The relationship between domestic space and gender identity: Some signs of emergence of alternative domestic femininity and masculinity

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Abstract

The premise of this article is that, by introducing domestic space in the analysis of gender identity, one might gain a more nuanced understanding of how gender and power are co-constitutive. The research question is what one could learn from the conclusions of recent studies about the relationship between gender identity and domestic space, by analyzing it as a way of "doing and undoing gender" through spatial practices. We conducted an interpretive synthesis, focusing on 20 articles published in the last ten years on the topics of domestic space, masculinity, and femininity. We show the traditional normative model of gender identity is still strong, but there are some signs, of the emergence of alternative domestic masculinity and femininity, based on the tendency to reconsider the value of domesticity, and to transgress traditional gender oppositions (mind and body, rational and emotional, public and private, work and domesticity). We discuss the implications of the findings for understanding and refining the concepts of doing and doing gender, and gendered space.

Keywords

Hegemonic masculinity, gendered space, spatial practice, material culture, doing and undoing gender, interpretive synthesis

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Introduction

Through the present paper, we intend to bring closer spatial studies of home (from the sociology of space, human geography, and consumer culture studies) with gender studies of masculinity and femininity. Gender studies tend to give priority to gender differences that legitimize masculine hegemony, but the attention given to gender similarities, hiding subtler power relations, is still scarce.

This paper builds on four recent contributions to the literature. First, in the sociology of space literature, Gieryn (2000) wrote an article pleading for giving more attention to place, understood not only as a container of social actions, but also as an actor influencing and being influenced by social interactions. The article was so influential that inspired more than 1300 studies. Similarly, Gans (2002) pointed to the need for more sociological studies of space oriented towards spatial practices from the private sphere. Second, as an important contribution to gender studies, the article introducing the concept of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987) became one of the most influential sociological papers in the last decades (Healy, 2014; Caren, 2012), receiving more than 8000 citations. It gave rise to a follow-up conceptualization of "undoing gender" (Deutsch, 2007) that was also noteworthy, receiving more than 500 citations. Third, in the sociology of home field the critical review of the literature performed by Mallett (2004) is one of the most cited articles in home studies, being referenced in more than 600 papers. The author highlights the importance of gender in analyzing the meaning of home, concluding "general debate about gender and the meaning of home remains problematic, if not simplistic" (*ibidem*, p. 77). More exactly, earlier studies have focused on the feminist interpretation of how gender differences are reinforced by domestic space, legitimizing masculine hegemony, but they ignored women's positive interpretations of home and the intersection between gender and other identities. Fourth, because of the growing body of qualitative research results, scholars recommend using particular methods of qualitative research synthesis, different from the conventional ones (meta-analysis, systematic review, literature review). Inside these methods, the interpretive synthesis technique is gaining more and more acceptance (Campbell et al., 2011; Barnett-Page, 2009; Weed, 2008, 2005; Jensen & Allen, 1996), especially in the fields of education, health, community development, and organizations (Major & Savin-Baden, 2011). We think it might contribute to integrating qualitative results from the fields of gender studies and spatial studies.

Overall, in gender studies multiple masculinities and femininities are not new. However, we think a closer look at how they interact with the domestic space, in various temporal and cultural contexts, may be advanced by moving the accent from traditional hegemonic gender relations based on differences, to signs of emergence of alternative domestic masculinities and femininities, transcending differences, united by the positive orientation towards the domestic space. Thus, the present paper interprets the domestic space through doing and undoing gender lenses, using as materials the results of 20 recent research papers, to show that gender studies might also benefit from looking at similarities instead of focusing only on differences. In this way, we suggest the concept of

"doing or undoing gender", applied in the study of domestic space, might be understood as "doing and undoing gender", and that "gendered spaces" may be interpreted as a context where gender similarities arise, and power relations are subtler than thought before. In writing this paper, we knew that specific interpretations might not be new in some particular fields of study. Our aims were modest, focusing on showing how trying to cross the disciplines' borders might help understand the dynamics of gender identity, and might inspire particular research topics or new interpretations of already established conceptual frameworks.

Gender differences, hegemonic masculinity and gendered spaces

Gender studies started by identifying and explaining oppositions. Traditionally, in the Western society, the dominant model used to study gender focused on the oppositions between mind and body, rational and emotional, public and private, work and domesticity (Gorman-Murray, 2013). Starting from the premise that biological differences between sexes explain gender differences, functionalist thinkers stated that men and women have opposing but complementary psycho-socio-cultural characteristics, later conceptualized as the essence of masculinity or femininity. For some structuralist thinkers, like Bourdieu (2003), the oppositions between masculine and feminine coupled with the opposition between public and private are binary mental categories, unconsciously produced by myths and reproduced by social practices, based on which the person orders social reality.

Feminist studies made visible how these gender oppositions have legitimated hegemonic masculinity. They showed that it was conventionally thought there are natural differences between men and women that justify the gender division of labor in the heterosexual family (man as the breadwinner, working in the public space and woman as the homemaker doing domestic, emotional and nurturing tasks). The segregation between productive and reproductive labor was inspired by the Victorian ideal of the middle-class family in which the rational husband works in the public sphere to support the family, being respected and worshiped by his wife who manages the domestic tasks and is in charge with all the emotional, nurturing and childcare tasks, in the private sphere (Gorman-Murray, 2008). Masculine identity was defined as a hegemonic one, the man having a paid job in the public sphere, allowing him to provide economic resources for the family, to become the household head, and to be absent from the domestic space (Moisio et al., 2013). Hegemonic masculinity became the norm, legitimizing patriarchal relations based on power and inequality, associating women with domestic space of unpaid labor and men with paid work from the public space (Gorman-Murray, 2008). Domestic space was traditionally considered a feminine space; while public space a masculine one (Löfgren, 2003; Pellow, 2003; Bourdieu, 2000).

