Do superheroes also get older? Bodies and masculinities in cartoons

Os super-heróis também envelhecem? Corpos e masculinidades nos desenhos animados

Rosângela Fachel de Medeiros[1]
Rosana Fachel de Medeiros[2]

Abstract: *This paper analyzes comparatively two superheroes duos "Aquaman and Aqualad", created by DC Comics, which premiered in 1960, and its parodic version (HUTCHEON, 1989) "Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy", SpongeBob SquarePants characters series created in 1999. This comparison aims to discuss the role of the body (LE BRETON, 2003) in the configuration of masculinities (Connell, 2003) presented in these cartoons, analyzing how each of the works draws up and submit such matters. The comparative analysis of these two superheroes duo puts into question the masculinity as a social and cultural construction that reflects a specific time, culture and society.*

Keywords: *super heroes; body; aging; masculinity.*

Resumo: *Este artigo analisa comparativamente duas duplas de super-heróis: Aquaman e Aqualad, criada pela DC Comics e que estreou em 1960, e sua versão paródica (HUTCHEON, 1989), Homem Sereia e Mexilhãozinho, personagens de Bob Esponja Calça Quadrada, série criada em 1999. Essa comparação visa discutir o papel do corpo (LE BRETON, 2003) na configuração das masculinidades (CONNELL, 2003) apresentadas nesses desenhos animados, analisando a forma como cada uma das obras elabora e apresenta tais questões. A análise comparatista dessas duas duplas de super-heróis coloca em discussão*

1 Integrated Regional University from Alto Uruguai and Missões. Erechim, RS, Brazil. E-mail: rosangelafachel@gmail.com
2 Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil. E-mail: zanafachel@gmail.com

a masculinidade como construção sociocultural que reflete determinada época, cultura e sociedade.

Palavras-chave: *super-heróis; corpo; envelhecimento; masculinidade*

Super heroes as body model of the hegemonic masculinity

According to David Le Breton (2003), each society and time picks and builds the particularities of their body, creating their own standards and building models of beauty and ideal shapes. Such models are constructs that fill the social imaginary and directly reflect in the artistic and cultural representations of the body, being subject to transformations throughout time. Thus, when we analyze body representations, we are also investigating the social cultural scenario in which they were created, their desires, concerns and obsessions in regard to body. Nowadays, perhaps more than other ages, we earn to have a young, productive, healthy and beautiful body, an ideal that is chased by men and women, that, do not measure efforts and investments.

Keeping the youth, beauty, strength, flexibility and elegance of the body became a daily task, because these characteristics value both the person and their acts. The body is, then, a provisional identity, a personal construction, passible of constant transformations thanks to multiple biotechnologic possibilities of remodeling, transformation and re-structure. And, as a response to all these actions of bodily improvement, an aversion to being fat and old is created, body conditions that represent the failure in dominating their own body (MEDEIROS, 2009). Because, as Paula Sibilia affirms: "The less youngsters become such organism, more worth of pity or despise they will look, due to being unable to mask their so miserably human essence of mature and decay" (SIBILIA, 2013, p. 97).

The young, strong, muscled and virile body of superheroes is configurated, since their arrival, as a model of ideal male body image, a set of physical attributes that associate the values of hegemonic masculinity that were built and rebuilt throughout sociocultural transformations lived in each decade.

Ou seja, um corpo musculoso e enérgico "vem historicamente se tornando o referencial de corporeidade masculina, enquanto corpos que

desviam deste padrão são comumente satirizados ou mesmo excluídos da mídia" (BEIRAS et al., 2007, p. 62).

In this sense, a double standard is created, in which superheroes bodies are reflected and reflect on the social construct of an ideal male figure. Because even if not everyone aim to reach that physical ideal, it ends up influencing tastes and attitudes, once the definition of what is physically attractive is, to a large extent, a socio-cultural construct. And both our perception of ourselves and our response to other's appearance is set from these issues. In this perspective, there is no doubt that the standard of attractive male body became increasingly muscular, and that is due to, in a certain way, the fact that the audience, both male and female, were gradually accepting the representation of an ideal male body increasingly physically exaggerated.

