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## **Masculinity and Rape in Spanish Cinema: Representation and Collective Imaginary**

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# **Masculinity and Rape in Spanish Cinema: Representation and Collective**

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## **Abstract**

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Commercial cinema in Spain, as in the rest of the world, has gone to great lengths to describe visually, without any intention of protest, each and every one of the forms of violence against women: physical, psychological, financial, social and, lastly, sexual. Beyond insinuating and intimidating compliments and gazes, sexual violence is something that is excepted in scripts, even in those of famous directors who create powerful female characters. The aim of this paper is to know how the Spanish directors, of both sexes, represent the topic of sexual violence, paying attention to the masculinity of the characters. To this end, a content analysis was performed on twelve films from a narrative perspective. In a second stage, employing methodological triangulation and a questionnaire as a quantitative tool, university students were asked about how they perceived the scenes of sexual violence in these films. The results show, on one side, that rape is the act of sexual violence more represented and, on the other hand, a lack of awareness about the treatment of rape in Spanish cinema, as well as its rejection by young audiences.

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**Keywords:** Sexual violence, Spanish cinema, masculinity, aggressor, victim, collective imaginari

# **Masculinidad y Violación en el Cine**

## **Español: Representación e Imaginario**

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### **Resumen**

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En el cine comercial en España, como en el resto del mundo, ha hecho todo lo posible para describir visualmente, sin ninguna intención de protesta, todas y cada una de las formas de violencia contra las mujeres: física, psicológica, financiera, social y, por último, sexual. Más allá de los insinuantes e intimidantes cumplidos y miradas, la violencia sexual es algo que se exceptúa en los guiones, incluso en los de directores famosos que crean personajes femeninos poderosos. El objetivo de este trabajo es saber cómo los directores españoles, de ambos sexos, representan el tema de la violencia sexual, prestando atención a la masculinidad de los personajes. Con este fin, se realizó un análisis de contenido en doce películas desde una perspectiva narrativa. En una segunda etapa, empleando la triangulación metodológica y un cuestionario como herramienta cuantitativa, se les preguntó a los estudiantes universitarios cómo percibían las escenas de violencia sexual en estas películas. Los resultados muestran, por un lado, que la violación es el acto de violencia sexual más representado y, por otro, la falta de conciencia sobre el tratamiento de la violación en el cine español, así como su rechazo por parte del público joven.

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**Palabras clave:** Violencia sexual, cine español, masculinidad, agresor, víctima, imaginario colectivo



The scandal that broke in 2016 as a result of the real rape of Maria Schneider during the filming of *The Last Tango in Paris* (Bertolucci, 1972) highlighted the thin line separating fiction from reality. Forty-five years later, the vision that society has of the act per se was reflected in the unanimous condemnation of a criminal offense that reopened the debate on sexual violence against women in the film world. Coinciding with the #MeToo movements, actresses all over the world became involved in a feminist campaign that continues today (Mendes, Ringrose & Jessalynn, 2018). However, far from the lights and cameras, filmgoers also deserve to have their opinions heard. During the international mobilizations on the 8 March 2019, a report was released in which it was claimed that young women were unaware of chauvinist behavior, reaching the conclusion that 56% of the respondents (38.1% of whom were women and 61.9% men) justified traditionalist and sexist stances. The report's authors claim that to eradicate violence it is first necessary to become familiar with it, insisting that there are "social imaginaries and rules that fuel violence against women" (Ruiz & Garrido, 2018, p. 16), whereby the need to transform those imaginaries in an attempt to eradicate violence against women in its multiple guises, including the sexual kind.

But, what imaginaries in this regard are currently circulating among the population? Basically, the greatest numbers of sexual references are shown through pornography and audiovisual products available on social media and websites, alike. With respect to the former, standard pornography—free and easily accessible on the Internet—can be understood nowadays as sex education videos for the young, in which sex is associated with violence, always against the female characters featuring in porn videos, except in those cases of "other sexual practices" linked to sadomasochism. Sexual relationship models that youngsters have at their disposal are primarily those of the porn industry which, besides being phallogentric and heteronormative, are even degrading and humiliating for the female partner in a relationship (Sun et al., 2016.). In this respect, there is also a porn current, i.e. feminist porn, calling for the need for equitable roles as referred by Lust, the porn film director and the authoress of books such as *Porn for Women* (2010) and *Let's*

*Make a Porno: A Practical Guide to Filming Sex* (2013), being a good example of this.