In the anthropology of space field, the gender asymmetries were studied using the concept of "gendered space", defined as: "particular locales that cultures invest with gender meanings, sites in which differentiated-practice occur or settings that are used strategically to inform identity and produce and reproduce asymmetrical gender relations

of power and authority" (Löw & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2001: p. 7). Löw (2006) argues that gender and space are produced in interactions influencing and being influenced by larger social structures and that gender identity and gender relations are produced in interactions that reproduce the cultural construction of gender differences. Therefore, the idea of gendered spaces and the way they explain gender practices and the social production of gender is not new. One could note that gendered spaces were conceptualized based on strong gender differences, rooted in gender ideologies that legitimize masculine hegemony. We think the way they were understood leaves little room for identifying agency and change through individualization and detraditionalization of gender identities.

Nowadays, many earlier assumptions are challenged by ongoing transformations towards the democratization of gender relations. Another recent tendency is to explore empirically the emergence of alternative patterns of gender identities in contemporary society reconsidering the importance of private life and domestic space. These changes mean to imply that traditional models, rooted in the idea that gender identity is a fixed one formed through gender role socialization and that gender asymmetries are preserved through structural inequalities, do not reflect the dynamism and complexity of gender identity. Therefore, new approaches emerged, assuming the lack of fixed continuity between sex and gender, gender identity being a social construct, constantly negotiated in interactions, and dependent on social situations. Taking this new path, West & Zimmerman (1987: p. 126) have proposed a constructionist model of gender, by introducing the concept of "doing gender", defined as "a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine natures". Later, other complementary concepts emerged, like "undoing gender" (Deutsch, 2007; Butler, 2004) or "redoing gender" (Connell, 2010).

Doing and undoing gender framework

From an ethnomethodological perspective, West & Zimmerman (1987) state that gender is not fixed and not a property of persons but an accomplishment, emerging in interactions. In simpler words, gender is not something the person is, but something the person does. This model was inspired by Goffman's (1976) idea that gender is a performance, an optional display of conventional gender conducts, maintained by particular institutional contexts. Gender display means that gender is conceptualized as a script for performing cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity for an audience who knows these codes. Another influence comes from Garfinkel (1967), who asserted that gender identity is displayed and maintained constantly, because in every interaction we are permanently and unconsciously evaluated and classified by the others based on taken-for-granted gender codes.

"Doing gender" means that interactions, in particular social situations, are opportunities to perform gender identity, and to produce gender differences. Owing to these repeated interactions, gender asymmetries come to be considered natural and

essential differences. Briefly, by doing gender, we create sexual differences, which are not innate or essential, rather socially constructed. Although people have many social identities they present selectively according to the situation, gender identity is activated in every situation. For instance, in a particular context, it is possible not to be judged based on our occupational identity, but we are permanently "made accountable" by the others for our gender identity (everything we do, say or display risks to be judged by gender codes). The others never stop evaluating and sanctioning us based on conventional gender codes, motivating us to display constantly in interactions gender-specific characteristics and conducts. By doing gender repeatedly and unconsciously, we legitimize institutional arrangements based on gender differences.

In a following article, West & Zimmerman (2008) move the knowledge forward, stating the accomplishment of gender is both interactional and institutional, which implies that "doing gender" has both the potential to reproduce masculine hegemony and to produce change. That is why they adopted the concept of "undoing gender". The conceptualization was complex, but not very clear. It referred to detaching from those characteristics of masculinity and femininity conventionally considered natural and essential due to the change of normative conceptions about gender conducts, for which every sex category is made accountable. Proceeding further, they cited the concept of "redoing gender" advocating the need to make gender irrelevant in social interactions.

Deutsch (2007) established an important clarification, suggesting that "undoing gender" points to social interactions that reduce gender differences while "doing gender" refers to these differences. The author considers the concept of "doing gender" can only explain how people construct and maintain gender asymmetries, but is poor in identifying possibilities for change.

Objectives of the study

In this article, we apply the technique of interpretive synthesis to some recent research findings from the literature through the frame of "doing" and "undoing gender", in its reconceptualization, as social interactions that "maintain" and "reduce gender differences" (Deutsch, 2007). None of the analyzed articles uses the concepts of doing or undoing gender as a theoretical framework, and just one article introduces the concept of domestic masculinity (Moisio et al. 2013), the concept of domestic femininity not being used in any of them. First, we show that by focusing on the manifestation of masculinity and femininity in the domestic space, one may detect signs of reduction of gender differences (transcending classical oppositions between mind and body, rational and emotional, public and private, work and domesticity), and of emergence of alternative domestic masculinity and alternative domestic femininity. Second, we illustrate that by studying the relationship between domestic space and gender identity one could find new possibilities to interpret, nuance or refine established concepts like "doing and undoing gender" and "gendered spaces", and to bring out new ones, like domestic femininity. Third, we showed how the technique of interpretive synthesis could

contribute to increasing the dialogue between spatial or material studies of domestic space and gender studies.