As a socio-cultural construct, the ideal of the male body reflects on the construction of the idea of a standard masculinity, which is not "natural", since there is no stable male gender identity. Because, as Robert Connell says:

> Usually we suppose that the real masculinity comes from male bodies – something inherent to the male body or that expresses something about him - either about that body provokes and drives an action (for instance, men are, by nature, more aggressive than women, rape is the result of uncontrollable lust or certain violent instinct) or limits it (for instance, men by nature do not care for children, homossexuality is something unnatural and, therefore, restricted to a perverted minority) (CONNELL, 2003, p. 73)[3].

Comics collaborate in the creation of this male body standards, as Jeffrey Brown says about DC Comics, which extensively use as signifiers of masculinity the hypertrophied body, with muscles and veins, and

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3   *"Casi siempre se supone que la verdadera masculinidad surge de los cuerpos de los hombres – que es inherente al cuerpo masculino o que expresa algo sobre el mismo –, ya sea que el cuerpo impulse y dirija la acción (por ejemplo, los hombre son más agresivos por naturaleza que las mujeres; la violación es el resultado de la lujuria incontrollable o de cierto instinto violento), o que la limite (por ejemplo, los hombres no se ocupan por naturaleza del cuidado infantil; la homosexualidad no es natural y, por lo tanto, se confina a una minoría perversa)".*

recurrent fight scenes. Thus, these magazines glamourized the muscular mesomorphic[4] male body and shared it as a cultural value:

> "[…] the masculinity of our media-generated heroes is increasingly recognized in much the same way that femininity has been understood, not as a real and unified subject position but as careful orchestrate performance – or, in others words, as a masquerade" (BROWN, 1999, p. 25)[5].

The body is the external, visible part of this representation of masculinity. And, in this context, muscles always symbolized and keep symbolizing male power as physical force, being seen as a confirmation of the "natural" difference between sexes. In this perspective, the male is recognized as opposed to female, and a game of dichotomies are installed: hard/soft; strong/weak; rational/emotional; active/passive. According to Brown (1999, p. 2): "classical comic book depictions of masculinity are perhaps the quintessential expression of our [North American] cultural beliefs about what it means to be a man".[6] We can extend this notion for a world context, once it is notorious the influence of American mediatic culture about other cultures.

The body is intrinsically rooted to the condition of super hero, it is in the body and through the body that the super-identity of the hero reveals itself. The body of each super hero has particular and fantastic attributes that makes them unique and special. Bodies that seem inviolable despite, sometimes, having a specific vulnerability, as, for instance, Superman's sensitivity to kryptonite. Even though there are generations, super heroes are always represented at the pinnacle of their physical form, unrelated to diseases, aging and death.

The indestructible body of the superhero configures the burning desire to keep our bodies beautiful and healthy as long as possible and it

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4   Indicates the predominance of tissue derived from the mesoderm (bones, muscle and conjunctive tissue). It presents a higher density and skelectic muscular development.
5   *"[…] the masculinity of our media-generated heroes is increasingly recognized in much the same way that femininity has been understood, not as a real and unified subject position but as careful orchestrate performance – or, in others words, as a masquerade".*
6   *"classical comic book depictions of masculinity are perhaps the quintessential expression of our [North American] cultural beliefs about what it means to be a man".*

seem to be rooted in the imaginary of the masculine power centered in the strong, agile and invincible body, already glorified in the Greek narratives in characters like Hercules, Achilles, Odysseus and also in the bible, in, for instance, the image of Samson.

In turn, the villain's body tend to be represented as hateful, grotesque or funny. While the super hero's body is symmetrical within health and beauty standards, the villain's tend to be deviant to this ideal, presenting, for example, scars and/or physical handicap, that refer to the grotesque.

