

# Pandemic and macho organizations: Wake-up call or business as usual?

Rafael Alcadipani 

General Management Department, FGV-EAESP, Brazil

## Correspondence

Rafael Alcadipani, General Management Department, FGV-EAESP, Avenida 9 de Julho, 2029, CEP:01313-902, São Paulo, SP, Brazil.  
Email: rafael.alcadipani@fgv.br

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The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the greatest challenges of our generation. The global spread of the virus is affecting societies' gender dynamics in general and in organizations in particular. Based on ethnographic research being carried out in a police organization in Brazil, this piece discusses how COVID-19 is impacting hegemonic masculinity in organizations. Police organizations are prototypical hegemonic masculinity organizations. I argue that the COVID-19 pandemic at first encouraged the performance of the typical police macho masculinity, but as the disease progressed, it created a situation that challenged it. I explore that even though the pandemic threatens macho masculinity in organizations, it is still unclear if an alternative gender dynamic will emerge from this crisis in macho organizations.

## KEYWORDS

COVID-19, macho masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, police

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Different world leaders are positing COVID-19 as the greatest challenge of our time. The effects on people's lives are immense and profound as COVID-19 is impacting one of the central cornerstones of all human societies: social interaction. It is also affecting the economy and a myriad of taken-for-granted assumptions in our lives. It has changed our lives very rapidly and it is still unclear how the world will emerge once the COVID-19 situation is under control.

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting gender dynamics and bringing gender gaps to the surface in many societies. The pandemic has been surrounded by a macho discourse of war all over the world. In some places, domestic violence against women is on the rise. Besides, while many are being forced to work from home, the uneven distribution of care work between men and women becomes more evident (e.g., care of the elderly and homeschooling young children). However, at the same time, new forms of gender and inter-gender solidarity are emerging making the COVID-19 pandemic an important time for gender-related research.

If, on the one hand, the pandemic affects minorities and the vulnerable more seriously, it can also have impacts on the performance of macho-dominated organizations. I realize this due to ethnographic fieldwork that I have been carrying out in a police force in Brazil. Police officers, a highly hegemonic masculine group, are one of the key front-line workers in this pandemic. As a result, they are also suffering high levels of COVID-19 contamination, some of which have resulted in death. To raise some questions concerning COVID-19 and hegemonic masculinity, I am writing this piece to shed light on how COVID-19 is impacting hegemonic masculinity performances in organizations. I am calling this an opinion piece because I would like to share my impressions of COVID-19 and hegemonic masculinity in these rather uncertain times. Most of the studies on gender in the police have focused on women and 'little is known about men's experience of policing through a gendered lens as men or through a theoretical lens of masculinity' (Silvestri, 2017, p. 38).

To reflect on the impacts of COVID-19 on masculinity, first I discuss the police as a prototypical hegemonic masculine organization. Then, I discuss how COVID-19 is impacting the ethnographic fieldwork I have been carrying out in the police in Brazil and also how to keep doing research in a pandemic. Later, I discuss how the police macho masculinity has been displayed in the pandemic to later show how COVID-19 threatens police macho masculinity. Finally, I argue that the pandemic situation is potentially putting in danger macho masculinity in organizations, however, I also hypothesize that it is still unclear if COVID-19 will give place to alternative gender dynamics in organizations.

Writing this piece has been important to understand and also to deal with several threats COVID-19 poses to all of us. The pandemic washes away any possibility of knowing what will happen to us, to our loved ones and also to society. Seeing the hundreds of deaths every day by COVID-19 makes our finitude even more salient and transparent. Social isolation makes providing care to our elderly parents more difficult. Furthermore, I am facing this disease from Brazil where the far-right proto-fascist president is possibly one of the worst world leaders responding to this pandemic. He defies social isolation publicly almost every day, and every week he takes part in public demonstrations against the already fragile Brazilian democracy. Bolsonaro, the Brazilian president, is the typical 'tough and forceful' macho who thinks he knows it all, that problems can be solved by public displays of strength and by far-right bravado. When asked by journalists about the COVID-19 increasing death toll, Bolsonaro replied: 'So what?' He shows no solidarity to people at all and is a macho role model of carelessness and stupidity. Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world and social isolation is an impossibility for most poor Brazilians, be it due to lack of adequate housing and sanitation, be it due to the need to work, sometimes making delivery of goods and services to the rich. There are reports that poor women who work providing care for the rich are the most susceptible to die from the virus in Brazil. I think writing this piece in these extraordinary times is a way to challenge macho masculinity in organizations.