We argue that instead of tracing a clear line between "doing gender" (constructing traditional gender asymmetries based on hegemony) and "undoing gender" (deconstructing it on the basis of reducing the asymmetries), "doing and undoing gender" in the domestic space could be understood as a single process (with two facets in which power relations manifest subtler and nuanced than it was conceptualized through the lens of hegemonic masculinity and social construction of gendered spaces). The research question raised by this article is what we can learn from the conclusions of recent studies about the emergence of new forms of domestic masculinities and femininities, which contest the normative model of hegemonic masculinity, by analyzing them as forms of doing and undoing gender through spatial practices.

Materials and method

We performed an interpretive synthesis, inspired by Major and Savin-Baden (2010) guidelines, of the results and interpretations of 20 articles published in the last ten years. The articles were selected from Google Scholar based on the following keywords: masculinity AND/OR femininity AND domesticity or domestic space (OR its partial synonyms: home OR house OR dwelling OR apartment).

Identified articles

Of all these materials, three are review articles, synthesizing the results of other articles (Meah, 2014; Vachhani & Pullen, 2011; Gorman-Murray, 2008), and 17 are based on empirical research conducted mainly in English-speaking countries (mostly USA, UK, Australia, and New Zealand). There are four historical studies focusing on: the colonial period in India from 1880 to 1920 (Stevenson, 2013), the period from 1930 to 1965 in USA (Osgerby, 2005), the period from 1961-2004 in 11 developed countries (Kan et al., 2011), and nineteenth-century England from 1850 to 1910 (Hamlett, 2009). The analyzed empirical studies were based on a very diverse palette of research techniques and instruments of data collection: long interviews from one to two hours with informants (Moisio, 2013), semi-structured interviews (González, 2005), individual and couple interviews combined with photos of the domestic space made by subjects (Morrison, 2013), analysis of representation of domesticity in colonial postcards (Stevenson, 2013), of domestic interiors in American men's magazines (Osgerby, 2005), of men as domestic experts in British lifestyle TV-shows (Attwood, 2005), case studies (Long, 2013), content analysis of documents like home decoration advise manuals, domestic inventories, sale catalogs, and autobiographies (Hamlett, 2009), autoethnographic methods (Warren, 2010), ethnographic methods combining interviews, focus-groups, domestic diaries, home tours, observation (Gorman-Murray, 2013, 2007; Meah & Jackson, 2013; Maller et al., 2012; Walsh, 2011), or diary surveys (Kan et al., 2011). Among the empirical articles, all were

based on qualitative data, and only one of them has an additional quantitative component.

In line with the recommendations for selecting materials with sample' variation (Weed, 2005), the primary studies were based on samples collected from different contexts and populations. In the analyzed materials, the socio-demographic profiles of the respondents are diverse: white-collars and blue-collars (mostly white) with several employment statuses (paid work outside the home, home based paid work, home based domestic work) or marital statuses (married, coupled, bachelor), being heterosexual or homosexual, and having migration experience. The historical periods and socio-cultural contexts of the identified studies cover several contexts. The same could be said about the field in which they were produced. Regarding the discipline from which the articles emerged, as reflected by the journals in which the they were published, most of them come from spatial and geographical studies (*Housing, Theory and Society, Space and Culture, Emotion, Space and Society, Geographical Research, Journal of Design History, Australian Geographer*), gender studies (*Gender, Place & Culture, Gender & Society, Gender & History*), and consumer culture studies (*Journal of Consumer Culture, Journal of Consumer Research*). The identified articles have another strong point, most of them being rather popular, influencing other researchers in the field (with a mean of citation of 28, the most cited one receiving 128 citations).

Interpretive synthesis technique

Given the small number of articles identified, their variety of contexts and qualitative orientation, we decided, based on recent scholars' recommendations (Major and Savin-Baden, 2010), to use instead of the conventional aggregative methods of synthesis (meta-analysis, systematic review, literature review), the method of qualitative synthesis based on the technique of interpretive synthesis. The aim of the technique is to produce more refined meanings, exploratory theories and new concepts (Walsh & Downe, 2004). Usually, the method is used to develop a conceptual translation, reinterpretation of data or development of a new theory (Major & Savin-Baden, 2011). Through its various techniques (meta-ethnography, meta-interpretation, qualitative meta-synthesis, etc.), the qualitative synthesis method recognizes the importance of meaning in context, the object of the synthesis being the original interpretations of qualitative data (Weed, 2005). Following the same source, the first step of the procedure lies in identifying a research area, followed by the selection of a rather small number of studies (not comprehensive) based on theoretical sensitivity and maximum variety of samples, continuing with thematic and context analysis. Commonly, a purposeful sample is used, the selection criteria for the articles depending on the subjectivity of the researcher, the topic, the research question, the research method and the clear findings (Major and Savin-Baden, 2011). The analysis aims to find how studies are relating or contrasting and to translate one interpretation into another using particular metaphors and concepts, which could be applied to all of them (Walsh & Downe, 2004).

Limits of the approach

Considering the variety of contexts covered by the studies, one might question how it allows for a consideration of the key concepts. In answering, we follow the epistemological position synthesized by Weed (2008: p. 17) as follows: ***"meta-interpretation represents 'an interpretation' rather than 'the interpretation' of these multiple truths. Consequently, the synthesizer, as an active interpretive agent, becomes an interpretive 'truth maker' rather than an objective 'truth seeker' "***. Therefore, taking a moderate path, we admit that different socio-cultural and historical contexts classify and interpret the world based on different categories and interpretive schemes that might be nothing like ours. Hence, we do not suggest that our conclusions are cross-cultural and trans-historical realities, they are constructs created in a hypothetical dialogue between primary subjects, secondary researchers and us. They are also ways to rewrite the world based on dominant theories from our social sciences community. They allow us to look at other cultures and other times from the outside, mediated by the glance of the original researchers, to better understand our own present time and culture.