However, these representations also incide over the social construct of masculinities, since, according to Cornell (2005), it is not only oriented by the images that the subject has identified with, but also by those which set him apart. Masculinities are configurations of social practices that are referred to male bodies, being both related to the symbolic and institutional order of society and the individual aspects of the subjects.

Aquaman and Aqualad: super heroes timeless bodies

Image 1 – Aquaman and Aqualad designed by Ramona Fradon.
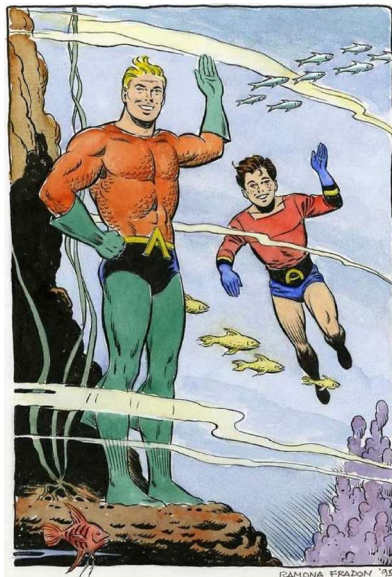
Source: Pinterest. Available at: https://br.pinterest.com/pin/198228821075749179/?autologin=true.

Created by 1941 by writer Mort Weisinger and by the artist Paul Norris and released by DC comics, Aquaman is a super hero capable of breathing underwater, has superhuman strength, and abilities to swim with superspeed and communicating with sea creatures. His home is an ancient temple of the lost city of Atlantis, where he rests in a lonely throne.

Aquaman belong to the first pantheon of super heroes, inaugurated by the release of Superman in 1938 and Batman in 1939. And, as many other characters of comics, his origin story went through modifications over time and according to the series. In his original story, Arthur Curry (Aquaman) was son of Atlanna, an Atlantian princess banned from Atlantis due to her interest by the Earth, with the lighthouse keeper Tom Curry. With two years of age, Arthur was found playing under water without drowning by his father. However, Atlanna only revealed the truth about her origin many years later, as well as the abilities inherited by her son: breathing under water and communicating with sea creatures.

In the 60's, the great popularity of the character took him to TV in an animated series dedicated exclusively to him. In that same time, he earns a partner: Aqualad, a young orphan of an Atlantian colony that became his companion and disciple, repeating the recurring pattern of super hero stories: the older, wiser and stronger man that becomes a mentor of a youngster that, despite having a well-shaped body, still isn't as muscular as his mentor. A notorious example of this partnership is the duo Batman and Robin (which begins in 1940), that, was always a target of suspicion, with many analyses that seek to suggest or unveil a possible homosexual relationship between them.

Homosexuality has always been a transversal issue in discussions about the configuration of super heroes. Either due to a visual perspective, that recognizes the body and outfit representation – extremely fit, which value the muscular silhouette of their bodies – a homoerotic aesthetic, either due to the recurring homosexual reading of the relationship between the super-partners, often based on the Greek model

of pederasty. A relation was established by an older man (*erasta)* and a younger man (*eromenos*) with the educational purposes of inserting the young man into society, which "would denote spiritual affection of an adult man for a boy, and consequently, would not have obscene meaning and content (VRISSIMTZIS, 2002, p. 100). However, only in the 90's began to appear the first super heroes with a sexual identity different from the normative heterosexuality.

In all Aquaman's versions, from the Golden Era (1938-1950) to the Modern Age (from 1985 until today) of the comic books and also in the television series, many things have changed, but his suit, even though it was influenced by the fashion tendencies of each period, is always recognized by the colors orange (the long-sleeved shirt) and green (the pants and gloves) and by the yellow belt with a big buckle with an A shape (his initials). His clothing repeats a preestablished pattern that values the athletic, youthful and agile body of super heroes: fitted shirt and pants that show their muscular features, with trunks over pants that, along with the belt, highlights the narrow hip and draws attention to the crotch and equally fitted boots, that emphasize the leg muscles. The same pattern is seen in the Aqualad suit, who wears a red fitted shirt, and, due to his condition of being a student, does not wear pants, but blue shorts, with the same color of his boots and gloves, the buckle of his belt presents a stylized "A" (his initials), similar to the Aquaman's.