Media narratives blatantly disseminate rape culture. This is the prism through which Harding (2015) has analyzed the issue, exploring how rape culture is expressed through media narratives. In addition to porn videos, advertising, music video clips and pop music itself, especially the reggaeton genre, reproduce models containing elements that are tantamount to the social acceptance of a silent and enduring phenomenon in patriarchal culture (Arévalo et al., 2018).

Although the blame for provoking criminal attitudes relating to sexual violence should not be placed solely on the media, it is nonetheless true that, as Donnerstein and Linz (1986) noted, “the media act to reinforce already existing attitudes and values regarding women and violence. They are a contributor, but only one of many” (p. 601). The fact that this statement was made some time ago means that it should now be reassessed, even more so when bearing in mind that the brazen and boastful public exhibition of acts of sexual violence, filmed by aggressors with their own mobile telephones, are currently circulating on the Web (Luder et al., 2011,Mattebo et al., 2013, Rivera et al., 2016).

Both premises have to do with violence against women, which rather than one has multiple forms, one of which is the sexual kind. This, in turn, comes in many guises, rape not being the most serious of all—for they all are—but the one that goes to the extreme. Rape can also be interpreted in several ways not only by the general public but also by lawyers and judges, to the point of considering factors such as the setting in which it occurs and the relationships between the parties, victims and aggressors. “To best help victims of rape, it is important to understand the range of experiences that are perceived to ‘count’ as rape” (Clark&Chrisler,2018, p. 14).

Rape culture is that silent phenomenon mentioned above. This concept, developed some time ago, understands that in a rape culture, men and women assume that sexual violence is a fact of life, inevitable as death or taxes (Buchwald, Fletcher&Roth,1993).The rapists themselves are aware that “rape emerges from a culture that involves the domination and objectification of

women” (Regueiro Fernández, 2015, p. 50). Rape reflects the masculine role as dominant and controlling. A rape culture exists in which rape is often not acknowledged as a crime and its victims are frequently blamed and held responsible for their own violation, as can be read in the testimonies gathered in the interviews conducted by Vogelmann (1990).

From these studies performed in the 1990s, in which the existence of an international rape culture is underscored, to the most recent research, the active stance now taken by women even includes acknowledging and combating it (Rentschler, 2014). Taking into consideration the great significance of this reality, this kind of studies are being approached from different disciplines. Researchers claimed that, in both social and sexual terms, women and children are the most vulnerable subjects as regards sexual victimization. In sum, cultures based on a system of gender domination contribute to social and sexual inequality, alike, and it is civilization that has created and fostered rape (De la Garza-Aguilar & Díez, 1997).

Just a very few studies have been performed hitherto about rape culture in film fiction, and it’s observed that these studies are also thin on the ground referring to fiction in general in other narrative arts. Sielke (2002), Horeck (2004) and Phillips (2015), among other authors, have studied rape in literature and popular culture. A noteworthy reference on this topic is the research conducted by Projansky (2001), reviewing the issue of rape in North American cinema from 1903 to 1979, paying special attention to the redefinition of concepts and evidence that feminisms have put forward since the 1980s, discovering in *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) an example with which to reinterpret film rape in light of post-feminism. Similarly, Russell (2010) reviews rapes that, until not long ago, were assimilated in such internationally well-known films like *Rashomon* (Kurosawa, 1950), *Last Year at Marienbad* (Resnais, 1961) and *Kill Bill* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003). To these must be added the cinematography of the Spanish directors Buñuel and Almodóvar (to whom the author dedicates a whole chapter of his book), in whose films rape is clearly a recurrent theme. In this sense, specifically talking about Almodóvar, Lev’s work (2013) provides an interesting perspective about how rape is represented in his films. Almodóvar’s oeuvre has also be

analyzed in studies such as those performed by Fiddian (2010) and Arroyo Fernández (2011), two of the few scientific works in this respect produced in Spain, plus Núñez and Troyano's (2012) pioneering research on gender-related violence in cinema. Davis (2017) has approached Cronenberg's oeuvre, while other works have gone a step further by analyzing films with the aim of opening opportunities for dialogue on sexual violence in teaching (Purcell, Oldham, Weiser & Sharp 2017). Studies of rape and sexual violence in TV fiction are a relatively new phenomenon, with important contributions by Cuklanz (1998), Berridge (2013), Ferreday (2015), Oliver (2016) and Joy (2017), who reviews popular patriarchal series like *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), *The Wire* (2002-2008), *Mad Men* (2007-2015), *The Walking Dead* (2010-2017), *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) and *Game of Thrones* (2011-2017).