One might further ask what a detailed description of historical papers adds to a discussion about contemporary masculinities and femininities. We think, in the last century, the dominant approach in gender studies has been tributary to feminist views focusing on the social construction of gender differences and on how it legitimates hegemony. If we show there are also studies showing how these constructed differences were transgressed, how gender was undone, how signs of emerging alternative domestic identities were present even in the past, we will have more reasons to accept these phenomena are not new, and they might still manifest in our present time asking to be further researched and defined.

Meta-interpretations of the results

We took the original interpretations from the studies and translated them through the framework of doing and undoing gender, as defined by Deutsch (2007). We looked at the spatialization of these processes, showing how gender identity and domestic space are co-constitutive, identifying both signs of persisting traditional gender identities, based on gender differences, and of emerging alternative domestic masculinities and alternative domestic femininities, rooted in gender similarities.

Persistence of conventional masculinities and femininities in the domestic space

As mentioned in the Introduction, the traditional normative model of gender identity is grounded in strong and opposing gender differences, associating femininity with domestic space, reproductive unpaid housework, body and emotions, and masculinity with public space, productive paid work outside the home, mind and rationality (Gorman-Murray, 2013). These gender asymmetries are premises for power relations based on gender inequalities, reproducing the hegemonic masculinity (Moisio et al., 2013). We found that some analyzed articles contain evidence for maintaining these models of

gender identity in the domestic space, illustrating ways of doing gender through public discourses and private spatial practices.

In the nineteenth century England, in the home decoration manuals there was a strong distinction among gendered spaces (Hamlett, 2009): the parlor, the reception room, and the morning room were considered feminine, identified by many decorations in light colors; while the dining room, the smoking room, the billiard room, the library and the studio, masculine spaces, identified by expensive, solid and dark furniture, expressing the richness of the family. Yet, domestic inventories showed that only aristocratic and middle-class families complied with these conventions, the big surface of their house being a resource for doing gender. In those privileged houses, the masculine smoking room reflects the men's power in the family, exposing objects like guns, sumptuous chairs or the vault of the family; also, the masculine billiard room was decorated with oak furniture, crocodile leather upholstery, hunting trophies or souvenirs from exotic places. The analysis of autobiographies showed how the study room, with sober decorations, reflected the man's of the house status, reflecting his rational occupation and intimidating the little boys from the household. Similarly, the bedrooms were adorned according to feminine conventions, in lilac shades, with bows and satin sheets, creating repulsion to little girls. Overall, home decoration manuals offered recipes to stage and perform the scripts for doing gender based on reproducing strong gender asymmetries and power positions. Women were conventionally placed in spaces associated with body care and emotional tasks (socialization and child caring) while men with mind-related work, leisure time, and prestige.

In colonial India, the situation was different. The domestic feminine identity was modeled by colonist ideological rhetoric, putting Indian women in an inferior position (Stevenson, 2013). The social construction of domestic space of the colonized was shaped by "imaginary geographies" (Said, 1991: p. 49), imposed through power, by using symbolic images and moralizing speeches. In this way, the feminine identity of natives was linked to domesticity by British colonists' women, who assumed a role of religious missionaries, imposing to Indian women their Victorian domestic ideals. The colonists saw femininity with pity and compassion and defined it as oppressed, savage, uncivilized and uneducated, needing to be "domesticated". In this context, feminine domesticity did not appear naturally, it was imposed from outside, by associating women with the duty to civilize the domestic space.

Women's association with domestic space and domestic work is still present in contemporary society. In the Global North (North America, Western Europe and developed parts of East Asia), the kitchen is still an important arena where gender inequalities are reaffirmed (Meah, 2014). There is evidence that, between 1960 and 1990, in 16 developed countries, although the time assigned by men to housework increased and the one assigned by women decreased, women continue to be responsible, at least at organizing level, for domestic tasks (Kan et al., 2011). Another example is the case of highly qualified men emigrating from the UK to Dubai. Because the association of men with public space and of women with domestic space is very strong, women cannot find

good paying jobs, and they become housewives (Walsh, 2011). This shows how women's connection with domestic space continues to play an important role in doing gender.

Traditionally, doing gender in the domestic space involved the display of gender differences, through gendered objects, spaces, and practices. Morrison (2013) shows that, for heterosexual couples, gender differences are identified in the domestic space through seeing: separate bathrooms, separate cabinets or drawers where each retains various personal possessions, and other gendered objects displayed in the house (men's shoes bigger than women's shoes, women's dresses, women's magazines, men's collections of comedy movies, women's collections of romantic music, personal care products that meet the various constructed needs of men and women etc.). As well, women are doing gender by displaying in their home couple photos, usually wedding photos, in the best moments of their relationship. We could conclude, agreeing with Warren (2010), that doing gender by displaying particular objects inside the house is strongly influenced by doing conventional sexual orientation, by complying with heteronormativity. These institutionalized instruments act as a resource for displaying gender through the physical features of social setting.