The image of Aquaman repeats a pattern inaugurated by their direct predecessors: Superman and Batman:

> "These superheroes were idolized for their incredible bravery, moral superiority, and (for the time) fantastic physical strength and proportions. Since Superman and Batman were supposed to be more powerful than ordinary men, they were drawn with physiques that exceeded the currently accepted standards of strength and fitness." (JIROUSEK, 1996, p. 5).

As other classic super heroes, Aquaman is a tall man with fit body, broad shoulders and narrow hips, with a well-shaved face[7] and a very

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7   The classic image of a superhero creates a significant change in relation to the old standard of masculinity, in which the beard and other body hair indicated maturity and virility.

strong chin line. The only distinction of his appearance in relation to most super heroes is blond hair. His physical completion as the other classic super heroes, has varied throughout time, fashion, culture and social influences, but always towards a strong body with defined and symmetrical features, respecting beauty and health standards that tend, currently to an increasingly muscular body.

Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy: super heroes also get old

Image 2 – Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy

Source: Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mermaid_Man_and_Barnacle_Boy.jpg.

Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy are the only human characters of the American animation (*SpongeBob SquarePants*), created in 1999 by Stephen Hillenburg. They personify the duo of super heroes that are the main characters of the television show *The Adventures of Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy*, SpongeBob and Patrick's favorite show. The

duo appeared for the first time in the episode "Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy", of the first season, in which SpongeBob and Patrick found out that their favorite super hero are retired and try everything to make them go back to the fight against crime, and consequently, the television show could carry on.

The duo of super heroes lived their pinnacle of youth and fame in the 60's, period known as the Silver Era of comic books (between 1956 and 1970) in the USA. The episodes SpongeBob watches are from this period, as a re-run, repeating and recreating the aesthetics (of fights and the usage of onomatopoeia) made famous by the Batman TV series, in the same decade.

The animation created by Hillenburg then makes direct references to the series, recreators their most notorious and characteristic elements: choreographed fight scenes; the existence of a secret hide-out place and the way of entering it, clear allusion to the BatCave; the Shell Signal, an underwater sound version of Bat Signal (both used to ask heroes for help); and the invisible automobile used by the super hero duo, a combination of Bat Mobile with Wonder Woman's invisible jet. In addition to that, the idea is that it is an "old" series is reinforced by the apparition of super heroes in the diegetic context of SpongeBob's adventures, both already old and retired and living in Bikini Bottom in a retirement home.

The duo of characters Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy is an evident parody of another duo: Aquaman and Aqualad. We thought about the notion of parody by Linda Hutcheon:

> Parody is, thus, repetition, but repetition includes difference; it is imitation with critical distance, whose irony can benefit and harm at the same time. Ironic versions of "transcontextualization" and inversion are their formal operators and the field of pragmatic *ethos* come from the disdained ridiculous to the reverence homage (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 54).

i.e., in the parody, the repetition of text gives space to artistic innovation, because it subverts the original text and allows the creator a critical posture. It demands from the reader/viewer a previous repertoire that

creates a dialogue with the parody, so they can get fully in the meaning game. Therefore, parody is considered a contemporary genre, in which the reader/viewer has an active function in the interpretation of the work (BRANDÃO, 2003).

The similarities, or repetitions, begin by the fact that both superhero duos live under the sea. As Aquaman and Aqualad, the Mermaid Man and the Barnacle Boy are hybrid human beings with the same ability of water creatures of living under water. In addition, Aquaman and Mermaid Man have the same ability, the ability of communicating with sea creatures. This relation of resemblance between two duos is reinforced and evidenced by their outfits, that are almost identical.