## 2 | ORGANIZATIONS AND MASCULINITIES: POLICE AS THE PROTOTYPICAL HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY ORGANIZATION

Research on masculinities and organizations (e.g., Ackroyd & Crowdy, 1990; Alcadipani & Tonelli, 2014; Cheng, 1996; Collinson & Hearn, 1994, 1996; Kerfoot & Knights, 1998; Knights & Clarke, 2017; Knights & Kerfoot, 2004; Pullen & Knights, 2007) analyses mainly how problematic performances of masculinities aid in the perpetuation of institutional inequalities and violence, and hegemonic masculinity is rather present in governing work organizations (Knights & Pullen, 2019). In so doing, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been crucial in the development of studies of masculinities in organizations (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Knights & Tullberg, 2012). The term hegemony comes from Gramsci (see Donaldson, 1993) and hegemonic masculinity signifies a 'culturally idealized form of the masculine character' (Connell, 1993, p. 23). This is the conventional dominant form of masculinity constructed in opposition to femininities and related to other subordinated, marginalized and colonized modes of masculinities (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Forms of masculinities can be seen as stemming from

power relations and can be characterized as either hegemonic or subaltern in relation to one another (Collinson & Hearn, 1994).

I depart from the view that gender is continuously performed (Knights & Tullberg, 2012) and from the assumption that masculinities must be accomplished, they are not static (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Knights, 2019). Masculinities are therefore in a constant process of being constructed in specific social situations, reproducing or changing social structures (Connell, 1993; Messerschmidt, 1993). Organizations are an important setting for the achievement and performance of masculinities (Ackroyd & Crowdy, 1990; Cheng, 1996; Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Kerfoot & Knights, 1998) as well as where hegemonic masculinities can be challenged (Peukert, 2019).

Historically, hegemonic masculinity has been strongly tied to social institutions such as the family, religion and work (Connell, 1993). Similar to the military (Karazi-Presler, 2020; Lee, Shirmohammadi, Baumgartner, Oh, & Han, 2019) and fire departments (Perrott, 2019), hegemonic masculinity is distinctively prevalent in police organizations (see O'Neill, Mars, & Singh, 2007). This makes police organizations an 'overwhelming masculine institution' (Willis, 2013, p. 80) where the cult of masculinity is the defining characteristic of the police occupational culture (Fielding, 1994; Smith & Gray, 1985), even though there are places of resistance (Dick, 2015).

Police occupational culture has been portrayed as essentially masculine 'with an emphasis on virility, toughness, masculinity, and masculine interests such as sexual triumphs, sports, outdoor life, and so forth' (Van Maanen, 1978, p. 228). Specifically, police officers self-perceived themselves as masculine heroes who take on all danger to fight crime (Manning, 1977) and are typically male, white and heterosexual (Foster, 2003), assuming a taken-for-granted heterosexual masculinity (Loftus, 2008) in which homosexuality is perceived as deviance (Burke, 1993). Since the police academy, police officers are in contact with a hidden curriculum teaching hegemonic masculinity to novices (Prokos & Padavic, 2002). Physical displays of masculinity and bravery to face danger, is a central characteristic that defines the 'macho' police officer (Crank, 2004; Dick & Cassell, 2004; Young, 1991). Another important element of police occupational culture is a masculine favouring of reason over emotion (Fassin, 2013) which can even play down stress in everyday police work (Yates, Riach, & Johansson, 2018).