In another study, Morrison (2012) argues the spatial structure and design of the dwelling influence intimacy practices, and support power relations between men and women. He evidenced that men are labeled by women as intrusive or annoying when they initiated touching gestures while women are doing domestic tasks. Regarding spatial practices, Maller et al. (2012) observes that during house' renovation, even if there is not a clear division of tasks between men and women, men enjoy more to act as experts, taking the technology-related tasks and do-it-yourself (DIY) ones. This means that domestic space can become a stage with standardized social occasions for doing gender.

The process of doing gender in the domestic space involves the accountability component because women are seen as responsible for domestic tasks and sanctioned accordingly. Warren (2010) starts from the assumption that domestic space can be a source of shame or pride for the residents, which influence the decision of having guests (when they are proud, they often invite many people in the entire house, when they are ashamed, they select a small group of people inviting them only in specific rooms). One of the biggest sources of shame is a house that is not clean or ordered, according to which women are judged. In this situation, women are doing gender being the only ones in the family excusing to guests for the mess in the house, and explaining that they did not have enough time to clean the house. Through a self-regulating process, women are legitimizing the traditional gender coded duty to clean and order the domestic space.

Studies from the last decades show that some dimensions of women's and man's relationships with the domestic space are changing, changeling normative conventions about masculinity and femininity. To picture these transformations, some researchers have used concepts like "domestic masculinity" (Moisio et al., 2013) or "the new man" (Gorman-Murray, 2008). We consider the results of recent researches might be also interpreted as signs for of emergence of an alternative "domestic femininity", different from the conventionally defined one. In the following paragraphs, we will question to what extent the characteristics of these alternative gender identities are signs of undoing

gender (reducing gender differences) by detaching from the characteristics of masculinity and femininity conventionally considered natural and essential.

Emergence of alternative domestic masculinities

Moisio et al. (2013: p.298) apply the concept of "domestic masculinity", defined as "the creation of masculine identity by forging a distinctly male domain of consumption activity at home", to research bricolage home-improvement projects among men. The main result was that, for men with high cultural capital, bricolage activities produce a domestic masculinity called the "suburban artisan"; while, for those with low cultural capital, a domestic masculinity called the "family handyman".

Because of their habit to perform abstract tasks at work, the high-cultural-capital men engage in domestic DIY projects to experience the concreteness and corporality of manual labor commonly associated with the working-class men. For these men, bricolage activities are ways of displaying their masculine role in which the domestic space becomes a front stage, with specific props (uniforms, tools, etc.). This identity is encouraged by bricolage TV-shows, representing man as the home' renovation expert. Playing this role means adopting a specific discipline centered on the rejection of hedonism and the tempering of impatience by practicing meticulously. For these men, work itself is more pleasant than its product, the best sources of pleasure being: the rigorous planning, the staging, the commitment to performance standards, the pursuit of excellence of procedures and the entrance into competition with other men carrying out similar projects. So the suburban artisans feed their gender identity from frustration about the public space of professional work, transforming house renovation projects into leisure activities, with a therapeutic role rooted into experiencing manual work and gaining new masculine skills.

Low-cultural-capital men approach differently their domestic bricolage projects. They perceive the house as a second job, where renovations are not done for pleasure, but out of duty. Their pleasure comes not from the work itself, but from the satisfaction of complying with family's expectations. By activating gender stereotypes, they label women as technically incompetent, unable to handle the tools, depending on men's help; and men as having native abilities for bricolage and as being happy to exercise their superior dexterity for their family. For these categories, not the work process is important, but the display of its finished product, the public praise, and approval. These men refuse to ask for expert advice or for help from someone else from the outside. By renovating the house on their own, they prove they can secure the economic independence of their family. The home' renovations become a way to display compliance with the provider ideal on which the family could rely on. Summarizing, the "family handymen" feed their identity from frustration coming from the domestic space and family life, transforming their home into a workplace where bricolage projects become ways to assume conventional gender codes, to comply with the breadwinner role expectations, and to make sure the family has what it needs.

Therefore, both types of men are, at the same time, doing and undoing gender in their own particular styles. Finding refuge and satisfaction in the domestic space through carrying out personal DIY projects, although domestic space is a traditional woman's territory, is a form of undoing gender. This process also involves doing gender by activating traditional gender differences, like: the importance of their paid work job from the public space, men's association with expertise and performance as sources of status, competition, physical strength of corporal work, leisure activities (for high-cultural-capital men), and technical skills, dexterity, independence, ability to provide resources for the family (for low-cultural-capital men). The perception that women depend on men's help due to their technical incompetence is another way of doing gender.

Meah (2014), like Stevenson (2009), brings new evidence in favor of the manifestation, in contemporary society, of the process of undoing gender through redefining masculinity's relationships with public and private spaces. There is a change in what was earlier considered domestic duties of women. Men are involving more and more in what was conventionally coded as feminine tasks in the domestic space, which transforms the spatialization of power and the definitions of masculine and feminine identities. "The new men" have started to become a partner by engaging in domestic work (Kan et al., 2011), especially in cooking, childcare, decoration and home arrangements (Meah & Jackson, 2013; Walsh, 2011; Gorman-Murray, 2008; Osnowitz, 2008). A particular context to study men's involvement in the domestic tasks is the case of couples working from home. According to Osnowitz (2008), men who work from home engage more in domestic tasks and are proud to do childcare, to play their role as a father. So home-based paid work can drop the spatial and temporal borders between public and private space, assuring flexibility in reconciling work and family life and diminishing conventional gender codes in the division of domestic tasks. Therefore, home-based work could be considered an emerging institutional resource facilitating the process of undoing gender.