Like Aquaman, Mermaid Man wears black trunks over green pants fit by the body and an orange long-sleeved shirt, green gloves and a belt with a M-shaped buckle (referencing his name, Mermaid Man), which hides many powers, configuring as a revival of Batman's utility belt. However, there are, in his outfit, deviant elements of his classic referent: over the orange shirt, the Mermaid Man wears a bikini made out of shells and, over his nose, a type of mask shaped like a starfish. And still, completely diverging from a superhero costume, he wears pink slippers that reveal his current position of retirement.

Barnacle Boy's suit is also similar to his classic duo, Aqualad: blue shorts, red shirt fitted to the body and blue gloves, but as his suit of Mermaid Man, his suit also presents deviant elements: a baby blue cape (which refers to other super heroes), flippers instead of boots, glasses[8] and a sailor hat. The image of Barnacle Boy brings back the memory of another classic super hero: Robin, Batman's partner, from who they may have appropriated the idea of a cape in his suit. His original name makes reference to Robin's original description, "The Boy Wonder".

It is clear, however, that this intertextual relationship among characters is only evident for adult viewers of Sponge Bob, with similar age to the show's creator, Hillenburg. Born in 1961, he had a childhood

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8   It is interesting to highlight that wearing glasses has always been associated to weakness and body limitation; thus, it is not fortuitous it is a part of Superman's disguise as Clark Kent.

filled with television shows, as the series dedicated to the trips of Jacques Cousteau and super hero shows. Many of the memories and intertexts seen in his show come from this time and these shows. Creating, thus, a second level of reading, given from the recognition of the dialogue between the classic super hero image and the super heroes presented on Sponge Bob.

Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy are super heroes from the 60's that got old and whose bodies are degraded and fragilized. Their old physical form, young and strong, can be seen in the TV series Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy, watched by SpongeBob and in comic books read by the character and published on *Nickelodeon Magazine* (Nick Mag), which were drawn by the famous illustrator Ramona Fradon, responsible for Aquaman's comic book during the Silver Age. When we see the images of young Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy, that repeat the body standard legitimated by super heroes, the similarity with the aquatic super heroes from DC Comics, making us see them as their aged, funny version.

Image 3 – The young Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy in the series The adventures of the Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy, watched by SpongeBob.

Source:https://giphy.com/gifs/spongebob-spongebob-squarepants-episode-9-l1EtpdMX3MIKwznHi.

Image 4 – Comic book excerpt Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy, illustrated by Ramona Fradon for SpongeBob's comic book.

Source: School Library Journal. Available at: http://blogs.slj.com/goodcomicsforkids/2013/06/18/review-spongebob-annual-size-super-giant-swimtacular-1/.

However, instead of young, muscular, beautiful and strong, as we see in the comic book and in the TV show by Sponge Bob, Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy are old and out of shape. The Mermaid Man already has white hair and is fat, while the Barnacle Boy is bald, skinny and curved, physical attributes that are far from the established standard for super heroes. Something transgressive and unheard of, super heroes that got old, lost their memory and agility and that, despite still keeping their superpowers, are no longer bodily able to continue their activities. The series SpongeBob deconstructs, thus, a standard of representation of superheroes that, despite fitting the passing of time, updating narratives, scenarios, and clothing following the social and cultural transformation, keeps them always with the same age and same shape, as if they are frozen in their best shape.

While divergent body from the ideal desired model, the old body is on the sidelines of images of our mass culture as a way of blurring

the undesired reminder that we are all, unquestionably, walking towards death. The contemporary cult to the young, skinny and athletic body transformed aging into a shameful body state. As Paula Sibilia comments:

> [...]Through the increasing tyranny of youthful appearance, old age is censored as if it was something shameful and obscene, which should remain hidden, out of scene, without aiming the so desired visibility. A body state to be fought – or, at least, sagaciously masked - for being morally suspect, and, therefore, humiliating. Something indecent that should not be shown; at least, not without using filters and touch-ups that our era created to this end and, with the increasing insistence, are now available to everyone and asked for us to use them. Thus, in plain validity of this values that ratify the cristalization of a new morality, the privileged scenarios of the audiovisual media avoid showing old bodies (SIBILIA, 2012, p. 97).