The cult of masculinity is performed, for example, in police storytelling within the organization, making a natural feature the use of violence and force when facing 'bad guys' (Dick, 2005) and also the need to prove their masculinity in daily work (Wilson, 1968). These stories construct the (macho) heroic police identity (Bayley, 1994; Van Maanen, 1980). The masculine body in terms of physical strength is perceived as the main tool the police officer possesses (Courpasson & Monties, 2017; Rubinstein, 1973). Moreover, there is the necessity to display 'tough and forceful' behaviours, represented by an aggressive, competitive and performance-driven leadership style (Silvestri, 2003, 2007). In so doing, machismo, an exaggerated version of masculinity, is a central element of police organizations. Even for those who advocate a more nuanced view on masculinity in police organizations (see Silvestri, 2017), it is recognized that masculinity is a key element of police occupational culture, both amongst patrol officers (e.g., Manning & Van Maanen, 1978) and detectives (e.g., Ericson, 1981; Innes, 2003).

Despite attempts to reform and make police organizations more gender-equal and less masculine, Brown (2007) argues that machismo is a fundamental characteristic of police occupational culture and has become a core and basic assumption that informs the nature of police work and their work environment. If machismo and masculinity are cornerstones of police occupational culture, how will these elements play out in the extreme context of pandemic times when police officers need to be deployed to the front line? In this reflection, I will discuss this issue based on ethnographic research I have been doing with police detectives in Brazil.

### 3 | RESEARCHING THE POLICE IN A PANDEMIC: I AM NOT INDIANA JONES

In Brazil, there are mainly two police forces at the state level: one responsible for patrol and crime prevention activities (the military police) and the other in charge of investigating crimes (the detective police). The research for this

article was conducted in the detective police force. Brazil has one of the highest homicide rates in the world and uncountable public safety concerns. The police force also face several problems such as high rates of suicide and occupational diseases among detectives. Much of the equipment they use is obsolete and detectives face severe difficulties in managing basic aspects of their work, such as logistics, managing people and financial resources.

The research that inspires this article adopts an ethnographic approach (Spradley, 1980; Van Maanen, 1979, 2006, 2011). Despite the fact that this research has been ongoing for almost eight years and I have observed police activities in various police district areas (the homicide division, the anti-kidnapping division, the police academy and tactical units), for this article I use data gathered during the first month of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. I also teach pro bono regularly at the police academy, as a way to report back to the police on my findings and impressions from my research.

I will report a confessional tale that emphasizes fieldwork as a social construction (Van Maanen, 1988). Due to the long-term nature of this research, I developed a strong relationship of trust in the police force. Today, I commonly receive phone calls from police personnel who reach out to me to tell their stories. They are detectives with whom I would exchange daily smartphone instant messages and, before the pandemic, had lunch with or went out for a drink with at least once a week.

The perception that the COVID-19 pandemic was a real problem started as news arrived portraying the grave situation in Italy, especially because many Brazilians often travel to Italy on a regular basis. It was then that I started to wonder when the virus would arrive and spread in Brazil and, as front-line workers, how the police would be severely impacted. I was very enthusiastic about doing fieldwork under pandemic times, as all over the world police forces are enacting containment measures and facing great difficulties that this crisis poses. In Brazil, officers have already been contaminated, and there is an ongoing need for the police worldwide to stay on the streets to either enforce lockdowns or even to collect samples for testing for COVID-19. Moreover, when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Brazil, I had just received approval of external funding to do research on the police detectives' use of technology and how this impacts labelling practices.