By analyzing closer the particularities of men's involvement in cooking in the domestic space, one could also see signs of doing gender, through reproducing gender asymmetries. Under the influence of TV cooking shows, hosted by men chefs, men are more present in the kitchen (conventionally considered a woman's space), defining a new way of cooking, not for nurturing the family, but as a hobby, as a lifestyle option, as a display of their complex personality (Meah & Jackson, 2013). This leads to material changes in the kitchen, by increasing the endowment of technological devices, and increasing women's load of cleaning the kitchen afterward. The authors interpret that men's involvement in culinary activities does not represent a democratization of domestic tasks, but rather a redefinition of masculinity. In brief, men engage in domestic tasks selectively, in their own way (with advanced technological equipment, with different standards of cleanness and order in the kitchen, practiced occasionally or as a hobby), maybe, to avoid feminization (Meah, 2014). Men's involvement in home decoration was documented mainly for particular social categories of bachelors, homosexuals, and migrants. The particularities of these social categories could be considered premises for facilitating the process of undoing, or even redoing, gender.

The association of bachelor men with home decoration and style has been popularized by media. Osgerby (2005) presents the "archetype of bachelor's apartment" by studying its representation in design magazines and American movies, from the period between 1930 and 1965. Bachelors' apartments were linked to elegance, displayed through designers' signature furniture and advanced technological equipment. One could identify the process of undoing gender in the proliferation of the representation of bachelor's apartment as an alternative to the normative model of masculinity; but also the process of doing gender because the bachelor's expression through consumption and style is interpreted by the author as a tactic for reaffirming the traditional masculinity based on virility, seduction, and affinity with advanced technology.

Popular media discourse has contributed to the association of homosexual men with home decoration and style. Attwood (2005) concludes the increasing number of TV-shows, presenting the model of homosexual men as the expert in home decoration, contributed to their association with refined tastes. Since the display in the public space of masculine identity of homosexual men might be sanctioned, domestic space offers them a refuge and a place of resistance against heteronormativity, where they can develop and display, for a selected audience, new alternative forms of masculine identity (Gorman-Murray, 2008). Without enough arguments, one can only speculate that, in the particular case of homosexual men, domestic space might become a private stage for redoing gender.

Conventional gender stereotypes associate emotions and embodiment with femininity, not with masculinity. Assuming masculinity was conventionally linked with the public space and men's embodiment of experiences understood as an effect of the disciplinary power of paid work, Gorman-Murray (2013) privileges the research of the embodiment of men's experiences in the domestic space. The author notes that men use their body to mark the difference between public and private space. The domestic space becomes a front stage where men use specific body uniforms to display their domestic masculinity and distinguish from other masculinities: at home, they take-off their suits worn at work, signifying rationality and control of the body, and put on more loose and enjoyable ones, associated with emotion and sensuality. This equipment is important for doing their domestic masculinity, as many men declared to be anxious or unable to express their emotions when they could not change their clothes after they arrive home. Domestic space can also become a backstage where men prepare for their appearance in the public space: bathing, shaving, choosing their clothes, etc.).

The migration experience creates particular situations in which traditional masculinity could be challenged. Walsh (2011) brings evidence in favor of the emergence of domestic masculinity by studying British emigrants in Dubai. For men, the migration experience is associated with alienation, difficulty feeling at home in the host country, and insecurity about the risk of being sent back to the country of origin. Owing to these factors, men migrants are finding refuge in the domestic space, perceived as a source of stability, where they redefine the normative model of masculinity. Particular migrant men are undoing gender through domestic routines conventionally coded as feminine: gardening or decorating the house. They are colonizing their domestic space with

sentimental objects brought from their country of origin. Not all these activities are ways of undoing gender, some of them being ways of doing gender, because they also display in their home traditional gender objects: hunting trophies that work as visual anchors for the traditional masculinity associated with sports, competition, and status display; souvenirs from locations meaning men's association with travel, adventure, and discovery of new territories.

Emergence of alternative domestic femininities

We believe not only masculinity is changing through the emergence of alternative identities associated with domesticity, but also femininity through new ways of signifying their relationship with domestic space and of negotiating work from domestic and public space. The results from recent studies could be interpreted in the light of the emergence of alternative domestic femininity as ways of both doing and undoing gender.

By analyzing migrants cooking practices in the Global North, Meah (2014) shows some contemporary manifestations of domestic femininity from other cultures, bringing evidence for the idea that domestic femininity could be unlike the one usually defined in Western culture as oppressive. The kitchen is not universally the place where gender inequality is produced. In other cultures, it is understood as a place of resistance, where women are doing pleasurable activities, negotiating and contesting gender asymmetries. For instance, for Mexican immigrants in the USA, cooking is represented as a celebration and affirmation of women's talents, for women the kitchen being a space of autonomy and freedom to resist domination from the public space and family. For African immigrants in the USA, cooking is a materialization of women's creativity, love, and sharing, the kitchen being a place to escape racial oppression. In the case of Bengali immigrants in the USA, cooking is signified by women as a gift and sacrifice for the family, almost a sacred activity that confers them symbolic power. These immigrant women are doing gender by performing an activity traditionally associated with women's oppression and are undoing gender by positively signifying and using this activity, which becomes an empowering instrument.

