or had something thrown at him/her?"	
	Mother/female caregiver 4.8%
	Father/male caregiver 3.5%

13. “Was an adult sometimes, often, or very often kicked or hit with something hard?”	Mother/female caregiver	5.2%
	Father/male caregiver	3.9%
14. “Was an adult ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with, or hurt by, a knife or gun?”	Mother/female caregiver	4.3%
	Father/male caregiver	2.2%
15. “Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or used drugs?”		13.0%
16. “Did a household depressed, mentally ill, or attempt suicide?”		29.4%
17. “Did a household member go to prison?”		3.9%

Note: we applied the Portuguese version of this instrument. As such, these are English translations of the items and should not be considered as being validated for English-speaking populations.

CMNI

CMNI’s items had a minimum value of 0 (*completely disagree*) and a maximum of 3 (*completely agree*). As we can see on Table 7 the items where our participants had the lowest values of masculinity were the items regarding the *power over women*, *playboy*, and *disdain for homosexuals* dimensions. Conversely, the dimensions with highest values were: *pursuit of status*, *emotional control*, and *winning*.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for the CMNI items, sorted by median.

	Median	Mean	SD
12. “I would hate to be important.”*(S)	2.0	2.0	0.8
10. “I tend to share my feelings.”*(EC)	2.0	1.9	0.9
17. “I never do things to be an important person.”*(S)	2.0	1.7	0.8
6. “I like to talk about my feelings.”*(EC)	2.0	1.7	0.9
1. “My work/studies are the most important part of my life.”*(W)	2.0	1.6	0.8
15. “I don’t mind losing.”*(WN)	2.0	1.6	0.8

3. "In general, I do not like risky situations."*(RT)	1.0	1.4	0.8
11. "I should command/lead."(D)	1.0	1.4	0.9
19. "I enjoy taking risks."(RT)	1.0	1.4	0.8
2. "I make sure people do what I tell them."(D)	1.0	1.4	0.7
13. "Sometimes violent action is necessary."(V)	1.0	1.3	0.9
9. "I believe that violence is never justified."*(V)	1.0	1.2	1.0
18. "I never ask for help."(SR)	1.0	1.2	0.8
8. "I try to avoid being perceived as gay."(DH)	1.0	1.2	0.9
14. "I don't like giving all my attention to work/studies."*(W)	1.0	1.2	0.8
4. "It would be awful if people thought I was gay."(DH)	1.0	1.1	1.0
7. "I would feel good if I had many sexual partners."(PB)	1.0	1.0	0.8
16. "If I could, I would frequently change sexual partners."(PB)	1.0	0.6	0.7
5. "I love it when men are in charge of women."(PW)	0.0	0.6	0.8
20. "Men and women should mutually respect each other as equals"*(PW)	0.0	0.3	0.6

Notes: (1) *item was reversed; (2) (W) winning; (EC) emotional control; (RT) risk-taking; (V) violence; (PW) power over women; (D) dominance; (PB) playboy; (SR) self-reliance; (DH) disdain for homosexuals; (S) pursuit of status and (W) primacy of work; (3) as already stated, we applied the Portuguese version of this instrument - as such, these are English translations of the items and should not be considered as being validated for English-speaking populations.

DBVS

As shown in Table 8, the most prevalent behavior was lying to adults (82.0%) and the least prevalent was cocaine/heroin use (5.2%). The most common serious offenses (>20.0%) were driving a motorbike or a car without a driver's license (26.0%) and carrying a weapon (21.2%). Serious offenses were less common than minor offenses.

Table 7. Percentage of positive answers by each DBVS item.

