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# Colonialism's Creation of *Machismo* and its Influence on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault: A Film Analysis of Telenovela DV/SA Anthologies

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TELENOVELAS, COLONIALISM, DV/SA

Colonialism's Creation of *Machismo* and its Influence on Domestic Violence and Sexual  
Assault- A Film Analysis of Telenovela DV/SA Anthologies

By

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### **Abstract**

Using Lothar Mikos' (2014) content analysis framework, this thesis uses a Xicana feminist epistemology to conduct a film analysis on telenovela anthologies *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real* (1986-2007) and *Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres* (2001-today). The impact that harmful depictions of domestic violence and sexual assault, and their foundations in colonialism, is discussed throughout my writing. The cynical and racist implications that problematic portrayals of domestic violence and sexual assault within the Latinx community is analyzed. This thesis claims that popular media, while attempting to bring awareness to these sensitive and life-threatening issues, have perpetuated a culture of recrimination and vicarious trauma. Trauma-informed suggestions, as well as a call for telenovela writers to critically analyze their contributions to systems of oppression throughout their writing, is brought forth.

***Keywords:*** *Telenovelas, Xicana, Colonialism, Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault*

## Introduction

When I think about my childhood, I often think about the cultural impact that telenovelas had on me and my siblings. Televisa was our Disney Channel. Instead of watching *Hannah Montana*, my sister and I saw ourselves in Danna Paola's character in *Atrevete a Soñar*. The pan y cafecito that mi mami would make me when I was having a bad day was always accompanied by an episode of *Teresa*. I have always viewed telenovelas as different from the traditional multi-season American sitcoms. While shows like *Full House* and *Boy Meets World* often showed relatively mature themes and nuanced plotlines, there was usually a happy ending by the end of the 20-minute episode. A clear and unambiguous lesson was learned by the main character of the show and then the characters would move onto another topic. However, the systemic barriers my community faced were not reflected in these shows and the erasure we experienced felt further perpetuated. The themes in the American sitcoms that I would often watch revolved heavily around teen drinking, body image issues, and similar conflicts. While these themes are important to address, the writers failed to incorporate the systemic concerns that people of color were specifically facing. It could be argued that it is unfair to compare an American sitcom that was intentionally catered to children and their families to a serious telenovela that was not. However, my response to that would be that many Latinx children, such as my sister and I, were also in elementary school when we were watching these telenovelas with our families.

Content background: Telenovela anthologies are slightly different from the traditional soap opera format. Instead of curating one plotline spanning hundreds of episodes, these telenovelas tackle individual storylines every episode with different characters and themes each time. *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real* (1986-2007), a popular Mexican anthology, created an irreversible impact on not

only its telenovela viewers, but arguably on our entire Latinx cultura when it comes to talking about toxic masculinity. As important as it is to highlight the benefits that telenovelas have had on social identities that are not typically represented in the media, it is even more important to discuss the potentially negative consequences that many of these storylines have also created. Originally, *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real* was created as an attempt to draw attention to the victims and survivors of Mexico City's devastating 1985 earthquake. From my preliminary research, it was clear that the writers saw the demand for television in which the viewers could relate to, and empathize with the actors, and began to cover an array of sensitive topics such as child abuse, discrimination, poverty, and most commonly, the concept of machismo. This show then heavily inspired the creation of other 'real life' telenovela anthologies; *La Rosa de Guadalupe*, *Como Dice el Dicho*, *Un Dia Cualquiera*, and another that heavily centered around women's struggles titled *Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres* (2001-today), which along with *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real*, will be used as the foundation of the analysis for this research paper.

This thesis will consist of a film analysis of two episodes from *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real*, and two episodes from *Lo Que Callamos las Mujeres*. As I discuss the impact that telenovelas have had on the Latinx community, I will also be setting up the purpose of this analysis. The analysis will illustrate the development of a concept typically known as *machismo*, or as Aida Huerta & Mrinal Sinha (2016) defines it in their book *Beyond Machismo* "the epitome of male patriarchal privilege and small mindedness," (p. 11). I discuss the cynical and racist implications that this word has brought onto my comunidad and how popular media, while attempting to bring awareness to this life-threatening topic, has created a culture of recrimination and vicarious trauma. In addition, I provide trauma-informed frameworks that I believe the writers could have used to approach the topics they were presumably intending to depict

critically. Through my research and analysis I aim to answer two questions: How has colonialism shown up in Latin American television, specifically telenovelas? How has colonialism influenced discourse surrounding domestic violence, sexual assault, and toxic masculinity in media via telenovelas?

Positionality:

“Pero he crecido. Ya no solo pasó toda mi vida botando las costumbres y los valores de mi cultura que me traicionan. También recojo las costumbres que por el tiempo se han probado y las costumbres de respeto a las mujeres. But despite my growing tolerance, for this Chicana la guerra de independencia is a constant,” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 37).

It is also important to make my identity known throughout my thesis. I identify as a Xicana. My family immigrated to the United States in the late 90’s from Mexico and I was born in a small, primarily white town on the Oregon coast. From a young age, I realized that American family television was not catered to me. No matter how deep or inclusive various shows attempted to be, none of my family’s struggles were ever depicted in any of the shows I was supposed to be interested in. However, I became obsessed with the ways that telenovelas such as *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real* and *Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres* portrayed real-life struggles. I needed my lived experiences to be validated and in doing so, I became an expert in my cultura’s pain. This idea heavily influenced my decision to seek higher education. I needed to find out when and how this pattern of pain all started. While my research revolves around my own culture and is motivated by my lived experiences, I will not shine a negative light onto my cultura nor will I invalidate the life experiences of myself nor anybody else. I am aware that this topic is heavy and I plan on being careful with the way I execute and present my research. My intention behind introducing telenovelas by emphasizing their influence lies in my hope that readers will both

appreciate the positive ascendancy that telenovelas have, and be critical of what they are capable of creating within my culture (amplifying and perpetuating toxic masculinity).

That being said, colonialism and its influence on misogynistic violence will be heavily discussed throughout my writing as I analyze the four episodes. I will also be critical of the authority in language that Spain and the United States have over Latin America. In keeping with this sentiment, I will limit my use of the word machismo from this moment on, unless absolutely necessary, and will instead continue the use of toxic masculinity. This is relevant as historically this term has been used to villainize Latino men and traumatize Latina women, a phenomenon which is especially visible in the media. To further this narration, I will primarily use a Xicana feminist epistemology throughout the film analysis. In addition, I will not be italicizing or translating anything outside of content titles and direct quotes, including phrases and words in Spanish. A refusal to italicize words in my native language will attack the narrative that academia in this country was created for English speakers only.



## Review of Literature

Telenovelas were introduced to the United States when they were imported by Mexico by the Spanish International Network (SIN) in the 1960s (Mayer, 2003). Theorists have argued that the format of these telenovelas has the power to change and entrench 'cultural homologies' by creating an influence on everyday life (Basten, 2009). Mayer (2003) conducted a study where she examined the impact that telenovelas had on the social identities and daily lives of three Mexican American young girls living in working-class neighborhoods in California. While studies regarding the relationship between young people and media often focused on Anglocentric individuals and what most Americans would consider to be 'classic' movies and TV shows, Mayer (2003) found that telenovelas served emotional, social, and economic needs in the lives of Latinx American viewers by not only connecting their audiences across international and cultural boundaries, but also by helping young Latinx folks feel as though they have a piece of their Latinx heritage in their homes in the United States. The three young girls in Mayer's study found that they were able to imagine Mexico through these telenovelas. They reported themes of reimagining themselves in relation to their motherland (Mexico), no longer seeing it as foreign and unfamiliar and instead creating a deeper intimacy with their culture.

That being said, it is also important to note the amount of literature that brings attention to telenovelas' tendency to promote colorism and misrepresentations within Latinx cultures. Suleiman-Gonzalez (2002) pointed out the interest that feminist scholars have in writing about the social phenomenon that telenovelas have on their primarily female audience. Simultaneously, through this feminist discourse, Suleiman-Gonzalez (2002) also pointed out how narrative depictions of gendered and racial roles in telenovelas have created another means of reinforcing stereotypes and systems of oppression. It is necessary to examine whether or not the plotlines

that focus on abuse and misogyny have created an opportunity for privileged identities to further perpetuate racist and sexist narratives. It is also interesting to consider the positionality that many of these telenovela writers have. Are they reinforcing stereotypes that depict Latino men as aggressive abusers who are bound to murder their wives and daughters? Why are themes of toxic masculinity at the root of so many telenovelas? Questions such as these must be addressed in a manner that does not victim-blame survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, as many conversations on this topic often do.