Nevertheless, I had to postpone the beginning of the new research phase due to the pandemic. Given the health issues associated with COVID-19, I chose to protect myself and my family and interrupt the ethnographic research. I am terrified about how this disease could affect myself, my family, my friends inside and outside the police and also the organization I have been doing research on for the past eight years. This has been a difficult decision, as I wanted to be out with the police in these challenging times and do my research. However, I keep saying to myself 'I am an academic, I am not Indiana Jones.' I recognized that I was not 'macho enough' not to fear COVID-19, a feeling that is really liberating. I think I have ambiguous feelings towards police occupational culture. On the one hand, I often felt disgusted and sick at police detectives' macho talk and attitudes and, on the other, I also identify with the police occupational culture: otherwise I would not have been doing this research for such a long period of time. I am coming to terms with the fact that not doing fieldwork during this pandemic time is a way to distance myself from the police and reaffirm my (less masculine?) academic identity.

To research the pandemic, I decided to use online and virtual research means (Akemu & Abdelnour, 2018; Luff & Heath, 2019; Moylan, Derr, & Lindhorst, 2015). I am part of some police detectives' instant messaging groups and I can also easily reach police detectives via instant messaging and phone calls. Each day, I have been writing very detailed field notes and memos (Fretz, Emerson, & Shaw, 1995) about the impact of COVID-19 on police detectives. I follow an inductive research process that originates from my 'thick description' of the field to generate an account that is both analytical and integrated into theory (Van Maanen, 1979). I have also been inspired by Spradley (1980, p. 14) who suggested 'before you impose your theories on the people you study, find out how those people define the world'. Since my thoughts about being a researcher and not Indiana Jones and from the dialogues I was having with police detectives, it became evident that the pandemic was challenging the heart of the police detectives to force masculine assumptions. I decided to write this because it helps me to deal with the social distancing situation, my distancing from the ethnographic real-time fieldwork and as a way to think about the unprecedented challenges this pandemic situation will create for all of us. Moreover, I think that doing

police research has been linked to my masculine identity and having time to step back and be reflexive is always important.

#### 4 | DISPLAYS OF POLICE MACHO MASCULINITY IN PANDEMIC TIMES

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Two days later, I was meant to give a talk to 215 sworn-in police detectives at the management school where I work. This was part of a management module that I organize pro bono for the Police Detectives Academy. Given that the police force has severe mismanagement issues, I thought that bringing new detectives to be taught at this institution, one of the most renowned management schools in the country, would make a positive impression of the benefits of good management among the detectives starting their careers. This impression, I reckoned, would help them to remember the importance of good management for their institution in the years to come.

On 12 March 2020, the head of my school decided to cancel all activities due to the fear of COVID-19 spreading among our community and all our teaching activities migrated online. Our school was one of the first educational institutions in Brazil to cancel all classes. Concerned about cancelling my talk altogether, the senior management at the police academy and I decided to give the talk at the police academy headquarters, even though the small auditorium would be crowded. Two important cultural issues were at stake here. First, I learnt from police culture (Manning, 1977; Rubinstein, 1973) that you have to keep your word to preserve your reputation. If you say you will do something, you had better do it. Second, displays of fear are not taken well. Saying that I would not teach due to personal concerns over COVID-19 would be seen as a 'sissy behaviour' and I would be the butt of little jokes. However, I knew if I cancelled the presentation, the police people would be completely fine about it. I was pressuring myself to do this. I felt that I had to keep my word even if this would mean I could be contaminated by COVID-19.

Upon arriving in the academy to give my talk, I was informed that students were concerned about being in an overcrowded auditorium in times of COVID-19. At the time, this seemed to be an overreaction. In mid-March, even though COVID-19 was already a global threat, Brazil was just two weeks into the aftermath of carnival, when millions of people took to the streets of the country to party and there were fewer than 20 COVID-19 cases confirmed in the country. People were just starting to get worried about the virus, but life was going on as usual.

When I was going to the lecture theatre, a police detective who works at the academy approached me and said,

*Professor, there are some students concerned about attending your talk due to COVID-19. I don't understand, we are the police! If there is a zombie apocalypse, we are the ones who will need to get our weapons to hunt zombies down. How can they be afraid of a microscopic harmless creature for most of us? It is good this is happening; it is an opportunity for them to learn how to be a proper police detective earlier on.*

The idea here is that a 'proper police detective' should not be afraid of any danger and also in the face of danger needs to act.

