

## Do young people today continue to repeat the negative behaviours of that traditional masculinity?



**Interview** with **Juan Manuel Feito Guerrero**, facilitator of the workshop “Pedagogical tools for working with adolescent males on equality and masculinity”

**Your association, Piper Txuriak, and you, in particular, have been focusing on masculinity with adolescent males for years in the classroom. How did this need arise, what drives schools or families to organise this type of programme?**

Are young boys no longer like the men of yesteryear, have they outgrown their Rambo-like masculinity, have they ceased to be chauvinists? Do young people today continue to repeat the negative behaviours of that traditional masculinity? How can I help my male child or my young male students in their process of “becoming men”?

These are questions that we often hear and that are often the motivation for activities on gender, equality or violence aimed at boys. We need to focus on boys as we have been focusing on girls so far and understand that they also need to revisit their gender identity and that it is essential to do so. But how? There seems to be a growing demand for gender-sensitive pedagogical tools to approach this task and relationships with boys. This is why schools often ask associations like ours to collaborate with them.

### **Can you explain how you introduce this topic to the boys in your workshops?**

When we are born, we are typecast, as if we were given a costume that will determine what our life will be like. And as we grow, the costume will become tighter and tighter, further limiting our movements. Until a time comes when we no longer know how to differentiate between the costume and our skin. It has stuck to us so tightly that our skin is covered, and we believe that this costume is the “natural” thing. And this “false skin” is assigned a social value and social functions. This is what gender is.

With the excuse of a mere physical characteristic we are classified as men or women...the criterion is so simple and narrow-minded. However, it means that we are placed under a tremendous social and family burden. It has the power to build,

on that basis, a huge and heavy castle that will determine our tastes, habits, decisions, thoughts, feelings, body gestures, ways of speaking, clothing, our games and toys, the films we like to watch, the studies and the profession we choose. Hence the first and most persistent question we ask is, "Is it a boy or a girl?", even before it is born. This is such a determining issue that even the Spanish language does not have a concept to refer to "people" in a neutral way.

**How do you explain complex gender concepts to them in a way that is understandable and interesting? Can you give an example?**

From very early in our life, our minds and bodies are endlessly bombarded with the characteristics that should be added to our boxes depending on whether they are blue or pink. Everyone around us confirms that this is the case, that there is no other way. They also dress their costumes, which cover who they truly are; and they also live inside boxes, which hide what they are under all that cultural burden.

So, when we are very young and vulnerable, we doubt our own view of what it means to be a person, our own judgement, still free from beliefs, and our own tastes and interests. What young people want the most is for their elders and the adult world in which they live to accept them, welcome them, love them, integrate them into the group. In short, they want to be normal. A process of understanding, acceptance and assimilation of what is normal has begun...from the cultural-social parameters that surround them and in which they are developing their own personality. After a time, and seeing what exists around them, that normality becomes natural. Thus, we forget how we understood life before this socialisation process.

**Can you tell us something about yourself with regard to your background in the field of equality and masculinity?**

We founded the Men's Association for Equality 'Piper Txuriak' in 2009, and since then I have been coordinating the association, attending to the various requests that come our way, and providing a wide variety and range of activities to raise awareness. At the same time, I have worked as an equality agent for the Deusto-San Ignacio Psycho-Social Assistance Module focusing on the elimination of sexism.