During the last year, have you ever...	%
1. Been to school or class after drinking alcohol? ^(MI)	32.9
2. Lied to adults (e.g., family members, teachers, etc.)? ^(MI)	82
3. Used cocaine or heroin? ^(SI)	5.2
4. Used a motorbike or a car to go for a ride without the owner's permission? ^(SI)	6.1
5. Hit an adult (e.g., teacher, family, security guard, etc.)? ^(SI)	7.4
6. Used public transport without paying? ^(MI)	37.7
7. Damaged or destroyed public or private property (e.g., parking meters, traffic signs, product distribution machines, cars, etc.)? ^(SI)	13.4
8. Used hashish ("hash") or marijuana ("grass")? ^(MI)	34.2
9. Stolen something worth more than 50 euros (e.g., in shops, at school, to someone, etc.)? ^(SI)	6.1
10. Skipped school for several days without your parents knowing? ^(MI)	15.6
11. Sold drugs (e.g., hashish, marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, amphetamines, etc.)? ^(SI)	8.7
12. Stolen something worth between 5 and 50 euros (e.g., in shops, at school, to someone, etc.)? ^(SI)	17.7
13. Skipped classes because you didn't felt like going, to stay with colleagues, or to go for a ride? ^(MI)	56.3
14. Drove a motorbike or a car without having a driver's license? ^(SI)	26
15. Used LSD ("acid"), ecstasy ("tablets") or amphetamines ("speeds")? ^(SI)	8.2
16. Carried a weapon (e.g., knife, pistol, etc.)? ^(SI)	21.2
17. Stolen something worth less than 5 euros (e.g., in shops, at school, to someone, etc.)? ^(MI)	32.5
18. Done graffiti on buildings or other locations (e.g., school, public transports, walls, etc.)? ^(MI)	8.7
19. Broken into a car, a house, shop, school or other building? ^(SI)	5.6

Notes: (1) ^(MI)minor infractions and ^(SI)serious infractions; (2) we applied the original (Portuguese) version of this instrument - as such, these are English translations of the items and should not be considered as being validated for any English-speaking population.

Correlations

Firstly, the variables were tested for normality using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, which they all failed. We then proceeded to explore correlations amongst the total scores for the four main variables (BCE, ACE, DBVS and CMNI). Since the prerequisites for parametric were not met (namely, having a normal distribution) we started by analyzing Spearman correlations. However, according to Fife-Schaw (2006), we also executed the equivalent parametric test to appraise whether there was any discrepancy in the correlations' values, which there were not. Therefore, in regard to the correlations between the aforementioned variables, we opted to report the Pearson correlations in this paper coefficients and not the Spearman ones.

A weak but significant negative correlation between benevolent experiences (BCEs) and deviant behavior (DBVS) was found ($r = -.139, p = .035$).

Conversely, a significant (slightly stronger) and positive correlation between ACEs and deviant behavior was also found ($r = .341, p < .001$). The ACE dimensions most associated with deviant behavior were: *physical negligence* ($r = .286, p < .001$), *domestic violence* ($r = .257, p < .001$), *emotional negligence* ($r = .256, p < .001$), and *physical abuse* ($r = .226, p < .001$). As expected, ACEs and BCEs had a negative correlation ($r = -.395, p < .001$).

Regarding conformity to masculine norms (CMNI), a significant correlation with DBVS was found ($r = .302, p < .001$). The dimensions of the CMNI scale most correlated with DBVS were *risk taking* ($r = .281, p < .001$), *violence* ($r = .264, p < .001$), *playboy* ($r = .230, p < .001$), and *power over women* ($r = .142, p = .031$). There were no significant correlation between BCEs and CMNI or ACEs and CMNI.

Considering the socio-demographic variables, namely educational level, there was a significant negative correlation between participants' educational level and deviant behavior ($r_s = -.220, p < 0.001$). The mother/female caregiver's educational level was positively associated with the son's educational level ($r_s = .220, p < .001$), while the father/male caregiver was not. The participants' educational level was also negatively correlated with their CMNI score ($r = -.151, p = .022$), indicating that the higher the educational degree, the lower the conformity to masculine norms.

To test the distribution of DBVS across the four categories of occupational status, we ran a Kruskal-Wallis test. A significant difference ($H(3) = 22.615, p < .000$) was found in the student group, with participants in this category reporting lower levels of deviant behavior when compared to all other occupations.

In regard to sexuality, for the first question (*sexual identity*) we also ran Kruskal-Wallis tests to see if there was any difference in the distribution of DBVS, CMNI, ACEs and BCEs across the three *sexual identity* categories (*heterosexual; bisexual; homosexual*). No significant difference was detected for CMNI and BCE scores. However, significant differences were detected in regard to ACEs ($H(2) = 7.877, p = .019$), with heterosexual identifying participants reporting less adverse childhood experiences than bisexual or homosexual individuals. Furthermore, significant differences were also detected in the distribution of deviant behaviors across sexual orientation categories, but only in one of the DBVS categories: *serious infractions*. The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that, when compared with the homosexual group, heterosexuals reported a significantly higher rate of serious offences ($H(2) = 14.639, p < .001$).