Moreover, when I was discussing whether my talk and all other courses at the police academy should still go on, police detectives of the educational institution were telling me,

*this is the police, not university. Our mindset is different. They are not just studying, they are working. They are being paid to take classes. They need to be ready as soon as possible should we need extra manpower due to the pandemic situation. More importantly, we need to face the danger here, not run away from it.*

While giving my talk and facing an overcrowded room, I started to ask myself what on earth I was doing there in pandemic times. Being reflective of my practice, I began to realize that I was trying to show that I was also 'brave',

'strong' and 'macho' in the eyes of the police detectives and myself. I realized that my need to display a hegemonic masculine identity had put myself in this risky situation. I apprehended how the police macho culture was stronger on me than I was aware of and this made me completely realize how the police macho culture creates internal pressures for people to face risks.

I also learnt that some detectives were complaining to the president of the detectives' union about the classes going on and also that non-urgent police activities were also going on. The union even requested legal help to force the police detective leadership to take action to protect detectives' health. On the same day this happened, some high-profile people from the military police contacted me saying, 'this is totally absurd! We are the police and we need to be out there fighting crime. A warrior does not stop because of a virus.' The masculine ideal of the warrior that does not fear the virus is explicit here. The military and the detective police engage in strong disputes, and this was taken as a way to suggest that the detective police are less engaged than the military. Talking to a senior manager of the detective police, he said: 'this legal request is embarrassing for us'. The underlying idea here is that macho detectives should not be stopped by the virus.

Some of the detectives I spoke to from different police departments were starting to get worried about the total lack of occupational health and safety personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate to protect detectives from being contaminated by the virus while working. The police mismanaged the purchase of PPE for some units and had to ask local businesses for donations of PPE supplies to the police. This is a common practice in Brazil: police officers and chiefs ask a business to donate work equipment when none is available. Antonio, one of the detectives complaining about the lack of PPE, is well known for using his social media to show off pictures of him using heavy rifles and other symbols of hyper-masculinity. When another detective told me about Antonio, he mentioned

*this is interesting. Antonio shows off in his social media as if he was the top macho detective in the world. Now, he is complaining that there is no PPE for him to work. Come on! Is he afraid now? What a sissy!*

Showing concern about COVID-19 was being perceived as not appropriate for someone who likes to show off as the macho detective. Even though the wearing of bulletproof jackets is obligatory for police detectives when using marked police cars, very rarely do they wear such protective gear. There is an underlying idea that using a bulletproof jacket is a display of being fearful and a 'proper police detective' has no fear. The same was said by some concerning the use of PPE for COVID-19, 'I need no gloves or masks to work. I am a policeman.' This was said at the very early stages of the pandemic in Brazil. Even a senior official of the police replied to a colleague when asked about the police plan for dealing with COVID-19,

*well, we finally guaranteed the necessary PPE for all police detectives. There is not a lot more we can do. Everyone will be contaminated and we all will have to face the virus.*

The underlining idea is: 'the police job is to face danger'. Apart from PPE no other plan to protect the police force was being considered, most probably due to the prevailing mindset that police face danger anyway, so why would a plan be necessary?

While COVID-19 was not a strong reality in Brazil, police detectives were working on a 'business as usual' basis. Under their macho police culture facing danger, making displays of hegemonic masculinity such as avoiding showing fear, was their reaction towards the virus threat. Those who were showing fear or concerns over the virus were being challenged by their peers as if they were not macho enough to honour the police badge they had. Even my researcher self was feeling under pressure from the police culture to display masculinity, by teaching in an overcrowded auditorium. However, once the virus became a closer reality in the police, detectives started to change their behaviour with regard to COVID-19.