Although the perception of a recent and gradual tendency of giving more visibility to "older" characters, the mediatic exhibition of the old body is still something that causes discomfort. The representation of the old body and its decrepitude comes, usually, associated to the ugliness, sadness, pain, and consequently, death. In this logic, it is easy to understand why the witches of fairytales are generally described as old and are highlighted by all the body deformations coming from aging: wrinkled skin, crested, twisted hands and, to top it all off, a repulsive sign raised by the passing of time, preferably located on the face, right in the nose.

These characters put in discussion the idealized image of super heroes, starting by their names (both associated to the sea world, such as Aquaman and Aqualad), which, despite keeping similarship with the names of classic super heroes – such as Superman, Ironman, Spiderman, Batman and Robin – present odd elements.

The first Mermaid Man refer to the mythological image of a hybrid being, half woman, half animal, being more frequent the combination man/fish. The image of the mermaid refers directly to the feminine, to the image of the beautiful, seductive woman, creating another deviation in relation to the masculine image of the super hero, emphasized in their

names by the word "man"" Super*man*, Iron *Man*, Spider-*Man*, Bat*man* and Aqua*man*. The wordplay created by the name brings, therefore, a paradox of genre when it unites the word "man" (male) and "mermaid" (female). Similarly, the name Barnacle Boy also creates a estrangement, since it is more common the use of boy in reference to kids, rarely used referring to grown men.

Thus, when their names are compared to the previously mentioned super heroes, which use words referring to strength, courage and hardship (super, iron) or to animals that usually are frightening (spider and bat), it is clear there is a rupture of old standards and the desire of putting in discussion the stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity associated to the image of the superhero.

In addition, the fact that the Mermaid Man uses shells as a bra, which creates a burlesque, ugly and masculine of the ideal of beauty created by Ariel, from the Little Mermaid (Disney, 1989), and wearing a pair of pink slippers proposes a reflection about the current condition of masculinities on our society. And even if, while young or old superheroes, they seem courageous or brave enough to fight the villains, their suits and names refer to the feminine world, calling attention to the ambiguities created in the conformation of identities in these characters.

Such condition can be related to the perception of Brown that the identification of readers/viewers with the comic book superheroes results in the attraction feel for the duality of masculinity present in this type of character. Brown is referring directly to characters that have double identity: the heroic alter ego, personifying strength, trust, power and the maximum ideal of masculinity, and the secret identity, which presents the vulnerabilities, insecurities and softness of the "ordinary man".

The secret identity unravels the masculine vulnerability represented by characteristics that would be considered not masculine. When we identify with this secret identity, the reader/viewer can, then, fantasize also having a heroic facet. And, although such ambivalence cannot be presented in Aquaman (which does not have a double identity), Mermaid Man can represent his double, constituted precisely to give visibility to

this "body frailty" side of his original character. Moreover, the Mermaid Man himself, equally without a double identity, is configured in the interweaving of dualities: frailty/strength; masculine/feminine; old/new; therefore, as a mosaic of multiplicity of masculinities, that does not have an opposite in the feminine, but rather a complement.

From Aquaman to Mermaid Man: the crisis of the contemporary man

According to Stuart Hall (2005), the crisis of the modern subject is built from the de-centralization of his cartesian certainties, which comes from the influence of five theoretical pillars: the Marxist thought; the discovery of the unconscious mind by Freud; the work of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure; the "genealogy of the modern subject" and a new type of disciplinary power" presented by Michel Foucault; and, finally, the impact of feminism both in the theoretical criticism and social movement. The subject, previously seen as having a unified, stable identity, became "fragmented, composed not with one, but with several identities, sometimes contradictory or unresolved" (HALL, 2005, p. 12).

The same way, there is also this idea of the existence of one only model of masculinity, which is constituted in the difference created towards homosexuality and the feminine, loses meaning and unravel multiple masculinities, corresponding to different insertions of the man in the social, political, economic and cultural contemporary structure. When he loses his traditional role of domination and due to his new social attributions (taking care of kids and doing chores), the contemporary man lives the "macho crisis".

