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Masculine domination and health: the uses of the body in middle class urban youth

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Goldenberg M. Masculine domination and health: the uses of the body in middle class urban youth. *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* (Rio de Janeiro, Brasil) 2005 January-March; 10(1): 91–96.

Objectives: To analyze the discourse of Brazilian youth on representations of gender, their behavior and opinions on sexuality and the use of one's body, and the implications of these views on their physical and psychological health.

Methodology: Qualitative analysis of 258 interviews with middle class male and female university students aged 17 to 24 years in Rio de Janeiro.

Results: The author considered women's envy of men's sexual "freedom" in terms of men's societal and physical advantages. Only 7% of men claimed to envy any quality possessed by women, which was their ability to give birth. What men most envied of other men was their potency, strength and virility. For men, height and strength are important, while women wish to be slender and pretty. The author found gender differences among the subjects' discourse on sex. While 17% of women interviewed said they were virgins, only 4% of men made the same claim. The gender gap with respect to first intercourse was found to be decreasing, but not the number of sexual partners. Among men, 28% could not specify the number of sexual partners they had had, but women were more precise, indicating that sexual relationships have a greater significance in their lives. The author highlights the central notion of virility among men, as evidenced by their efforts to achieve physical adequacy and their obsession with male performance and the size of the sexual organ.

Conclusions: The author affirms that the quest for a socially accepted body type enslaves both women and men, and can lead them not only to illness, but even to the point of death. Societal pressure to commit what has been dubbed by the author "symbolic violence" can provoke anxiety, depression, stress, and affective disorders in young people.