According to the same study (Meah, 2014), the situation is different in the Global South (Africa, Latin America, and developing Asia, including the Middle East). In these cultures, food preparation is the responsibility of the extended family (not just the nuclear one) and often occurs outside the home. For example, in many African communities, the women's authority over food preparation is a form of exerting power within the family: women decide what the family eats and when, to whom and how food is distributed. In South America, the association of women with kitchen and cooking has led to the crystallization of a state-sponsored group of women for food production at community level. In India, women's preparation of food has empowered them to start protests to highlight their role in feeding the family. Kan et al. (2011) bring evidence that even in some countries in the Global North, like the UK, men who cook are taking tasks subordinated to women, and that women have a lot of power in the kitchen. Similarly, in Spain, cooking is interpreted by women as a source of status, pleasure and power, men

being ridiculed for failing to deal effectively with cooking. These examples show how women's association with domestic food preparation tasks, although it is commonly labeled as a way of doing gender, can become a source of power that is exercised not only in the domestic space, but also outside it, challenging conventional gender asymmetries, which means undoing gender.

Another argument in favor of the emergence of an alternative domestic femininity is that traditional women's associations with particular ritualistic behaviors, taking place at specific moments in time in the domestic space, are redefined by women in positive terms. Vachhani & Pullen (2011) start from the observation that in the dominant discourse is expected that at Christmas women to assume the entire housework burden associated with this holiday, which would mean the reactivation of women's traditional roles would make them feel oppressed and overcharged. In addition, the authors take into account that Christmas activates the promotion of consumerism that idealizes the capitalist satisfaction of desire through buying commodities. Their study shows that at Christmas, the domestic space can be a place of women's liberation, providing them comfort and refuge against marketing aggressiveness and against the everyday pressure put on women from the public space. By performing housework during Christmas, which is commonly labeled as a way of doing gender, they are actually undoing gender by rediscovering domesticity as a place of production, fulfillment, and love, redefining a domestic femininity based on the regeneration of relationships with their close ones. Therefore, the study suggests that nowadays, the capitalization of consumerism and commercialism of specific events facilitates the withdrawal of women in the domestic space and the affirmation of an alternative feminine identity dissimilar with the traditional oppressive one. These are institutional factors acting as a resource for undoing gender in the domestic space.

A similar argument comes from González (2005), interested in how social change, in Spanish rural communities based on traditional gender ideology, influence the meaning invested by women in the domestic space and housework. Starting from the premise that people's emotions are ideologically conditioned, the author focused on the situation of women living in a rural area, having low education, and being housewives married to manual workers. For these women, domestic space is simultaneously the place of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, perceived both as a source of burden and as a refuge, a medium for doing and undoing gender. Domestic space is understood as an extension of the women, a source of both pride and shame, a place where the involvement of men is preferable to be minimal, where the women, although feeling trapped and overloaded with domestic tasks, find ways to relax, to be satisfied and to express freely their individuality. A similar conclusion was reached by Long (2013), based on studying the situation of Palestinian immigrant women in Britain, highlighting the domestic space of the migrant women, working as housemaids, becomes their refuge place where they seek to harmonize interior life and cultural identity with the exterior pressures from the public space. In other words, in the domestic space, women do gender by embracing oppressive gender ideologies; however, they also undo gender through positive and personal constructions of the domestic space and domestic tasks.

Staying in the sphere of ideologies, it was considered the effect of gender oppressive ideologies on women is similar, and maybe associated, to the impact of heteronormativity on how sexual minorities construct their home. In this regard, Gorman-Murray (2007) shows that homosexual people signify their domestic space by complying with the normative heterosexual model (they are doing heterosexuality), although their interpretations are made through their own individuality (they are undoing heterosexuality). Thus, trying to challenge the dominant ideology they put the highest value on privacy-related housing meanings denied in public, they resist the dominant model, finding in the domestic space safety and emotional support out of discrimination. So these studies bring evidence that the domestic space can be a place of resistance to the dominant ideology, and a frame facilitating the manifestation of alternative domestic identities.

A particular situation is that of couples in which both partners are working from home, creating opportunities for undoing, and maybe redoing, gender. Osnowitz (2008) shows that women working from home do not confront with the difficulty of adjusting the rhythms of family life to the rhythms of the corporation to advance in their careers and are negotiating domestic tasks with their partners.

Discussion: Multi-dimensionality of doing and undoing gender

In this paper, we argue that domestic space can be studied as an arena for doing and undoing gender, as a context for understanding the contemporary transformations of gender identity. Doing gender enforces the maintenance of conventional masculine and feminine identities based on the traditional oppositions between mind and body, rational and emotional, and public and private; however, undoing gender enforces the emergence of alternative feminine and masculine identities. The emergence of alternative domestic masculinity is supported by the fact that men are orienting towards the domestic space where they involve in domestic tasks (like cooking, raising children, gardening, etc.), developing bricolage projects, decorating their home and using their body to connect with their emotions and sensuality. The emergence of alternative domestic femininity is supported by the fact that, in particular cultures from the Global South, women's engagement in domestic tasks is a source of their symbolic or sacred power within the family and in the public sphere; while, in the Global North, it is lived as a tactic against the alienation due to depersonalization and commercialization from the public sphere, a way to relax, to express freely their individuality and to connect with their close ones.