Suleiman-Gonzalez (2002) points out that many telenovelas are written for women, by women. It's worth considering that many of these writers could be using telenovelas as means to write about their own experiences. If you grew up in a Latinx household, you know that many older generations still consider speaking out against the patriarchal positions within their families as taboo and worthy of shame. Sexist dichos such as 'calladita te miras mas bonita' have been used to reinforce the notion that women and girls are to stay quiet and/or not have an opinion about the decisions that their fathers, brothers, and husbands make. Telenovelas have historically allowed women a chance to safely discuss their frustrations about their own lives with the other feminine-identifying individuals without the judgment of the men in their lives. Telenovelas have allowed women a safe and accessible form of resistance by being able to discuss sex, desire, and feminism, among other topics, in their own homes.

However, when you consider the political atmosphere within racist American society, it is not far-fetched to wonder if this type of media consumption sustains negative portrayals through telenovelas, which ultimately fuel individualistic interpretations of behavior that criminalize the pathology of families of color by antagonizing dark-skinned Latino men and convincing dark-skinned Latina women that they are destined to be victims. Ferraro (2008)

defined a racial realists as individuals who view racial inequalities as consequences of the failure of people of color rather than considering the ongoing discrimination and institutional racism. Ferraro (2008) mentions how within sociological literature, it is common knowledge that people will use racialized statistics to support their racist ideas. It makes me wonder how telenovelas are also used to blame victims and pathologize individuals away from their positionalities within oppressive systems.

### **Colonialism and Domestic Violence**

Western Europe's focus on the patriarchal family unit is worth analyzing in domestic violence discourse. McEachern et al., (1998) brings attention to the lack of reported domestic violence found within pre-colonial history. The many recorded testimonies from Indigenous women speaking about their freedom and the equal rights that were honored within their cultures before colonization must be acknowledged. Navajo women owned property, held authority and importance, and oftentimes honoring the wife's family was prioritized (McEachern et al., 1998). Zion (1993) goes as far as arguing that the fundamental act of domestic violence contradicts the Navajos values and morals of sexual equality and harmony. Many Indigenous historians have claimed that domestic violence within Indigenous communities began when individualism and the patriarchal family unit was forced onto Indigenous communities, causing the romanticization of male domination of bodies and properties. McEachern et al., (1998) interviewed a Navajo woman who brought attention to the influence the white macho image has had in perpetuating toxic masculinity and encouraging Indigenous men to hurt the women in their lives.

Similarly, Gloria Anzaldua (1987) summarized the way that balanced gender oppositions in Latin American Indigenous communities were replaced by male dominance when Catholic

religious influences were placed upon them. Before “male dominated Azteca-Mexica culture drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes and by substituting male deities in their place,” (p. 49), Latin American Indigenous communities worshiped powerful feminine entities, such as Coatloapeuh, that celebrated their sexuality and unity between all gender identities.

“Battered and bruised she waits, her bruises throwing her back upon herself and she waits, her bruises throwing her back upon herself and the rhythmic pulse of the feminine. Coatloapeuh waits with her,” (Anzaldua, 1986, p. 45).

### **Xicana Feminist Epistemology and Its Necessity in Telenovelas**

Hurtado and Sinha (2016) pose a series of questions when discussing the dismantlement of toxic masculinity within Latinx cultures. Why should feminists be responsible, again, for the healing and recovery of men? Isn't the cost for women high and at the expense of their own development? Their answer, while being a simple one, is incredibly powerful: by saving the men in our lives, we ultimately save ourselves and those we love (Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). However, by using this framework, it is also important to clarify that this does **not** mean that we, as women of color, have to exhaust ourselves in order to make excuses for the men who have harmed us.

Ana Castillo (1995), who coined the term Xicanisma, described it as the ability to reconsider behavior that has been enacted onto our roles within our families, communities, and white-dominated society in which we all live. Bernal (1998) sums up the notion of a Xicana feminist epistemology by stating its ability to question the notion of objectivity and a universal foundation of knowledge. This epistemology prioritizes the unique lived experiences of Xicanas and our relationship with sex and gender. By applying this epistemology onto a film analysis and onto the literature that I gathered, I will construct a critical relationship between my own

interpretations of the roles that race, gender, and sexuality played in these episodes. This framework will also provide me with the analytic tools to offer suggestions to reconstruct the telenovela anthologies that were so influential in my life.

Yosso (2020)'s reflection of her 2002 publication, "Critical Race Media Literacy: Challenging Deficit Discourse about Chicanas/os" brings attention to the significance of historical contexts in media - questioning what racialized imagery aims to teach their viewers. Yosso (2020) urges viewers to critically question whose perspectives are being portrayed in the media we consume. She questions whose stories and histories are being rendered invisible and which narratives are being prioritized. In Yosso's (2002) analysis of critical race media literacy, she claims that repetitions of negative portrayals oftentimes teach young Latinx individuals that they are inferior to white people and simultaneously teach white people that they are better than Latinx individuals. I use her framework to illustrate the need for colonialism to be at the center of the conversation when analyzing culturally significant media (telenovelas) and domestic violence within groups of people who were colonized. I argue that these repetitive negative portrayals also dictate whose histories are considered worth highlighting. It is harmful to ignore the way that colonialism is uplifted in many of the narratives that telenovelas portray and unjust to ignore its origins.

Cortés (1992) emphasizes film's ability to be a part of a 'societal curriculum' that has the authority to be a pervasive and relentless method of teaching in itself. Cortés (1992) claims that film's contribute to intercultural, interracial, and interethnic understandings and misunderstandings. Thus, critiquing and analyzing popular films and media using a Xicana feminist epistemology is necessary when we think about the influence that systems of

oppression, such as colonialism and gender specific systems of oppression, have over visual media.

### **Methodology**

This project used a qualitative content analysis research approach in order to decide which episodes to analyze, and which theoretical frameworks to use in order to answer my research questions. Using Mikos' (2014) film analysis framework, I analyzed four telenovela episodes using his 14 steps of analysis to structure the basis of this thesis. These steps include the following:

1. Identifying the development of a general cognitive purpose- I knew I wanted to analyze the influence that telenovelas have on domestic violence and sexual assault discourse.
2. Watching the visual material- I spent about three months watching episodes that centered domestic violence and sexual abuse in *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real* and *Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres* on Youtube and finally settling on 'Casa de Odio', 'Causa Y Consecuencia', 'En Las Redes de Terror', and 'Como Novia de Pueblo'.
3. Providing a theoretical and historical reflection- I researched material that highlighted the history of domestic violence in pre-colonial Indigenous communities. I researched the impact that toxic masculinity and other gendered systems of oppression hold over my community
4. Development of a concrete cognitive purpose- I read over articles that specifically centered the impact that telenovelas have over the lives of Latinx and Xicanx individuals.
5. Development of questioning- I became familiar with Mikos' five film levels of research analysis

6. Sampling of the material for analysis- I utilized the literature from the previous steps and analyzed how it would correlate with the five film levels of analysis
7. Fixing of analytic tools- I rewatched each episode around ten times
8. Collection of data- I applied the theoretical frameworks onto the four episodes
9. Description of data collection- I created an introduction and literature review to set the readers up for the film analysis
10. Analysis of data – inventory of the film component
11. Interpretation and contextualization of analyzed data- I prioritized a Xicana feminist epistemology while I was analyzing the four episodes
12. Evaluation I – assessment of the analyzed and interpreted data
13. Evaluation II – assessment of the results with regard to the cognitive purpose and the operationalization
14. The presentation of the results

Furthermore, I used Mikos' five different film levels as the basis of my data collection. These film levels include the following topics

1. The analysis of content and representation
2. Narration and dramaturgy
3. Characters and actors
4. Aesthetics and configuration
5. Contexts

As Mikos mentions, the successful production of a film analysis relies heavily on its cognitive purpose, the research question, and the structure of what is being analyzed and how. Each episode will be broken down into the first four topics of his film levels as we discuss the

various themes that are brought forth and the fifth film level, 'contexts' will be addressed simultaneously in the discussion portion of this thesis.

### **Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real- Jealously and Femicide**

The two episodes from *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real* are titled 'La Casa de Odio' and 'Causa Y Consecuencia'. 'La Casa de Odio' is a common example of what this show entails and how it is structured. It follows a real life story about a woman accepting and excusing the physical and emotional abuse that her husband brings onto her.

The episode is narrated by Silvia Pinal Hidalgo, one of Mexico's most prominent actresses from the 1950's. She starts off narrating the episode by emphasizing the importance of family systems within Latinx cultures. She mentions how safety and security is found when families provide love and support to one another but tragically, the value of morals are diminished when family members fall into cycles of abuse.

The episode depicts a husband dragging his bleeding wife by the hair through a field after she left home without his permission. As she is begging him for forgiveness, she also mentions that the only reason why she left their home was because Maria, their daughter, was about to give birth to their grandson. The husband then stops beating his wife after he hears this news- this immediately creates the basis of this episode by bringing attention to the value of manhood over womanhood as this character's only incentive to stop beating his wife was the birth of another male family member.