## 5 | COVID-19 CHALLENGES TO THE MACHO POLICE ORGANIZATION

On 19 March 2020, I was informed that 906 detectives were on sick leave with suspected COVID-19. I could not confirm the veracity of those numbers, but some people I spoke to said, 'there are a lot of contaminated police detectives'. To make things worse, Brazil did not have enough COVID-19 tests and also the test results were taking more than 15 days to be released. As a detective told me 'we are in the dark here. No one knows who is really infected. I don't know if the person who I work with is infected.' It is rare to see a detective saying s/he does not know what is going on. They usually talk in such a way to show that they know what is happening. I was also informed that some students of the police academy had been admitted to hospital, even though they were less than 35 years old. I was later informed they had returned home safely. This led people from the police academy to comment that the virus was not as harmless as some were trying to picture it.

As the presence of the virus became more pronounced in the detective police force, people started to get much more concerned. A senior detective told me,

*I have never ever seen this in my entire career. For the first time ever, I feel people are afraid of what is going to happen. Till now, our problems have been similar. We need to investigate and lock people up. That is what we know how to do best. Now, we face an enemy we can't see, and we have never dealt with before. Everyone who I know is afraid, I don't know what is going to happen.*

I heard this and similar comments from several people. Also, some years ago, the police forces of the state were attacked by the drug gang that monopolizes crime in the region. Many policemen were killed, but many more alleged criminals were killed by police. Compared to the times of the attacks, a detective said to me, 'when we were under attack, it was much easier. I had to have my gun and I could protect myself. What can I do against this virus?' Police detectives usually know what they need to do and act towards it diligently. With COVID-19 the underlying feeling was that of fear of not knowing how to act and, more importantly, how to detain the virus. Washing hands, using masks and gloves is not what they usually do when facing a threat.

Moreover, a detective talking to me said very worriedly

*I am coming here to work every single day like everybody else on my team. Do we all really need to come here every day? Why they don't make some people come for 15 days and leave others at home. Then, the ones who are home come to work. This could be a way to protect all of us.*

Another police detective said

*there are regulations that people over 60 should be working from home. However, my chief is ignoring this and is not sending anyone home. I have a friend who has just finished having chemotherapy and she is coming to work every day. How is that possible?*

Another detective contacted me to say, 'I go in and out every day. I can get the virus and die or even kill my family.' The tone of detectives talking to me has changed completely. They do not usually openly show concern for their own or colleagues' safety. On account of COVID-19, they were all talking as if they were afraid of what would happen to them.

When someone dies at home, the police have to investigate the death. The first response is usually made by the police district areas. Once the police are informed that a person has died outside a hospital, a police squad goes to check the circumstances of the death. Either the squad produces a formal report to say this was not a murder or they call the homicide department to start a murder investigation. It is only when this procedure has been followed that the corpse can be removed from the place where it is. With COVID-19, the prospect of various deaths at homes

made the police central management designate the homicide department in charge of checking all deaths. Members of this department were fuming. One said to me

*They are putting us and our families in real danger. Why do we need to deal with this shit? We have no appropriate PPE, we have nothing. We will end up with this fucking virus.*

This particular detective never once wore a bulletproof jacket when I was following his squad on police operations and was terrified about coming into contact with the virus.

I also spoke to some detectives in the district areas. They were all very concerned about the virus and the means of protection against it. I have never once seen any detective complaining so harshly about the lack of PPE over my eight years in the field. I spoke to a detective who said

*In my district, there are not enough gloves and masks. Also, we keep our door closed to stop people coming in. Now, people can report crimes using the Internet, there is no need to come to us. However, our general boss came to our station and told us off because the front door was closed. He says we need to keep working and he is making everyone turn up on the same day. If one gets the virus, we will all be contaminated.*

He also said,

*the regional boss had a meeting in the station of one of my friends. The station boss had COVID-19 and turned up to show off to the boss. Can you believe? He was afraid of losing his chief position.*

Moreover, a detective who assists a senior detective phoned me very worried saying