The comparative analysis between two duos of super heroes put in discussion the issue of masculinity as a changeable socio-cultural construct that reflects its time, culture and society. According to Robert Connell (2003), there is no only form of construction of the masculine in societies, but multiple masculinities understood as configurations of practice around the position of man in gender relations. These masculinities are

hierarchized from the power relations in the center of which creates a hegemonic masculinity – set of practices and values with the function of assuring the dominant position of men and women subordination. When referring to these masculinities, Connel affirms that:

> There is a conventional narrative about how masculinities are built. In this narrative, all culture has one definition of conduct and feelings appropriated by men. Young men are pressured to act this way and to distance themselves from women's behavior, understood as the opposite (CONNEL, 1995, p. 189-190).

Aquaman and Aqualad, with their perfect bodies and in perfect shape, classic representation of super heroes, corporify the pinnacle of heteronormative masculinity. In turn, the Mermaid Man and the Barnacle Boy, parodic configuration of classic super heroes, represent the contemporary complexity of the subject that needs to handle an ever-increasing life expectancy, followed by the aging and body decay, with the deconstruction of old standards of gender as, for example, in regard to masculinity, unraveled in their multiple possibilities in the *Sponge-Bob* series -, that can be contradictory without stopping being legitimate, putting in discussion old paradigm related to sex and the male gender (MEDEIROS, 2010).

When being old, week men with decaying bodies and corroded by time, and, carrying elements of the feminine world that are exhibited naturally, the characters Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy deconstruct the idealized image of the super hero, maximum representation of a hegemonic masculinity. And reinforce the identified situation by Cornell, in which contemporary masculinity, as a result of multiple social, cultural and identitary interactions, is a multiple and fluid condition. In this sense, the animation gives visibility to the fact that it is no longer possible to identify one only model as representative of what it is to be a man.

Sponge Bob is set apart in the mediatic cultural scene for presenting to the viewer and putting in discussion contemporary issues referring to the human in relation to the status of the body and to new perspective of gender and masculinities in the configuration of contemporary

identities, mainly male. In a world increasingly guided by the search of maintenance of youth in the body, but, on the other hand, has an increase of life expectancy and the growth of elderly population, aging is still a denied state.

The media and audiovisual productions, most of the time, only give visibility of old age and the old body in the medical-scientific context of shows about health and disease prevention, for example. Or even, in the configuration of elderly characters, almost always in the sidelines of narratives, that seem not to create interest. Present or represent elders as complex, sexual and interesting subjects, as well as showing their bodies as the object of desire or productive both for work and for sex is still an exception.

The parodic configuration of super heroes in Sponge Bob unravels the contemporary complexity of the relation established with the body and masculinity. Old age and the body transformations coming from it, mainly about the male body, which has their sexual drive associated to youth, directly reflect in the reconfiguration of masculinity of these individuals. The duo Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy, with their body fails coming from old age and deviations of the idealized model of male representation, puts in evidence the condition of getting old, so frightening in today's society. But, at the same time, de-constructs hegemonic standards of masculinity, reinforcing Connell's (1995) collocations in relation to the existence of multiple masculinities.

When putting in evidence elder characters and old bodies, with all their limitations and frailties, Sponge Bob instigates a reflection about the position and the role of the elder subject in today's society. In addition to that, when the show presents images of these super heroes when they were young, it gives visibility to the process of aging and the transformation of the body. Combined with that, the naturality with which these characters link feminine elements to their male identity creates deviations in the hegemonic model of masculinity and creates the perception of diversity of ways of living and seeing masculinities in the contemporaneity, which, the same way as the body, are in constant change.

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About the authors

Rosângela Fachel de Medeiros Correio – PhD in Languages by the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Masters professor in Languages – Compared Literature of the Integrated Regional University from Alto Uruguai and Missões (URI), working in the following fields of research: comparatism and cultural processes, as well as reading, languages and teaching.

Rosana Fachel de Medeiros Correio – PhD student at the Post-Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.