The episode then jumps to scene two where the wife is portrayed with bruises and blood from top to bottom as she waits for her husband to get home. The husband arrives, visibly intoxicated, and demands that the wife cook him dinner. She asks him permission to speak to him



while she cooks and he grants her permission as he is in a 'good mood' due to his grandson being born. After the wife asks the husband whether or not he grants her permission to go visit her daughter, the husband immediately assumes that the real reason why his wife wants to go see her grandson is because she is cheating on him with her son-in-law. The husband then proceeds to physically harm her some more.

In the next scene, Maria is begging her husband to go check up on her mother as she is very familiar with her father's abuse towards her mother. Maria's husband agrees and finds his wife's mother on the floor bleeding. As he's helping her up, Maria's father walks in on them and confirms to himself that his wife is indeed cheating on him with Maria's husband. He then tells Maria about the non-existent love affairs between her mother and her husband. When Maria confronts her husband, he reminds her of the abusive manhood that her father has traumatized both her and her mother with her entire life. After realizing that the love affair was just another way to antagonize her mother, Maria decides that it is finally time to kick her father out of her house, since the entire family lives together. Maria and her husband arrive at their home as Maria's father is once again, beating Maria's mother. Maria's husband then overpowers the father, threatens him, and tells him that he is no longer welcomed in his home. After the father attempts to take his wife with him, his ego is then emasculated when she refuses to go with him.

In the next scene, the father is at a bar, incredibly drunk, talking to his buddies about how he was just disrespected by his wife. He tells his buddies how he has lost everything. He no longer has a grandchild, a daughter, or even a 'machete para zorrajarle el pescuezo a esa maldita' (the maldita being his wife). One of the buddies then gives him a machete and in the next scene, he goes back to their house and he brutally murders his wife while she is babysitting their grandchild. A horrified Maria then comes home to the crime scene. The episode ends with Silvia

Pinal Hidalgo informing the viewers that the father was arrested by Bolivian officials and is currently serving time for his heinous crime. Hidalgo mentions how Maria does not believe that her father's sentence is enough of a punishment for the decades of abuse her mother endured.

#### The analysis of content and representation

The Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (OCDSV) reported on the negative and positive consequences that depicting stories of domestic violence has on viewers. Mcmanus and Dorfus (2003) explained how the manner in which the media tells a story of intimate partner violence (IPV) will have a profound effect on what their viewers, and ultimately what our society decides to do about it. As I was conducting research on *Mujer, Casos De La Vida Real*, it was evident that one of the show's ultimate goals was to encourage women to speak up about their abuse. The stories that they portray on the show are from real life stories that their viewers write to them about. According to OCDSV, it is important that media mediums stray away from sensationalization, blaming anger/drugs, mislabeling, and harassing the victim/survivors family (OCDSV. n.d.). Instead, it is important to know the facts of the story, seek expert comments, and to share resources at the end of each story.

While episodes like 'La Casa de Odio', do essentially bring awareness to domestic violence and sexual assault by simply existing, the visual depiction of such a brutal episode tends to be the only method of doing so. Mikos (2014) argues that for a film to be productive in completing a goal, it is crucial that film makers put in just as much meaning and effort into how their concepts are being portrayed, and not just to whom they're being portrayed to. For example, as much as a viewer could be trying to think about IPV awareness, it is difficult to not look away from the screen when Maria's mother is shown bloody, distraught, and being ruthlessly attacked in every other scene in the short episode. As representation is a vital aspect in these types of

telenovelas, Mikos reminds film makers that the viewers will reflect on their own experiences and placements in the world when watching these episodes. Is it trauma-informed to potentially trigger a survivor by depicting their abuse in such an uncomfortable manner? What is then being interpreted by audiences when these episodes seem to avoid digging deeper into societal positions through their portrayals? Mikos mentions the importance of reflecting on ethics when writing the scripts of these episodes i.e are racial stereotypes being enforced? How is Maria's mother, the actual victim of this story, being portrayed? In the characters and actors section, I will argue that Maria's mother is made to represent the oppressive consequences that Gloria Anzaldua (1987) portrays in 'The Wounding of the india-Mestiza'.

### Narration and dramaturgy

Mikos defines dramaturgy as the structure of the sequence of events in a narrative film (the tone of the episode, the timing in between scenes, how empathy is built up, etc) and narration as the voice of the storytelling process. Together, these two aspects are able to produce the cognitive purpose of the episode.

When thinking about the dramaturgy in *La Casa de Odio*, it is important to question the sensationalization of this episode. OCDSV reminds us that embellishing stories does not serve the facts or the public (OCDSV. n.d.). The scene where Maria's father is in the bar comes to mind. It is safe to assume that this particular scene was curated by the writers. Unless Maria or the police spoke to the people at the bar, there is no way that Maria wrote to the directors of *Mujer, Casos De La Vida Real* the details about the disturbing conversation her father supposedly had with his drunken friend. It is also safe to assume that the friend would not willingly disclose to anybody that he was the one to not only give Maria's father the murder weapon but also the one to urge him to go kill his wife. Knowing this, it is important to ask ourselves whether or not

this scene is necessary. Realistically, Maria most likely wrote to the producers about her father's substance use regarding alcohol and how this amplified his jealousy and led to the death of her mother. In Ana Castillo's book *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1995), she asks her readers a customary question that many people ask themselves when looking into cases of domestic violence: "What did the murdered woman do... to deserve to die?" (p. 74). Discourse that surrounds jealousy and toxic masculinity is typically followed with an explanation that centers self esteem, alcohol induced wrath, and the value of a woman.

Castillo (1995) reminds her readers that jealousy is a symptom of hierarchical civilization—a trait that has been handed down to colonized communities throughout history. It is a concept that finds its roots during the time period where women were nothing more than men's property. While honoring and protecting women has been historically significant, especially within older Indigenous tribes and cultures, Castillo (1995) brings attention to a cultivated 'bond' that men have with themselves that overrides any desire to protect women. This bond refers to men and their desire of total ownership over all their commodities, reminding us that one of man's oldest commodities is woman. Maria's father was so offended at the idea of his wife simply speaking to another man that it spiraled into murder. However, accountability when jealousy leads to heinous 'crimes of passion', such as murder and abuse, must be taken by the individual man or perpetrator. The scene at the bar shifts blame onto two different explanations;

1. Alcohol led Maria's father to kill her mother and
2. Her father's friends influenced him to kill her mother.

As previously mentioned, the OCDSV recognizes the tendency for media outlets to blame alcohol for instances of domestic violence. Stanley (2012) mentions that understanding myths associated with domestic violence is key in discussing prevention and awareness. Whether

you are shifting blame onto alcohol or peer influence, you are opening the room up for potential victim blaming. A viewer could interpret this as a critique of Maria's mother—Maria's mother should not have made a drunk jealous. Instead of critiquing the abuser, this type of narrative questions why Maria's mother would have ended up with somebody who's jealousy was amplified with alcohol instead of questioning why an individual would allow himself to drink to that extent. Men's jealousy gets blamed onto the abused woman and this type of narration is passed onto impressionable young women (the viewers).

In Xicana feminist scholar Emma Perez's book *Gulf Dreams* (1996), she explains this phenomenon by addressing a daughter's tendency to question her mother's compliance to patriarchal abuse in the following passage:

“She feared my father's jealousy, like abuse, and often stayed home to appease. I misunderstood her compliance. In time, I recognized her strength, his weakness,” (p.19).

Maria initially believing her father's jealous rage to the point where she feels inclined to question her husband is a great representation of Perez's (1996) illustration of just how impressionable the daughters of abuse can potentially be. This is important to think about when you consider just how many daughters watch these types of episodes with their mothers.

The bar scene insinuates that her father's friends were also a factor in her mother's death. We'll analyze this assumption in the character and actors section.

### Characters and Actors

There are three main characters in this episode; Maria who is played by Aleida Nuñez, her father who is played by Juan Romanca, and her mother who is played by Thelma Dorantes. Mikos (2014) mentions that analyzing the characters in tv shows is significant for two reasons:

1. The characters who appear are important for advancing the plot as they add to the dramaturgy and to the narrative structure of telenovela as the storyline is often portrayed by their perspectives and
2. The way that the viewers perceive the overall themes and lessons depends on how their perception of the characters relate to their personal concepts of self and identity.

During my preliminary research, I found that *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real* appeared to prioritize hiring actors who were not necessarily the biggest stars in Hollywood. It appears that they are careful in deciding who their characters are going to be portrayed by but this could also be as a result of how much money they are willing to pay their actors. While they are better than other telenovelas in including dark skinned Latinx actors into their plotlines, their tendency to amplify racist and sexist stereotypes by the personality traits of their characters must be addressed as well, even if they don't mean to uplift these problematic narratives.