Regarding the *sexual attraction* (i.e., the spectrum) item, we found three weak but significant correlations. Firstly, a negative correlation with CMNI ($r = -.165, p = .013$) was detected, meaning the participants who labeled their sexual attraction closer to the exclusively homosexual end of the spectrum were less likely to report deviant behavior. When looking at the specific CMNI dimensions associated with *sexual attraction*, we found slightly stronger associations with 3 dimensions. Men who reported higher levels of same-sex attraction also reported lower conformity to the dimensions: *power over women* ($r = -.260, p < .001$), *violence* ($r = -.259, p < .001$), and *disdain for homosexuals* ($r = -.231, p < .001$). Confirming our findings in the *sexual identity* item, we detected a positive, but weak, significant Spearman correlation between sexual attraction and ACEs ($r_s = .176, p < .001$), which reveals that participants who reported higher levels of same-sex attraction also had more adverse childhood experiences. Probing the correlation with ACEs, the two significant, but weak, associations were with *sexual abuse* ($r_s = .197, p < .001$) and with *emotional abuse* ($r_s = .183, p < .001$). Similarly to our *sexual identity* findings, a negative ($r_s = -.216, p < .001$) Spearman correlation was detected between *sexual attraction* and DBVS but only when looking at the *serious infractions* category. Indicating that participants closer to the exclusively heterosexual end of the spectrum were more likely to report serious offenses.

Regression model

To quantify the strength of the relationship between our main variables, a multiple linear regression analysis was calculated to assess if and how DBVS was predicted by CMNI, ACEs and BCEs.

A significant regression equation was found ($F(3,227) = 19.091, p < .001$), with an adjusted R^2 of 0.191. ACEs and CMNI were significant predictors of DBVS (with ACEs having a slightly higher beta coefficient than CMNI), whereas BCEs were not.

Therefore we calculated a second model, excluding the BCEs score, which also resulted in a significant regression equation ($F(2,228) = 28.612, p < .001$), with an adjusted R^2 of 0.194. The corresponding coefficients can be seen below, in Table 9.

Table 8. Linear regression coefficients.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	-0.956	0.894		-1.069	.286		
CMNI Score	3.289	0.670	0.291	4.907	.000	0.999	1.001
ACEs Score	0.357	0.064	0.331	5.593	.000	0.999	1.001

DISCUSSION

The main goals of this study were to investigate the relation between masculinity and deviance, as well as the relations between benevolent and adverse childhood experiences and deviance. Specifically, we examined (a) the correlation between conformity to masculine norms (CMNI) and deviant behavior (DBVS); (b) the correlation between benevolent childhood experiences (BCEs) and DBVS; (c) the correlation between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and DBVS; and (d) how sociodemographic variables associated with CMNI and DBVS.

Summarizing our descriptive results, in the BCEs scale, higher levels of favorable experiences were found. Notably, our participants scored higher on items pertaining to external safety, as opposed to items related to internal safety. Regarding ACEs, experiences of emotional and physical abuse were the most common ones, as well as experiences of having parents with psychological problems or that had gone through suicide attempts. Masculine norms that pertained to *emotional control*, *pursuit of status*, *winning*, and *dominance* had the highest scores, whereas *power over women*, *playboy* and *disdain for homosexuals* had the lowest. As expected, in regard to DBVS, serious infractions were less common than minor infractions. More than a third of participants reported committing minor offenses such as skipping class or smoking marijuana/hashish. The most common serious infractions were driving a motorbike or a car without a driver's license (1 in 4 participants) and carrying a weapon (1 in 5).

Statistical analyses revealed our three exploratory hypothesis were substantiated by the data. Therefore, three key findings emerged as well as some noteworthy results from our sociodemographic data.