*Professor, people here are crazy. We have no serious plan to deal with this pandemic situation. How will we deal with the high amount of contaminated police detectives? How are we going to process all the bodies that will be in the city? How are we going to deal with organized crime in this pandemic situation? What is our plan to deal with domestic violence? I am exasperated! No one says anything. We are completely lost, no one knows what to do. This is a recipe for disaster.*

I asked if he had spoken to this boss. He replied 'well, you know what they are like here. My boss thinks he is always right. He does not listen to anyone.' The police have a very aggressive and non-collaborative management style. Macho managers (Panayiotou, 2010) are all around. The feelings of the police detectives on the ground are that the men at the top believe they know it all, as it is typical of macho leadership styles. In the pandemic situation, some chiefs are using a strong hand to make police turn up to work while at the same time they do not feel protected to perform their tasks. The situation makes it even more explicit to police detectives how negative the aggressive management style they are under is.

When the death toll was approaching 1000 deaths of COVID-19 in Brazil, a detective phoned me up to let me know about an argument he had had that day due to the behaviour of one of his colleagues. He said

*The person came into my office and wanted to shake hands. I asked if he was crazy and smiled. He got angry and said 'I am police, I shake the hands of my friends.' I replied that this was very dangerous. He replied that he was a policeman. I got very pissed off. Come on! It is no time to shake hands!*

He went on to complain about the behaviour of his colleague. He also said that other people complained about that colleague, claiming he was mad. Not shaking hands is a display of fear, and it was perceived by other police officers as the most appropriate reaction.



The Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, has always used tough-on-crime and pro-police violence discourse. During the elections, he got massive support from police officers across the country. Among the detectives I research, it was no different. The vast majority of police detectives who I spoke to had made positive comments about Bolsonaro. Far-right populists exert hegemonic masculinity and machismo performances (Knights & Pullen, 2019). This type of public personality embodies crucial elements of the police occupational culture. Bolsonaro's son is a police officer. As the COVID-19 situation evolved in Brazil, Bolsonaro tried to minimize the situation and was also against social distancing measures. He even said on a TV interview that 'we need to take coronavirus like a man!'. With his attitude of denial towards COVID-19, Bolsonaro started to lose respect and also popularity in Brazil; a trend which has reverberated in the police. A detective who voted for Bolsonaro said to me 'this guy is crazy. He wants to kill all of us.' Also, a military police sergeant died of COVID-19, the first police officer to die of the disease in the region where my research has been taking place. The news of this death rapidly spread in the police instant messaging groups with phrases like 'Many thanks Bolsonaro, your reckless behavior will kill a lot of police officers in Brazil.' Many detectives were saying that the president's attitude was putting police officers' welfare at risk. COVID-19 was even challenging the police's massive support of Bolsonaro. This can be seen as a signal that in the pandemic situation the macho role model is undermined, even in an organization that is a prototypical hegemonic masculinity organization.

## 6 | MACHO MASCULINITY IN DANGER IN PANDEMIC TIMES: THE NEED FOR CARE

In this piece, I discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on a prototypical hegemonic masculinity organization, the police. Traditionally, a police force is an organization where the cult of masculinity is performed in everyday work (Dick, 2005; O'Neill et al., 2007; Wilson, 1968). The (macho) heroic police identity who fights crime (Bayley, 1994; Manning, 1977; Rubinstein, 1973; Van Maanen, 1980) is continuously performed through displays of virility, courage in facing danger, toughness, showing interest in sexual triumphs, sports and outdoor life (Van Maanen, 1978, p. 223) as well as the masculine favouring of reason over emotion. Machismo is a central element of police occupational culture up to the point of becoming a core and basic assumption informing the nature of police work, which can be very difficult to change.

In the pandemic situation, at first, police were in the machismo 'business as usual' mode. The core police machismo values of facing danger and avoiding displays of fear were initially the police reactions towards the virus threat. Police detectives who were showing fear of the virus were criticized as if they were not 'proper' police officers. I was even feeling this pressure in my interactions with police detectives and it took some time to decide that 'I am not Indiana Jones', the adventure hunter, and that I should hold back my police research fieldwork. This shows how masculine values run deep and how this impact on people taking unnecessary and meaningless risks is just to display a type of masculinity.