Let us go back to the bar scene. It starts off with Maria's father, his compadré, and two other friends taking a shot of whiskey. In the background there are images of white playboy models, loud Latin music, and many other drunk men. This is the show's very clear attempt at portraying a group of traditional 'macho' men. Even while Latin telenovelas and other forms of media have been the primary (visual) depicors of macho men, it is important to address the way that white Anglo folks internalize some of these narrations. Castillo (1995) points to white men's tendency to associate 'machismo' with a Mexican male killer, citing the knife toting 'vato loco' trope. Instead of acknowledging that machismo, as Castillo (1995) defines it, is an exaggerated demonstration of male virility that is shown throughout various ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, it is often associated exclusively with Latino men, even though white supremacy

deems Latino men as inferior and less than. This is further amplified when our own networks are quite literally depicting groups of drunken and dark skinned ‘vatos locos’ with machetes plotting the death of a Latina woman.

Again, viewers will associate their own identities with these characters. In conversations about toxic masculinity, literature has shown that Latino men have expressed their feelings that feminist portrayals of domestic violence are simply accusing all Latinx men of abusing their women. It is highly important that there is also a depiction of Latino men who are not portrayed by these tropes. *La Casa de Odio* actually does follow this suggestion with Maria’s husband. He is shown as caring for his wife, his wife’s mother, and his baby. He does his best to protect them all by condemning violence against women. However, at the end of the day he was unable to save Maria’s mother from her brutal death. I acknowledge that this episode in particular is a true story. The show would not have changed the end result for the sake of allowing their viewers to relate to the ‘good guy.’ It is just disappointing, and tragic, to see how this character’s efforts were unsuccessful and how the supposed murder scheme from the bar was successful.

The depiction of Maria and her mother’s character is also important to address. Aleida Nuñez and Thelma Dorantes' characters both portray depictions of *marianismo*, which has been described by scholars as the coexisting aspect of *machismo*. Within this narrative, women are labeled as self-sacrificing, passive, and home-centered. This idea was brought forth during colonial times by Catholic ideologies that described women as the spiritual pillars of their homes and often were expected to behave similar to the Virgin Mary (Nuñez, et al., 2016). Political scientist Evelyn Stevens coined this term in 1973 to bring attention to the subordinate position women have been historically assigned (Castillo, 2009). When we examine Thelma Dorantes’ character, there is a clear illustration of the backlash of marianismo as she screams and begs her

husband for forgiveness when she is not emulating the level of subordination that he is expecting from her. Her role is represented through Anzaldua's (1987) writing:

“The dark skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century. For 300 years she has been a slave, a force of cheap labor, colonized by the Spaniard, by the Anglo, by her own people...,” (p. 44).

Similarly, Aleida Nuñez's character portrays the generational effect of domestic violence that toxic masculinity has over the daughters of battered women. For example, she continues to have nightmares about her father's abuse even as an adult woman in a non-abusive marriage. However, it was she who was taking initiative to remove her mother away from the decades of abuse as she acknowledged that her mother would not be able to do this alone. The strength that it took for Maria to share her story gets watered down through her distraught depiction. Even through an episode about the negative consequences of toxic masculinity, the writers failed to show Maria as the strong survivor that she is. As Anzaldua (1987) mentions, the worst type of betrayal lies in patriarchal systems convincing us that dark skinned women are destined to be *las chingadas* instead of *las chingonas*.

### Aesthetics and Configuration

According to Mikos (2014), the way a film configures its plotline also adds onto the way an audience is able to react and internalize the show. A film is not simply an array of moving images and just the characters; it is also the music, the editing, the lighting, etc. When analyzing this episode, it is important to address the dark eerie lighting, the constant zoom-ins to Maria's mother's face as she is mortified and the suspenseful, almost corny, music that is played when Maria's father appears to be creeping in the background. I ask again, were all of these things



necessary? If you are going simply based on entertainment rates, whether or not this episode was going to be able to keep an audience watching for the 20 minutes that it is portrayed within, then one could argue that it is necessary. However, we must also acknowledge that this show claims that its mission is to help victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, so the intentionality behind a piano key playing every single time Maria's father starts to physically harm Maria's mother should be questioned.

### **Causa y Consecuencia- Parental Blame and Homophobia**

*Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real* tackles toxic masculinity in a different manner in *Causa y Consecuencia*. The episode starts off with Silvia Pinal Hidalgo letting the audience know that the Mexican authorities are currently working with this family to pursue justice for the death of the character this episode is about. The episode then diverts its attention to Daniel, a young man writing a letter. Daniel is shown crying, smoking a cigarette and drinking alcohol as he writes an apology letter to his mother. He then reaches for a gun, points it at his head, and the next scene is quite literally a bunch of blood being thrown onto the wall as Daniel falls onto his bed.

The next scene depicts Daniel's landlord having a conversation with the police as she describes how she found him. She mentions that she knew Daniel was raro but did not think he would be capable of ending his own life. Daniel's mother then rushes in asking for Daniel's whereabouts and the police inform her that he ended his life and hands her the letter.

The letter starts off with Daniel apologizing for being a burden and humiliation to his mother. We then get a scene change to Daniel's mother carrying him as a baby as she is pleading with her husband not to leave her. Daniel's father screams at Daniel's mother insulting and shaming her for having another child. As soon as he leaves the door, Daniel's mother begins to

scream at the crying infant that he is the reason why the father left them. Daniel then discloses that as soon as he was able to understand that he was 'different' from other boys his age, he began wishing he was never born.

The episode then shifts to another flashback of roughly 10 year old Daniel putting on his mother's makeup and dresses. As soon as his mother sees what he is doing, she begins to beat him profusely to the point where he is bleeding from his nose and mouth as she tells him it's time for him to begin acting like a man. In the letter, Daniel then confesses that he knew from that moment on, that his life would only ever bring his mother shame. This shame contributed to his hesitation in disclosing the abuse he experienced at school to his mother.

The scene then shifts to the first time that Daniel was badly beaten up by his male classmates. His principal urges him to tell her who hurt him but Daniel, out of fear, decides to stay quiet. The principal tells him that she knows which boys were responsible for the harassment and is planning on punishing them regardless. When Daniel gets home that day, visibly having been attacked, his mother instantly starts berating him for being too feminine to defend himself. He then confesses how he was also sexually assaulted by the group of boys that beat him up because of his sexual orientation but was too worried about causing her an even bigger humiliation to let her know. He states that her burden will end with his life and the letter ends there.

Daniel's mother is then shown hugging his lifeless body as she asks for his forgiveness. The audience is then received by Silvia Pinal Hidalgo as she reminds parents how it is of utmost importance to accept and love your children no matter what sexual orientation they hold in order to avoid fatales consecuencias.

The analysis of content and representation

Homophobia and parental irresponsibility are the two primary themes that are portrayed through this episode. Homophobia and toxic masculinity have always been depicted hand in hand, and especially in conversations about sexual assault. Martinez (2019) brings attention to the way that Christian and Catholic beliefs have influenced Latinx cultures when addressing sexuality. When Indigenous tribes were colonized, Spaniards also forced their religions onto the communities. When looking over letters and journals from Spaniard soldiers who invaded the Chumash people living along the southern coast, which would then be transformed to today's California, Miranda (2010) found declarations of soldiers where they are brutally discussing the way that the third gendered individuals from these Indigenous tribes were offending their Eurocentric spiritual beliefs and in turn, were deserving of discipline and punishment.

In this episode, Daniel is not only constantly physically abused by just about everybody in his life, but he also experiences a same sex rape as punishment for his queerness. Let me reiterate that- Daniel, a man, is sexually assaulted by another man because he is gay. If sodomy is sin, then how is it justifiable as a punishment? Miranda (2010) brings attention to this hypocrisy when she addresses the horrendous way that the Spaniards would murder the third gendered Indigenous people as their means of paying tribute to their own religion, even though the ten commandments clearly state that murder is a sin. So essentially, thou shall not kill, unless a colonizer deems it okay.

The goal of this episode, as stated by the title 'Causa y Consecuencia', is to inform their audience that every action has a consequence. The abuse an individual adheres may lead to a morbid and fatal death and therefore, parents must be advocates for their children. However, the sexual assault that Daniel experiences is addressed for a total of about two minutes. How much more productive would the lesson be if the effect of this assault was discussed in a more nuanced

fashion? This lesson did not need to be learned because somebody died. While the message that is directed toward the parents is necessary, it is clear that these old telenovelas still have a difficult time discussing sexual abuse, especially when the victim is a male.