(1) Results showed that there is a statistically significant correlation between conformity to masculine norms and deviant behavior. Within the instrument, our results indicated that the dimension which had the strongest association with the DBVS score was *risk taking*, followed by *violence*, and *playboy*. These three traits, out of the total 11 dimensions, could perhaps most closely be described as impulsive and lacking in self-control (risky behavior, lashing out in violent ways and multiple sex partners). This is reminiscent of Gottfredson and Hirschi's theoretical approach to crime published in 1990. Often referred to as the "General Theory of Crime" (GTC), the theory spotlights self-control as the central variable in explaining crime. Interestingly, according to Schulz's (2005) analysis of GTC, when self-control is split into six

different variables, risk taking stands out as the most predictive of criminal behavior, which is aligned with our findings. The *power over women* dimension also had a (weaker) correlation with DBVS, however, the phrasing of the items (“I love it when women are under the responsibility of men” and “Men and women should respect each other equally”) may have induced some type of response bias, namely social desirability, since, as evidenced in the Results section, they had extremely polarized responses.

(2) Adverse childhood experiences were significantly correlated with deviant behavior. This corroborates the existing literature. Bellis and colleagues (2016) found that, when compared with people with no ACEs, those with 4+ ACEs were 15 times more likely to be a perpetrator of violence in the last 12 months and 20 times more likely to have been incarcerated in their lives. In the present study, we found that negligence (physical and emotional) were 2 of the top 3 strongest correlations with deviant behavior. This is also corroborated by existing literature, as child neglect has frequently been found to put the child at an increased risk of future delinquency, as parental monitoring and parental rejection all play a central role in predicting delinquent behavior (Ryan et al., 2013). Exposure to domestic violence presented the second strongest correlation with DBVS and physical abuse was also found to have a significant association with deviant behavior. Physical abuse has long been recognized as a risk factor for delinquency. However, our findings regarding exposure to domestic violence are of particular relevance. Many countries have criminalized domestic violence, with the Russian Federation being the only European exception to the rule (WomanStats Project, 2020). However, many, including Portugal, have not yet classified the *exposure* of children/young people to domestic violence as a form of child abuse and, therefore, a crime.

(3) Benevolent childhood experiences were found to be significantly correlated with less deviant behavior, albeit with very a weak correlation. Because this study gathered data from 18 and 19 year old participants, one possible explanation for the weakness of the correlation may be that its effects are not yet noticeable on our young participants, since they are only now entering adulthood. Taking into consideration that BCEs have positive long-term effects, it is possible to assume they will play a stronger role later throughout adulthood, which may be better appreciated in a study with a broader age range.

Regarding our regression model, we found that ACEs in conjunction with CMNI explained deviance in 19.4%, with the ACEs contributing slightly more than CMNI. These are

encouraging results, since our findings seem to indicate conformity to masculine norms are as strong of a predictor of deviancy as a universally recognized risk factor: ACEs.

When compared to the pilot study that validated the DBVS, we encountered a higher prevalence of almost every type of deviant behavior, however, as stated in the literature review, this was expected since we purposefully focused this study on the “peak” of deviant/criminal activity curve, whereas the original study had participants as young as 14. The most glaring exception was in item number 6, where only around 38% of our participants declared using public transportation without paying for a ticket and in the original study 51% did. This may also be a consequence of the measures in place as throughout most of the length of this study, as Portuguese citizens were under stay-at-home orders.

Education level data was collected to infer about socioeconomic status. Participants’ education level was significantly negatively correlated with the DBVS, demonstrating that the higher educational level, lower the risk of engaging in deviant behavior, which is supported by existing literature (Steinberg, 2008). However, there is also room for doubts, as these results can be skewed. Some 18-year-old participants might, due to how close they are to completing high school, respond that they have completed that stage, while others, not technically having completed high school, choose to report that their last officially completed grade was the 9th.

Curiously, we also found that the participant’s mother/female caregiver’s education level was positively related to the son’s education level while the father/male caregiver’s was not. It is interesting since one traditionally held belief is that, as the “breadwinner”, the father’s socioeconomic position tends to be the highest and therefore most influential of the family’s socioeconomic position. Our data shows the opposite. Mothers were the ones who had the bigger impact at that level. This has been somewhat corroborated by literature, as researchers have found that the mother’s education and occupation is substantively more influential on children’s academic achievement (Korupp et al., 2002).