However, as the COVID-19 situation in Brazil worsened, police detectives started to feel the threat of the virus getting closer and closer. An important issue here is that often, police face dangerous criminals with weapons, ammunition and helicopters. However, all these key artefacts in the police performance of police macho masculinity to fight the 'war on crime' are totally useless to the police detective's engagement on the 'war on the virus'. To make matters worse, the virus is 'confronted by' washing hands, wearing nurse-like masks and gloves and performing all different types of hygiene care. Care is perceived in the police macho perspective as a non-macho masculinity attribute and wearing, even worst on the face, nurse-like artefacts can be perceived almost as if you are non-macho. In addition, during the pandemic engagement with criminals should be avoided as much as possible. However, arresting criminals is how police officers display to each other how (macho) good they are. The COVID-19 situation is not only making detectives to have to engage on culturally under valued care-like activities, but it is also making the traditional police macho mindset redundant in the pandemic and causing an existential dilemma for policemen: to be

protected against the virus, police officers need to give away at least part of the embedded macho culture. The virus respects no occupational culture values. For many police officers, it is like for protection against the virus, police officers cannot be who they have always been. In so doing, the virus ends up helping to undermine the traditional police macho culture because care does not resonate well in machismo settings.

Police detectives have changed their 'natural' macho behaviour as they face this unknown situation. They indicated that they feared not knowing how to act in relation to the virus, and that they were concerned about the use of PPE, something very atypical. Until the outbreak of COVID-19, this was perceived as a display of fear and lack of masculinity. Furthermore, subordinates were critical of stubborn macho leaders who did not listen and pretended to know it all. Even hand shaking was being problematized and those who were trying to keep the same old macho habits were being criticized. The reaction against the president, a role model for machos in Brazil, is also striking, as he was severely criticized even among his many supporters. The macho management style, either in the police or in the country as a whole, was perceived as a 'recipe for disaster' that would endanger the lives of the police officers. Police detectives were shown to be frightened by the disease and displayed fear, something that is a no-no in macho organizations. Either the pandemic situation seems to be putting police macho masculinity in danger (for the good), or at least it shows how problematic it can be for organizations.

This piece indicates that the early stage of the pandemic is revealing how complicated machismo can be for organizations, especially during a pandemic, as it can literally put people's lives in danger. It also shows how an extreme situation can impact gender perceptions, performances and identities. However, as I finish this article, the pandemic in Brazil is still not as bad as in other countries such as the UK, the United States and Italy, for example. However, the tendency is that the situation will get far much worse. This is a call for researchers to focus on how the pandemic can affect masculinity in particular and gender issues in organizations in general. The question we are left with is once this pandemic is over, will organizations go back to business as usual or will they be able to learn from this pandemic?

Back to the detective police, the police academy has developed a training programme to make police detectives offer a better and less judgemental approach to victims of domestic violence. The police macho culture has made detectives struggle to offer decent care for victims of domestic violence. This training involves role-playing in which the need to care for the other becomes clear. Many police detectives seem to experience a real change of behaviour after taking part in the training programme.

The changing of a macho culture involves the need of people realizing the importance of care, both to the members of the organization and to the people they interact with daily. Police tend to see their jobs as 'fighting crime', however, as the first respondents for crime victims, what police actually need to realize is that an important part of the police work is to care for people who just faced violence. COVID-19 is making the need for care to be central in our lives. Macho public figures as Bolsonaro who display contempt to the care of people are being severely questioned, even among ex-supporters. The hope is this deadly disease can, at last, teach the lesson of the need to care which will be a key element to challenge prevalent machismo in organizations and large parts of society.

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## ORCID

Rafael Alcadipani  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5132-5380>

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#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Rafael Alcadipani is full Professor in Organization Studies at FGV-EAESP, Brazil.

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