### Narration and Dramaturgy

Narration is a big aspect in this episode as it consists of Daniel's voice reading the letter to his mother when depicting each scene. The combination of the loud violin music playing as he reads, and his heartbreaking confession create a precedent for the tone of the entire episode. The majority of the lines in his suicide note are all statements rooted in toxic masculinity, intimate partner violence (between Daniel's parents) and the affects of sexual violence onto brown bodies. For example, right after the first flashback scene, Daniel's quivering voice explains his understanding of why his father decided to leave him and his family. Instead of blaming his father, Daniel apologizes to his mother for being born and for causing such distress for her when his father walked out on them. Instead of acknowledging the mother's desperate begs, the father accuses Daniel's mother of using his birth as another means to hold him down- a typical misogynistic claim.

In his next narration scene Daniel begins to talk about his sexuality and what it meant for him to feel different from his peers.

“Yo no era como los demás niños de mi edad. A mi no me gustaba jugar con coches ni boleta. A mi me gustaba jugar... a las muñecas. Y mi gran sueño, mamá... fue a ser como tu,” (Mujer, Casos de La Vida Real, Causa y Consecuencia, 8:55)

There is a dramatic pause right before he confesses that instead of playing with what folks would consider to be stereotypical boy toys, such as cars and balls, he enjoyed playing with dolls. This pause is an indication of the shame he feels for enjoying something that is considered

to be feminine and ‘for girls’. In Miranda’s (2010) exploration of the third gendered Indigenous people of the Chumash community, she brings attention to what the Spaniards referred to these people as. They were called ‘Joyas’ which translates to gems. Some scholars predicted that this could have been due to the fact that the third gendered people dressed in women’s clothing and jewelry. However, considering the Spaniards perception of their practices there is no way that such a pretty word would be associated with this community, unless it was done with a mockery undertone. When the Spaniards colonized this community, they stripped the Joyas of what they considered to be ‘feminine’ clothes and forced them to wear ‘masculine’ clothes. If there was any objection, they would get murdered in horrific ways. This curation of shame that comes along with enjoying feminine things derives from this cultural trauma and it is why Daniel confessed that he would play with dolls in such a self-hatred manner. This monologue tells the audience that Daniel knew people would persecute him if they were aware that he liked to put on lipstick and dresses and dress up like his mother. This monologue indicates that the most horrific thing a man can do is behave like a woman.

His third confession revolved around his sexual assault. Daniel’s character can be depicted as sounding as though he’s crying throughout this narration. The pain in his voice and his verbal illustration for how much shame he felt after his sexual assault could be interpreted as his reasoning for taking his own life. I go more into his sexual assault in the next section.

### Characters and Actors

Ricardo Margaleff, a Mexican actor most well-known for his famous roles in *Una Familia de Diez* and *Al Diablo Con Los Guapos* plays the grown up rendition of Daniel, the Daniel who dies by suicide and the Daniel who narrates the letter. Rafael Bazon plays teenage

Daniel. Rafael Bazon is most known for his work in various Telenovela anthologies including *La Rosa de Guadalupe* and having a role in 27 episodes of *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real*.

As I was conducting my research on Rafael Bazon, I noticed that many of his depictions in *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real* were those of a male survivor/victim of sexual or physical abuse. In terms of his physical appearance, Bazon is a smaller individual. He has a higher pitched voice and a shy demeanor in many of his characters. Now why is this worth noting? As I previously mentioned, Mikos (2014) claims that themes and lessons in films are heavily influenced by the actors who are portraying them. While there is no way of knowing how the real life Daniel looked like, it is interesting to wonder why the telenovela production chose to cast Rafael in these roles so often. What exactly are they saying about male victims of sexual assault?

Ocampo (2012) brings attention to the validation and praise that many Latino men get when they exhibit 'masculine' behaviors and the tendency to brand men as girls or as being homosexual when they present 'feminine' traits. Social distancing from femininity and desiring domination and power has become the general way to show masculinity. When analyzing the way that gendered identity categories have been resisted in Indigenous cultures, Strawblanket (2020) found that the imposition of Western gendered roles was created as a way to further maintain dominance between colonizers and the colonized. The way that this shows up in the media, and specifically in this episode, is by emphasizing and mocking Daniel's femininity when he is being sexually assaulted. His abusers categorize him as a woman when they call him a *chismosa* instead of a *chimoso* right before they abuse him. Similar to the Spanish colonizers asserting their dominance over women, the three abusers showcase their male dominance by magnifying his femininity. By casting Rafael Bazon in these roles over and over again, he

ultimately becomes the face of male victims and survivors in this show. This then holds the potential for isolating victims and survivors that do not share his femininity.

### Aesthetics and Configuration

In terms of notable aspects of aesthetics and configurations that show up in this episode, the intro is worth analyzing. Specifically, the scene where Daniel dies by suicide. As previously stated, the overall message of this episode revolves around being mindful of our actions as we cannot know what consequences they will have on the people around us. Black and Latino men who identify as gay are more at risk for suicide attempts even in the absence of the traditional markers of depression and substance abuse compared to their white counterparts (O'Donnell et al., 2011). Stigma, prejudice, and discrimination that comes along with being a queer male heavily influences this. In the scene, Daniel picks up a gun after he finishes writing his letter. Intense piano music plays right before he tragically pulls the trigger and the next camera movement is an immense amount of blood being splattered onto the brick wall right before Daniel falls onto his bed.

Mikos (2014) mentions that along with the visual moving pictures that make up the 'aesthetic' of the film, the means of configuring scenes influences viewers' expectations regarding future events. The intensity of this scene is meant to prepare the viewer for the series of blatant homophobia, bullying, and abuse that Daniel is about to depict in his writing. Daniel's death is *la consecuencia*. Based on this scene, and the fact that the episode revolves around his mother regretting her impact on his death as she is reading through his letter, it is safe to assume that *el causo* falls on the mother, the parental irresponsibility and the lack of support that Daniel adhered from her. I question why parental blame was highlighted so intensely through the configurations of the episode and why Daniel's sexual abuse seems to be glossed over so

intentionally. Especially considering the fact that the sexual abuse scene is quite vividly illustrated. How are the viewers supposed to move on from this scene? We are left with no room to question the intentionality behind this portrayal as we are instructed to focus on the regretful mother.

### **Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres**

In the year 2001, *Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres* aired its first episode. Similar to *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real*, the ultimate goal of this anthology was to detail the sexist social problems that occur in Mexico (toxic masculinity, domestic violence, sexual abuse, etc). After twenty-three years, this show continues to be one of the most popular shows on the Mexican broadcasting network Azteca 13. The two episodes that I analyze from this telenovela anthology are titled ‘En Las Redes de Terror’ and ‘Como Novia de Pueblo’. As with the previous series, one of these episodes focuses on themes of domestic violence while the latter focuses on themes of sexual abuse. However, these episodes are over two times the length of the episodes in *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real*. The end of each episode also provides a list of domestic violence agencies that viewers with similar experiences can call to break their silence. The episodes also end with a motivational/inspirational quote associated with the episode’s overall message (“Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres,” n.d).

### **En Las Redes de Terror- Intimate partner violence y la vida de una madre**

The episode follows Rosa, her husband Chava, and their two kids. The first scene shows a crying Rosa being chased down the stairs by Chava as her youngest son (about five years old) hides under their kitchen table and their oldest son (who appears to be around ten years old)



screams at his father to stop hurting his mother. Chava immediately turns his anger to his ten year old son and threatens to hit him too. Doña Lucha, their neighbor, observes out the window as she waits for Chava to leave before rushing to check on Rosa and the kids.

The next scene shows a conversation about gender inequality and domestic abuse between a defense attorney and a psychiatrist, a married couple, who are later revealed to be Rosa's bosses. In the next two scenes we see the kids asking Doña Lucha why their father hurts his mother so much. They also ask her if she is able to go check up on Rosa since they know their mother is crying alone in their living room. Chava on the other hand is shown in a restaurant where he runs into an old boss who offers him another opportunity working for him as long as he makes sure to keep his anger under control.

Back at home, Doña Lucha questions Rosa as to why she allows so much abuse to occur so often and a defensive Rosa attempts to explain Chava's ownership over her as her husband. Rosa confesses to Doña Lucha how her father used to hit her mother all the time and this is just how things are. A worried Doña Lucha attempts to rationalize with Rosa but by this point in the episode, Rosa is still very much stuck in her cycle of abuse. As the story progresses, the psychiatrist notices Rosa's limp as she is attempting to clean her house and she, too, attempts to have conversations with Rosa about her abuse. The psychiatrist and her husband, the attorney, continue to have conversations with one another about why men decide to hit their wives using Rosa and her situation as an example.