Regarding sexuality, namely the sexual attraction item, one interesting finding, on its own, was the fact that 1 in 2 participants declared some level of attraction for the same sex. Contrastingly, in a 2012 survey of the Portuguese general public conducted by the *Expresso* newspaper, 77.5% of adults identified themselves as exclusively heterosexual. This is relevant because it confirms a similar trend found in other Western countries - younger people are much more likely to report same-sex attraction. For example, a 2015 British survey of the general

public (using a similar 7-point scale) found that 72% of adults also identified as exclusively heterosexual; however, when looking only at young people's (18-24 year old) responses, that percentage was 46% (YouGov, 2015). In a replication of the survey, done in 2020, the percentage of younger people identifying as '100% heterosexual' had dropped to 37% (YouGov, 2020). When comparing these numbers, it is also important to note that our data only reflects sexual attraction feelings of males, whereas the British surveys include both sexes. This is relevant because virtually in all sexuality surveys females, across all ages, are more likely than males to report feelings of same-sex attraction.

Considering sexual attraction's correlations with our variables, we found it was positively correlated with ACEs, meaning, people closer to the same-sex attraction end of the spectrum reported higher levels of adverse childhood experiences. The ACE dimensions most correlated with sexual attraction were sexual abuse and emotional abuse. Furthermore, our results also confirmed this in the sexual identity item, with heterosexuals reporting less ACEs than bisexual or homosexual participants. This is congruent with research on this topic, since it is well established that members of sexual minorities tend to be at higher risk for several forms of victimization, especially sexual and emotional abuse (Rothman et al., 2011; Balsam et al., 2005) - precisely the two ACE dimensions we found to be most negatively correlated with sexual attraction. Conversely, individuals closer to the heterosexual end of the spectrum reported higher levels of conformity to masculine norms, but only in 3 specific dimensions: *power over women*, *violence*, and *disdain for homosexuals*.

Data from the sexual orientation and sexual identity items also revealed a connection between these two variables and deviant behavior. It was found that individuals closer to the exclusively heterosexual end of the spectrum, as well as heterosexual identifying individuals were more likely to report serious infractions. However, there was no difference for minor infractions. This is interesting because homosexual individuals were more likely to report higher ACEs and, as our research demonstrated, ACEs themselves are associated with a higher score of DBVS. These results lead us to question if ACEs are not as strong of a predictor for criminal behavior for these individuals, as they are for heterosexual individuals. Additionally, since we also found that the closer the individual is to the exclusively heterosexual end of the scale, the more likely he is to endorse norms regarding the use of violence, it is logic to assume that violent action would translate into serious infractions, such as carrying a weapon, damaging property or physically assaulting others.

Limitations and future research

One major limitation of this study is that it is not helpful in explaining female deviance or criminality. However, our original intent was not to explore general explanations of criminal behavior/deviance but, given the smallness of women's contribution to crime, explore what contributes to males' disproportionate offending rate. Furthermore, since we only studied males, it should be stated that we cannot postulate that women who deviate would present a higher conformity to masculine norms. In fact, and despite some flaws in the way masculinity/femininity was measured, the scarce literature that exists on this matter, seems to indicate this is a unique phenomenon to males. For example, Thornton and James (1979) found that girls who were delinquent were not more masculine than law-abiding girls. The authors also state that the association between masculinity and delinquency was found only in boys who believed others had low masculine expectations of them.

Future research could also explore how direct is the relationship masculinity and deviance. Our results indicate that there is a moderate correlation between conforming to masculine norms and crime - which may suggest the presence of other variables in this equation. For example, we know that when men experience masculine gender role stress (i.e., when they perceive threats to their masculine identity), they are more likely to engage in violence against women and gay men; however we don't know its association with delinquency. Messerschmidt's (2018) work recognizes the central role of masculinity in explaining crime. As mentioned in the literature review, masculinity is, by its very nature, something that has to be earned in the eyes of others. Messerschmidt (2018) posits that whenever men are faced with situations that challenge their masculinity they have to find a way to restore it and if no other resources are available, men will then resort to crime.

Another major limitation is in the small age bracket chosen for this study. We chose participants with 18 and 19 years old to rigorously meet the validation criteria of the instruments. The DBVS is only validated for 14 to 19-year-olds and the ACE and BCE scales are for participants of 18 and up ages.

The CMNI instrument was selected because it is the only Portuguese adapted scale that measures this construct; however, another limitation of this study is that this instrument still requires additional psychometric analysis to fully validate it. Given this aspect, it is also

possible that the relatively small correlation that was observed could be tied to low internal/external consistency.