First, doing and undoing gender can be studied as a relational process mediated by space and power. Based on the persistence of conventional gender identities, one could assert, in agreement with Meah (2014), that by introducing space in the analysis of the process of doing gender we can come to a more nuanced understanding of how gender and power are related and co-constitutive. Home is not only a stage for gender display, yet it is also an agency influencing doing and undoing gender by the opportunities and constraints imposed through the material and symbolic dimensions of the domestic space. It is accepted that the ideologies embedded in the domestic space produce

through spatial practices specific ways of doing gender asymmetries. Domestic space allows us to see masculinity and femininity, defined not only as a zero-sum game of characteristics, but also starting from similar spatial practices and similar orientations towards private life. Based on the evidence and interpretations provided by the analyzed studies, one might infer that, in the domestic space, gendered spaces are not only reflections of the cultural construction of gender differences (Löw, 2006), but also have the potential to become cultural constructions of gender similarities and of crossing the borders of traditional gender asymmetries (between mind and body, rational and emotional and public and private). Besides their commonly accepted definition (Löw & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2001), gendered spaces could also be conceptualized as places of resistance where one could undo gender, and deconstruct masculine hegemony. In this process, the material things, expressing the ideology of the consumer culture promoted in the media (through home decoration magazines, cooking, bricolage or design TV shows, and movies) as a lifestyle choice, can influence both doing and undoing gender. The gendered objects are instruments through which popular culture manifests in the domestic space and produce and reproduce (un)conventional gender codes.

Second, doing and undoing gender can be understood as a single dynamic process. In the analysis of the emergence of alternative masculine and feminine domestic identities, it is difficult to separate clearly between the processes of doing and undoing gender. There are arguments in favor of specific changes taking place in masculine and feminine identity due to the orientation and of both genders towards domestic space. However, all these changes are made based on traditional components, some conventional gender stereotypes being reinforced by these transformations. Therefore, a clear line between doing and undoing gender cannot be drawn. Every analyzed spatial practice and spatial representation might be interpreted as having components of both doing and undoing gender. This does not mean the concept of doing and undoing gender is not useful. It might be considered weak only if one starts from the assumption that the concept should be helpful in drawing a clear line between traditional and modern gender identities, and give a decisive answer between oppression and gender equality. We consider the concept adequate in showing how gender identity and domestic space mutually interact through a relational process with two facets happening in the same space. For instance, in the heterosexual couple, the fact that some men are doing spatial practices to display domestic masculinities and to undo gender could activate in their women partners practices for doing gender. Also, when particular men decide to express their individuality as domestic masculinity, this could also generate in the same person resistance spatial practices to maintain traditional masculinity. If women perform at home traditional gender activities and understand them as ways of undoing gender, it does not mean that masculine hegemony was eliminated for good. The important note here is to take into account the definition of the situation (whether women are signifying a particular space and a particular spatial practice as oppressive). We interpret these findings as possible indicators that doing and undoing gender are not two processes, but one in which traditional and alternative gender identities melt into one another, showing that we are still in a transitional period towards gender equality and/or gender neutrality.

Moreover, another possible approach might have been to interpret the results through the process of "redoing gender", understood by Connell (2010) and Butler (2004) as making gender differences irrelevant in social interactions and thinking in gender-neutral terms. Even if there were some evidence compatible with this view, in the cases of homosexual men as experts in decorating their apartments (Attwood, 2005) and of couples in which both partners are working from home transgressing the gender division of domestic tasks (Osnowitz, 2008), we do not think this to be the norm, rather the exception. Because there is also evidence that traditional gender identities based on strong power positions are still present, even in the contexts where domestic masculinities and domestic femininities emerge, we appreciate that doing and undoing gender is a more reliable concept to study contemporary dynamics of gender identities.

Third, we synthesize that doing and undoing gender is a dynamic multi-dimensional process embedded in the domestic space. For instance, by doing the same spatial practice in the same place inside the home, people from one social class can signify it as doing gender while people from another social class as undoing gender. In the same space, through similar spatial practice, different social classes might rely on unequal access to resources for doing and undoing gender. In addition, a specific contestation of a traditional gender assumption might generate a reaction to reinforce it in another domestic context using a different spatial practice. What is interpreted as doing gender in one particular culture and in one particular historical time might be interpreted as undoing gender in another culture and in another time. The implications of this multi-dimensionality of the concept is that when we study doing and undoing gender in the domestic space we should specify its network of particularities (places in the home, spatial practices, material objects, media discourse, identities, intimate relationships, cultural and historical contexts) and trace the complex dynamics between them.

Concluding remarks

Since the analyzed articles tend to over-represent the extreme manifestations of these alternative identities (among bachelors, homosexuals, migrants), we consider that more studies are needed about the relation between domestic space and gender identity in the non-migrant heterosexual couples. As well, most of the analyzed studies were focused on middle-class families from Anglo-American cultures or on particular communities from the Global South, some other socio-cultural contexts might contribute to nuance the understanding of the dynamics of gender identity (like, for instance, the post-socialist countries of Central or Eastern Europe). We also believe the study of contemporary gender identity through domestic spatial practices has contributed to the development of a complex and diverse palette of research techniques and instruments (listed in the Materials and Method section) that could be adopted by future studies to better understand the process of doing and undoing gender.

Apart from the limits described in the Materials and Method section, we reassert the aim of this paper is not to confirm a theory or to eliminate established concepts, based only on a small number of studies from various contexts. Our intention is only to

launch a conversation, by offering some hypothetical interpretations of the results, to encourage orienting future studies towards testing some of them (or similar ones) empirically in particular socio-cultural locations and for particular socio-cultural categories.

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