There are two more incidents of domestic abuse that occur before Rosa's boss convinces her to seek help. Throughout these two incidents multiple people, including the kids question Rosa as to why she allows this abuse to occur and each time Rosa jumps to Chava's defense mentioning his childhood, their lack of money, her lack of skills, etc. It is not until the

psychiatrist brutally tells Rosa that the possibility of Chava killing her, or killing the kids is very high that Rosa begins to understand the gravity of her situation.

In the next scene, Rosa interacts with an even more agitated than usual Chava as he expresses his frustrating day at work. Chava then sexually abuses Rosa and she is found lying on her floor the next morning by Doña Lucha and the psychiatrist after Rosa did not show up to work. Finally, the two women convince Rosa to report Chava. In the next scene Chava and his boss meet up to discuss some issues happening in the workplace when Rosa, the psychiatrist, her lawyer husband, and a police officer confront Chava and explain to him that Rosa is reporting him for sexually abusing her. Chava immediately convinces Rosa to not report him. As soon as her bosses and the police leave, Chava begins to threaten Rosa with what he is going to do to her when they arrive at home. Hearing this, his boss decides to fire Chava as he previously expressed his disapproval for men abusing their wives.

When they arrive home, an enraged Chava threatens to kill Rosa, the kids, and himself if she ever attempts to report him ever again. What they did not know was that both of the kids were at the top of the stairs listening to everything Chava is spewing. The next morning, Rosa realizes that her kids are not in their beds or anywhere to be found. She immediately begins searching for them while Chava essentially searches nowhere. Rosa does not find her kids until the next morning out in the streets hiding under some boxes. When Rosa asks her boys why they ran away from her, they confess that they heard Chava threatening to kill them. 'Desgrasiado' Rosa shamefully says. This confession of fear from her children was the strength that she needed all this time. Rosa leaves the kids with Doña Lucha and she goes on to confront Chava for everything he has ever done to her and the boys. Throughout this monologue, Chava begins to get more and more angry but right before he attempts to hit her one more time, the police and the

lawyer arrive to arrest him. As he is leaving, Chava threatens to punish Rosa for what she is doing. An empowered Rosa simply tells him that she no longer fears him and that he is never going to get close to her and the boys ever again. The episode ends with the psychiatrist congratulating Rosa on her strength as they hold hands together indicating that the realm of terror is finally over.

### The analysis of content and representation

“For the woman who is a mother of young children, her alienation is intensified by the various ways society restricts mothers from participating in the world,” (Castillo, 1995, p. 191).

Edelson et al., (2007) noted the cultural factors that tend to affect Latinas experiencing intimate partner violence and why this results in the lack of reported cases and how it contributes to why women stay in these relationships. They found that only 13% of Mexico-born women living in the United States reported domestic abuse. They mention dichos rooted in hierarchical misogyny como ‘La ropa sucia se lleva en casa’ y ‘¿El qué dirán?’ that have contributed to the perpetuation of shame and guilt that many victims and survivors face when they’re in situations similar to Rosas. The focus of this episode centered around depicting the exhausting process that comes with leaving domestic violence. Instead of simply showcasing the abuse that Rosa was experiencing, this episode made sure to also center conversations around toxic masculinity, the effects that IPV has on children, and unconditional support from loved ones.

In their study comparing the psychological effects that domestic violence has on Latina women and non-Latina women, Edelson et al., (2007) found that Latinas experiencing IPV had significantly poorer outcomes on measures related to trauma, depression, self-esteem, and attributional style than did non-Latina women. The value of respecting and defending one’s

husband regardless of his actions is heavily addressed in this story. Alvarez and Fedock (2016) bring attention to the disproportionate vulnerability to intimate partner homicide (IPH) that Latinas face compared to other types of homicide. This episode addresses Rosas's fears, her feelings of inadequacy, her isolation, and ends with a harsh but very much necessary reality check for Rosa regarding the safety of both her and her kids' lives.

### Narration and Dramaturgy

Similar to *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real*, episodes in this telenovela anthology are also based on real stories and real experiences. As a reminder, the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (OCDSV) emphasizes the danger of straying away from the facts of a story when depicting domestic violence in the media. As with any show that illustrates the dramatization of a real life story, it is difficult to confirm the details of conversations had with characters. Especially when the characters are not the main subjects of the show. In this episode, it was apparent that nearly every single conversation was scripted with audience members with similar experiences in mind in order to build up empathy for not only Rosa, but also for themselves.

Scenes of violence were followed by a conversation from the psychiatrist and her lawyer husband that looked at domestic violence in a greater scheme of things. Even when mentioning machismo, the characters made sure not to make this concept a generalization for all Latino men. Furthermore, this episode addresses the fact that Chava is not an alcoholic since there is a tendency for folks to blame alcohol for IPV. When a scene of violence was not followed by the psychiatrist and the lawyer, they were followed by supportive talks from Doña Lucha or with critiques from Chava's boss and his opinions on men neglecting and abusing their families. While there is a probability that these conversations did not happen in real life, it is clear that the

intentionality behind these conversations was created for the viewers to understand Rosa's situation from a critical standpoint. Mikos (2016) states that dramaturgy has the task of arranging the sequence of events in which the actors are active in such a way that certain cognitive and emotional activities are stimulated in viewers. He highlights the fact that the feelings viewers develop arise when knowledge regarding the subject of the film's message accumulates. The more viewers understand domestic violence and toxic masculinity, the easier it will be to recognize Rosa's strength and become aware of the root of this systemic issue.

### Characters and Actors

I was unable to find information regarding the names of the actors of this episode or any previous work they have been a part of. However, the portrayal of Rosa's character and the portrayal of Chava's character will be discussed in this section.

Rosa is played by a dark skinned Latina woman with long black hair and a small physique. She plays a housecleaner, the mother of two, and a battered woman. As with the two women in the episode of *Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real*, Rosa's character is also meant to play a representation of the colonial concept of marianismo and with that, the extension of familismo. Familismo is a multidimensional cultural construct which prioritizes support among family members, strong ties between family members, behavior and attitude perceptions of the family, and family honor and obligation toward the family (Fuchsel, 2013). While the episode does not show any family outside of Rosa, Chava, and the two boys, it is clear that defending Chava's reputation is of utmost importance to Rosa. There are various moments when she justifies his behavior by mentioning his childhood, stress related to financial needs, and by blaming herself. Fuchsel (2013) mentions how literature has found that Latinas have a harder time disclosing intimate partner violence for the sake of not disrupting family cohesion in the community. This is

a learned practice. During one conversation between Rosa and Doña Lucha, Rosa tells her that she witnessed her father abusing her mother to the same extent that she gets abused and how her mother would always be complicit. This reminded me of Castillo's explanation of the mother-bond principal:

“Some mothers married because they were really in love yet others may have thought that is what they were supposed to do—fall in love, get married, have children, become grandmothers, die—if not happy, at least guilt free—with the knowledge that they fulfilled their role in life as a God-fearing woman. Some women discovered after marriage that they were no longer in love. But they stayed out of economic necessity, fear of reproach from their family, prohibitions against divorce by the Catholic church, and many reasons long ago established to keep our mothers ‘in their place’,” (p. 188).

In the same conversation, Rosa explains her feelings of incompetence as she states how she isn't anything without Chava. Rosa plays into the status of *marianismo* when she confessed that her only role in life is to be Chava's wife. Luckily, the show does not end the conversation there. Doña Lucha jumps in and reminds Rosa that no person is anybody's property.

As stated previously, literature surrounding *machismo* tends to lack historical facts. This word has also been defined as “the ideology that defends and justifies the superiority and domination of males over females” (Soto, 2021, p. 12). While new age literature does tend to highlight the Catholic origins of this word, there still tends to be a lot of discourse that emphasizes harmful stereotypes of Latino men when speaking of this word. For example, associating it with the overindulgence of alcohol and jealousy. Unlike many ‘macho’ men portrayed in telenovelas, Chava was not an alcoholic and jealousy was not a theme shown in this episode. His toxic masculinity was purposely associated with his uncontrollable temper and

neglect for his family. The viewers were able to see a different form of toxic masculinity that does not typically get showcased. There is no shift of blame to alcohol or jealousy that could be misrepresented. We the viewers are able to see that Chava is abusing his family because he is an abusive man who was never held accountable for his actions, not because he's a drunk.