More research is also needed to better appreciate which specific dimensions of masculinity contribute the most for various types of deviant/criminal behavior. It would also have been useful to study how conformity to masculinity may be associated with desistance. If, according to Moffitt (1993), we can assume most of these participants will engage less in deviant/criminal activity in the future, it would be relevant to see if those who desist report lower levels of conformity to masculine norms. Additionally, since this was a population-based self-report study, we have no official data on deviance/criminal behavior so one could also postulate that more masculine conforming participants would be more willing to admit their “misdeeds”.

Given the circumstances in which this study was conducted (i.e., under a state of emergency and under stay-at-home orders), we could not help but notice some of these instruments, namely the ACEs scale, which focuses on specific instances of abuse, may need some updating to our “new normal”, for young people are spending more time online. Jacobo (2019), writing for ABC News, reported that even before the pandemic, in October 2019, American “tweens” (8 – 12 years old) were spending, on average, 7 hours and 22 minutes per day online (this time did not include school work). This new reality has also given rise for many forms of abuse to occur online. Therefore, it could be relevant to measure, for example, online sexual abuse or violence.

As already discussed, our sexual attraction findings are relevant on their own, just in terms of sexuality demographics. However, they also could have implications for studies of masculinities going forward, particularly for the *disdain for homosexuals* and *antifemininity* dimensions of masculinity. The CMNI scale was developed in 2003, which does not make it a particularly old instrument; however, in Western societies, attitudes toward (homo)sexuality have shifted dramatically since 2003. For example, in 2020 *The New York Times* identified and described a social media phenomenon where heterosexual-identifying young men purposefully record themselves engaging in homoerotic activities (i.e., cuddling and kissing other boys) to make themselves “look cool” and attract female attention, something which would be tantamount to “social suicide” in 2003. Speaking to the publication, professor of masculine studies Anderson, posited that because today’s young people grew up in a time of declining homophobia, they are now actively rebelling against the “anti-gay” and “anti-feminine” model of previous masculinities (Hawgood, 2020). Considering that *disdain for homosexuals* is evaluated by these two items “It would be awful if people thought I was gay” and “I try to avoid

being perceived as gay”, and considering current attitudes, it seems important to reconsider how to best analyze this.

Practical implications

The findings of this study indicate clear evidence of conformity to masculinity as a significant predictor of deviant behavior. In this study masculinity was almost as significant a predictor as adverse childhood experiences - which the scientific community universally regards as significant risk factors for youth delinquency and other deviant behaviors. As such, our results call for an increased awareness to how young boys are being raised and socialized, for parents to consider alternative parenting strategies that do not place such importance on masculine notions such as risk taking, violence, dominance, etc...

These results should also encourage policymakers to address issues of criminality and youth deviance in a more holistic and multifaceted way, particularly in the case of public institutions. Detention facilities and prisons, as already stated in the literature review, tend to be “hypermasculine” environments that could, unintentionally, be working against their own goal of rehabilitation by promoting even more deviance and delinquency.

Bearing in mind the broader context of the literature, this paper contributes to an accumulating body of evidence that exposes a link between the traditional socialization of men and its negative effects on men themselves and those around them.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX A – Permission from the ISPA-Instituto Universitário Ethics Committee



Comissão de Ética de Investigação
ISPA - Instituto Universitário de Ciências
Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida
Rua Jardim do Tabaco, 34,
1149-041 Lisboa
Telefone: (351) 218 811 700
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I/044/03/2021

COMISSÃO DE ÉTICA

PARECER

Título do projeto: “Experiências adversas e benevolentes na infância, conformidade com normas do género masculino e sentimentos criminais em adolescentes do sexo masculino”.

Investigadora responsável: Andreia de Castro Rodrigues.

Instituição/Curso: ISPA- Instituto Universitário.

O protocolo do estudo apresenta objetivos relevantes. Foram descritos adequadamente os métodos e procedimentos a adotar e estes respeitam os direitos humanos e as recomendações constantes nos documentos nacionais e internacionais relativos à ética em investigação.

Assim, o parecer da Comissão de Ética do ISPA-Instituto Universitário é favorável à realização do estudo em epígrafe.

Qualquer alteração futura aos procedimentos descritos do estudo que possam colidir com os critérios éticos de investigação dos regulamentos acima referidos, exige uma rerepresentação do pedido de apreciação a esta Comissão.

Comissão Ética do ISPA – Instituto Universitário

(Assinatura do Presidente da CE)

Lisboa, 5 de Março de 2021.