### Aesthetics and Configuration

According to Mikos (2014), the moving pictures within a film, or in this case the telenovela, guide viewers emotionally through the story, the viewers are transported into particular moods, and their attention is steered to individual aspects of the film image without our awareness of it. While Rosa is shown in great distress and with various bruises and in pain after Chava harms her, she is never once in the episode actually shown being beaten. Weiss (2022) defined re-traumatization as the reactivation of stress as a result of retelling or emotionally engaging with narrative of past traumatic events. While researchers have questioned the validity of re-traumatization due to debate regarding its definition, I believe that the media's cultivation of showcasing violence towards women of color on screen must have some type of psychological effect on us which could take away from the goal of the episode. Literature has found how portrayals of sexist violence contribute to the normalization of it—I argue that it adds onto the romanization of it as well. Even without the visual scene of Rosa being abused, we know that it is happening. If your show results in audience members looking away, or turning off your show because the depiction of domestic violence is so uncomfortable, then I do not believe the goal of awareness was successful. At the very least, writers should incorporate Weiss' (2022) findings on the way that re-traumatization affects research participants and question the notions of ethics when creating the aesthetics and configurations of their shows.

### **Como Novia de Pueblo- The consequences of sexual abuse**

*Como Novia de Pueblo* tells the story of Altagracia, her parents Ceferino y Lorenza, and Jacinto, a boy who she is hoping to marry one day in her little pueblito. The story starts off with Altagracia and Jacinto messing around and running through fields as they discuss their dating barriers. Altagracia's parents are very strict and have made it apparent that they want her to respect herself as well as them. Jacinto promises Altagracia that he is going to ask Ceferino for her hand in marriage as soon as possible and Altagracia runs off to the store to pick up some milk from Jacinto's uncle's store for her mother.

On her way home from the store, Altagracia comes across some travelers. As soon as they see her, El Jefe and two other travelers rape her. The scene then cuts to Jacinto's uncle and his worker, Doña Paola in the store talking about how good of a girl Altagracia has grown up to be compared to the rest of the girls from the village. Doña Paola goes as far as referring to Altagracia as *pura como el agua*. When Altagracia arrives home, she confides in her mother what just happened to her. A panicked and distraught Lorenza sends Altagracia to her room and immediately tells Ceferino that Altagracia is not feeling well due to her menstrual cycle.

The next day Altagracia and her mother have a further conversation about her rape, she confesses that it was three men who took advantage of her. Lorenza then says 'Ya no vales nada, mija. Ya te desgraciaron la vida' as she simultaneously tries to comfort her daughter by offering her some atole. Lorenza then convinces Altagracia that she must trick Jacinto into having sexual relationships with her in order for him to be forced to marry her as soon as possible. When Jacinto asks for Altagracia's hand in marriage, Ceferino makes it clear that even with the animals that Jacinto's uncle is also offering up, he will not give Jacinto his blessing since Jacinto is poor and unable to take care of Altagracia.



The episode also introduces us to Mikaela, an older single flirtatious woman who is friends with Jacinto. When the travelers come across her, they proceed to beat and rape her while expressing their hatred towards 'wild women'. The story then shifts gears to a scene in a bar where Jacinto meets the travelers. They point a gun at him and tell him to prove if he's 'hombre o vieja'. After this, the travelers take Jacinto under their wings and introduce him to the world of dirty business. Jacinto then begins to make a lot of money and finally, Ceferino agrees to let him marry Altagracia.

On the day of their wedding, the travelers try to convince Jacinto to rape Mikaela as a wedding present to himself. When Jacinto expresses his discomfort towards this horrific act, they convince him that his bride-to-be has had sexual relations with half the village. Jacinto then decides to not show up to their wedding. When Ceferino goes to confront Jacinto, Altagracia confesses to her father that she has been raped. Both Ceferino and Jacinto shame and disown Altagracia and she is left crying into the arms of her mother.

Altagracia then goes to visit Mikaela where she asks her if she can stay with her since her father kicked her out of her home. Mikaela shares the hardships of her life with Altagracia and explains how she has not allowed the pain men have caused her to define her life. She convinces Altagracia to stay with Doña Paola instead.

The episode ends with a regretful Jacinto coming back to a now very much pregnant Altagracia as he begs for her forgiveness. He tells her that he is going to turn himself in for all the crimes he committed while he was working with the travelers. He also asks her if she is willing to wait for him after his sentencing. He promises to take care of her and their child. While hesitant at first, Altagracia takes him back.

The analysis of content and representation

Non-consensual domination of a woman's body, and its consequence is the primary theme shown throughout this episode. Beginning with the Spanish conquest of the Indigenous nations, and shown countless times throughout our own society, sexual violence has been frequently placed onto the bodies of women of color. Drawing on Brenda Hill's coined term 'domestic terrorism,' Bubar (2013) illustrates the detrimental effects that normalization and naturalization of heterosexist gendered violence have over our communities. Hill defined domestic terrorism as a concept that replaces 'gendered dominance'. Domestic terrorism emphasizes toxic masculinity's ability to deny Indigenous women's control over their bodies and livelihoods.

This episode follows the social and cultural consequences that Altagracia faces after she is sexually assaulted by travelers who felt entitled to power and control in her pueblo. As previously stated, *Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres* aims to cover the many social conflicts that live within Mexico. While it is not explicitly stated that Altagracia and her family hold Indigenous ancestry, the title of this episode 'Como Novia de Pueblo' leads us to believe that they do since the word pueblo is readily associated with Indigenous people within Mexico.

There is an emphasis that the travelers in this story are strangers who simply barged into the quiet pueblo and affected everybody's lives by raping the women and negatively influencing the men. This can be representative of the Spanish conquest of Mexico and its cultivation of the toxic masculinity that has been discussed throughout this entire thesis. Castillo (1995) mentions how the conquest of Mexico has also been considered to be the conquest of women. Furthermore, how the conquest of women is not only over her body but of her wisdom and of her knowledge. This episode also emphasizes the consequences that Mikaela faces as a woman who

is confident despite the abuse she has experienced throughout her life. How this confidence enraged the travelers so much that they hurt her even more.

### Narration and Dramaturgy

“Y a los violadores que? Ellos quién les dice algo? Ellos pueden desgraciar vidas y largarse como si nada y mientras tanto le dejan a uno la vida fregada. Todos los hombres son iguales, papá. Hasta usted,” (Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres, Como Novia de Pueblo, 2022, 36:00).

One of the most notable aspects of this episode was the emphasis of the various monologues that would occur after a display of toxic masculinity. Altagracia’s tone of voice throughout the episode changes. We see how her understanding of her positionality drastically becomes a reality to her as soon as her sexual assault occurs. The first conversation between Altagracia and Jacinto illustrates her weariness of male intention. However, her weariness is portrayed as a simple repetition of gendered rules that her parents have taught her.

Altagracia: “Aqui nomas hay amigos o esposos y tu y yo somos amigos.”

Jacinto: “Pero su papá no me quiere como amigo ni esposo.”

Altagracia: “No, no es eso. Pues es que no quiere que quede como las otras. Nomas embarazadas y luego las mandan a la fregada. Pero me dicen que yo soy diferente. Que yo si me voy a casar.”

When defining chastity and its relation to womanhood, Mahalingam (2007) pinpoints its five main characteristics: not indulging in unlawful sexual activity; virtuous; sexually abstinent; celibate; pure, decent or modest in nature. Mahalingam (2007) argues that patriarchal caste systems have created the damaging connection between a woman’s purity and the validation of manhood. The honor of men and their family lies solely in whether or not they are able to keep their daughters virgins until marriage. Through Altagracia’s narration in the beginning of the episode compared to her final conversation with her father, we are able to see how her sense of

identity, the 'pure' woman, was completely stripped from her when she realized that both the man she hoped to marry, as well as her father were so quick to stop protecting her as soon as they found out she was raped. Her final speech to her father seems to be intentionally written so that the viewers of this episode internalize the psychological and physiological consequences that survivors of sexual assault have compared to their abusers.

### Characters and Actors

Altagracia, her mother Lorenza, and Jacinto's friend Mikaela will be discussed in this section. Altagracia is played by Mexican actress Maya Zapata, who is most famously known for her portrayal of Selena Quintanilla in *El Secreto de Selena*. Lorenza is portrayed by Angeles Cruz, a Oaxacan actress, filmmaker, and screenwriter. Mikaela's character is played by Maya Sərbulo, a Mexican film, theater and television actress born in Santa María Jalapa del Marqués, Oaxaca, Mexico.

The three women all represent the various gendered roles that are forced upon women. As stated in the previous section, Altagracia represented purity before her sexual assault. Lorenza represents complacency within toxic masculinity culture. Mikaela represents all women who were ostracized after their rapes. However, while each woman holds a very different consequence of toxic masculinity, this episode illustrates how they all attempted to help one another out in their own way.

Kennedy and Prock (2016) illustrate the five levels of stigma that rape survivors often face: self blame, shame, stigma, anticipatory stigma, and negative social reactions upon disclosure. In this episode, these three characters all display a combination of at least one of these general levels of stigma.

For example, while the way that Lorenza reacted to her daughter's rape may be critiqued by viewers, Altagracia recognizes that this was her mother's way of trying to protect her from the way society would view her as soon as her sexual assault was public information. Negative social reactions are a type of stigma which describe the harmful responses that many family members, friends, partners, and service providers display after someone in their life discloses their sexual assault. According to Kennedy and Prock (2016) these responses can be represented as attempting to take control of the situation or offering unhelpful distractions. Lorenza displays both these examples when she tries to distract Ceferino by telling him that Altagracia is distressed because she is on her period. She also displays this when she takes over the situation by conducting a whole plan to trick Jacinto into having sex with Altagracia and marrying her soon after.

Both Altagracia and Mikaela display their awareness of shame and stigma that came after their sexual assaults. Altagracia for example displays what Kennedy and Prock (2016) described as anticipatory stigma, which was the belief that as soon as disclosure occurs, she will be stigmatized as blameworthy and less than. Mikaela on the other hand displays the shame and feelings of unworthiness in her placement in society, especially compared to other women. Mikaela has been made to believe that she is less than the rest of the women in her pueblo which is why she urges Altagracia to not move in with her. She does not want Altagracia to live the life she has been forced to live.

This episode does a good job of emphasizing the fact that none of the women blame themselves or each other for their rapes. Both Mikaela and Altagracia go into monologues that place blame onto the men who've harmed them. Even Lorenza immediately questions where Jacinto was during Altagracia's attack instead of blaming her daughter. While this line by

Lorenza was quickly and faintly stated, I believe that it counteracts and explains her frantic reaction. As Castillo (1995) states, women have been conditioned into perpetuating male privilege as a survival skill. Slapping Altagracia was not a means to shame her, Lorenza was trying to think of a way to best protect her daughter which is why her final scene with Altagracia ends with a protective embrace.

This cannot be said for Ceferino's character or for Jacinto's character. Both the men in this episode were very quick to accept the truths that the travelers created. This reminded me of McEachern et al., (1998), testimonies from Navajo women about the influence that colonizer men had over Indigenous men, specifically when one woman was quoted saying "The only model the men have is the macho white man. They try to copy him and Navajo women object," (p. 35). Jacinto was quickly influenced by the travelers and Ceferino accepted their narration as law. I do believe that the final scene where Jacinto comes back and begs for forgiveness was the writers attempt to not villainize *all* the men in the episode, however I don't think they put in as much thought into this scene as what I would have deemed necessary for the point they were trying to portray.

### Aesthetics and Configurations

There is one scene in particular that needs to be analyzed in terms of aesthetics and configurations. The scene when the travelers convince Jacinto that Altagracia threw herself at them. As previously mentioned, this is also the scene where the travelers try to convince Jacinto to rape Mikaela. Jacinto and El Jefe appear to be standing next to a table that is filled with beer bottles and bottles of whiskey. Ominous music begins to play as El Jefe begins to describe in gross detail his attraction for 'pure' women. He then whispers in Jacinto's ear his version of events on what occurred with Altagracia. A distraught Jacinto takes off his rancho hat as his

smile turns to anger and the camera zooms out to show the two other travelers abusing Mikaela. As a reminder, Jacinto and Mikaela were friends in the beginning of the episode. She is the person who he turned to for advice on women and when she first got sexually assaulted by the travelers, Jacinto attempted to try to go save her before his uncle convinced him that it was better to stay out of it. The configurations of this scene illustrate the way Jacinto's character changed throughout the episode. His morals completely changed. The combination of the ominous music and the tears in his eyes as he is taking off his hat should have depicted his horror for what occurred to Altagracia. Instead, the zoom out foreshadow the way Jacinto is going to react to Altagracia's sexual assault. He does not care that the women in his life are being harmed, even when the abuse is happening directly behind him. Instead, this depicts the way that his manhood was insulted for what Altagracia supposedly did.

I question the use of this specific scene as it seems to be very out of character for Jacinto. This also appears to be the scene where Jacinto completely switched up on Altagracia. After he and Altagracia have sex for the first time, he is mortified after she begins to cry over what had just occurred between the two of them. While he did not know that Altagracia was actually reacting to her rape, he still felt immediate guilt and went to talk to his uncle and Mikaela about how he can make the Altagracia feel better. This scene not only depicts the clear influence that the travelers held over Jacinto but it also brings attention to his betrayal towards his only friend in the episode.

### **Discussion**

As a reminder, dominant perspectives of social issues tend to be those that get represented in mass media. Shoos (2003) brings forth an interesting critique when it comes to talking about media's portrayal of domestic violence: both of these telenovela anthologies claim

that awareness is the reason why they are sharing these stories. Shoos argues that awareness does not necessarily mean understanding. General domestic violence portrayals in the media have not altered viewers' denial of domestic violence or changed aspects of abuse. Instead of simply portraying domestic violence and sexual abuse, it is important that we understand the depth of control that abusers have, as well as have an understanding of where this abuse started. Reinforcing racist stereotypes and retraumatizing viewers has caused more damage than awareness.

When considering the difference between the two portrayals of domestic violence and the two different portrayals of sexual assault that took place in these episodes, it is clear which episodes offered more nuance throughout the analysis. The intentional conversations that occurred after depictions of domestic violence or sexual assault in *Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres* offer viewers an opportunity to breathe after a triggering scene occurs. They also allow viewers a chance to critically conceptualize the issue that is being portrayed. The resources and words of affirmation that are offered at the end of each episode offer some type of insinuation that the writers and directors are genuinely trying to bring forth awareness for domestic violence and sexual assault.

The historical, economic, juridical, technical, cultural and social-societal contexts of any visual media play a significant role in the way the material will be internalized by the viewers (Mikos, 2014). Claiming that the writers were not intending for racist stereotypes to be amplified through their episodes is inexcusable. Yosso (2020) claims that studios capitalize on the power of films to influence social policy. They know the harmful impact that sensationalizing the facts of an incident of domestic violence or sexual abuse will have over victims and survivors. Based on the fact that both of these telenovela anthologies have been viewed by consumers for a



combination of three decades, it's important for viewers to hold these writers and directors accountable for their impact.

The way the analysis of content and representation, narration and dramaturgy, characters and actors, and aesthetics and configuration would be easier to understand if contexts (film texts) were used more appropriately. According to Yosso (2020), building conservative historical contexts in media create a formula for films to amplify distorted views of patronizing narrations of the people they are portraying (Latinx victims and survivors of sexual and domestic violence). Mikos (2014) claims that the four levels of film analysis are able to be misinterpreted by viewers when there isn't a clear portrayal of the context of the episode. That being said, if telenovela writers and directors want to claim that they aren't intending to portray harmful stereotypes that are rooted in systems of oppression, such as colonialism, then they need to be more intentional in the way they deliver their message.

### Suggestions

While *Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres* is not a perfect representation of how telenovelas should depict domestic violence and sexual assault, their approach is definitely less harmful than the way other telenovelas have portrayed these concepts. The lack of historical truth, misrepresentation of the Latinx community, retraumatization by means of unnecessary explicit scenes, and curated plotlines were the primary damaging themes I found throughout the four episodes.

Joyce and Martinez (2017) prioritize the concept of social merchandising in constructive telenovelas. Social merchandising was defined as the systematic and voluntary inclusion of issues of public interest in the soap opera plot and other entertainment programs, with well-defined educational purposes (p. 221). An effective method of social merchandising in film

can be amplified with a trauma-informed approach. Trauma-informed practices consist of systems that are able to demonstrate understanding and recognition of trauma as both interpersonal and sociopolitical (Berger & Quiros, 2014). While trauma-informed care is typically associated with medical and psychological care, I believe that telenovela writers will be able to conceptualize the impact of displaying trauma on screen once they are trained on the psychological and neurological effects that Latinx people, in particular, face regarding domestic violence and sexual assault. This idea is heavily associated with Joyce and Martinez (2017)'s suggestion that social merchandising is adequately used when writers have intentional dialogues with public health campaigns and health journals, as well when writers mimic public services announcements- similar to the way *Lo Que Callamos Las Mujeres* did through the many monologues and conversations about domestic violence and sexual assault.

I hope that this analysis will offer writers a method of reconstructing the way that they portray domestic violence and sexual assault in telenovelas, as well as motivating them to reflect on the way that colonialism is able to be amplified in their work. As stated in the introduction and literature review, telenovelas offer my community a certain visibility that is not seen in North American television. As mentioned earlier, Castillo (1995) stated that it is important for Xicanas to confront, reconsider, and redefine the harmful behavior that has been deemed inherited by our culture by oppressive systems in order to save the men we love, and save ourselves. By critiquing and offering solutions to a cultural entity that I grew up loving (telenovelas), I am able to prioritize my needs and concerns in order to begin healing from my own trauma. Future research should focus on the short term and long term effects that viewers face when interacting with trauma-informed telenovelas compared to how older generations are affected by classic telenovelas.

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