### **Objective and Hypothesis**

Commercial cinema in Spain, as in the rest of the world, has made its best to describe visually, without any intention of protest, each and every one of the forms of violence against women: physical, psychological, financial, social and, lastly, sexual. Beyond insinuating and intimidating compliments and gazes, sexual assaults are something that is excepted in scripts, even in those of famous directors who create powerful female characters.

Considering denunciations of the UN and the researchers, such as Oñoro (2018), and the importance of this matter raised by different areas<sup>(2)</sup>, the specific objective of this study is to gain further insights into how Spanish directors, of both sexes, broach the issue of sexual assaults in their films, paying attention to the representation of the characters involved. At this point, it's important to highlight that this study will not be focused on the complete analysis of the films but on those scenes in which any act of sexual violence occurs. Once this has been analyzed, and taking into consideration the continuous complaints of harassment and abuse among young population in Spain, our intention is to find out how this segment of the population perceives and interprets these scenes, being aware that part of the people surveyed may have been a victim or a victimizer.

The research process was as follows:

1. The first stage involved the contextualization of sexual violence in different audiovisual formats, with a special focus on Spanish cinema. Therefore, the initial objective was to provide a snapshot of sexual violence, plus its uses and representations, in Spanish films.
2. Subsequently, taking into account the large number of denunciations reported by youngsters in Spain about sexual violence, a group of university students were asked to provide their views on the rape scenes represented in Spanish cinema, with an eye to gauging empirically the empathy that these elicit in people watching these films. Being considered that rape is the most common representation of sexual violence in the analyzed Spanish films, the questionnaire used for this study has been duly focused on this kind of assault.

The hypothesis presented here is twofold: on the one hand, it does consider that rape is the most widely represented kind of violence in the Spanish cinema, and it normally involves men as aggressors and women as victims. In line with the conclusions arisen from other works such as Berride (2013), Coral Morera (2013) and Martínez Bustamante, Quintal López and Amarís Macías (2019), it is considered that male aggressors are represented showing their hegemonic masculinity over women, while women are represented like victims in the narrative universe, also from the point of view of film production. On the other hand, understanding cinema as a tool of entertainment, education and socialization at the same time, it is considered that viewers are more afflicted with the scenes in which women are victims, due to the stereotypical idea of the act.

## **Methodology**

Prior to start describing the methodology, it is important to point out that the examination carried out here is not decisive since this work focuses exclusively on Spanish cinema, limited to a specific batch of films where sexual violence is present, and subjected to the tough sample of students. Even so, and after compiling the pertinent bibliography, this study should be understood as a work that complements and enriches the existing literature. As contribution, this work provides an idea on what youngsters really think about rape, victims and victimizer.

Employing methodological triangulation, this research was performed in two stages. In the first, to reach the initial objective and with the intention of encompassing diachronically the portrayal of explicit violence in Spanish cinema, a corpus of films was selected using the following criteria: the Francoist period<sup>(3)</sup> was ignored due to the censorship to which cinema was subjected, the films being chosen from the period following the consolidation of democracy, in which censorship or self-censorship or the excessive sexuality arising from the first freedoms of the Transition did not undermine the independence or decision-making capacity of the country's film directors. Furthermore, it was judged appropriate to exclude X-rated films, insofar like the narrative structures employed are different (without being judgmental) and, therefore, so are those of reception. So, although one of the aims of this study was to analyze the representation of sexual violence in Spanish cinema in order to determine the types of crimes against sexual freedom and indemnity portrayed in the corpus of films, it was deemed essential to take into consideration the definition of sexual assault, abuse and harassment established in the Spanish Criminal Code<sup>(4)</sup>, according to its last review, to determine whether or not any of these situations were represented<sup>(5)</sup>.

## **Sample**

At the beginning of first stage, a total of twelve films directed and produced by Spaniards were analyzed: *Pepi, Lucy, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1980); *Salsa Rosa* (Manuel Gómez Pereira, 1991); *El pájaro de la felicidad* (Pilar Miró, 1993); *Todos a la cárcel* (Luis García Berlanga, 1993); *Kika* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1993); *Perdita Durango* (Álex de la Iglesia, 1997); *Solas* (Benito Zambrano, 1999); *Hable con ella* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2002); *Princesas* (Fernando León de Aranoa, 2005); *La piel que habito* (Pedro Almodóvar, 2011); *Mientras duermes* (Jaume Balagueró, 2011); and *Kiki, el amor se hace* (Paco León, 2016), selected for being films of wide repercussion in the cinemas and in its diffusion by television.

To properly analyze those films, a specific worksheet was designed following the character template created by the Research Team in Media Analysis, Images and Audiovisual Stories (AdMIRA) of the University of Seville, which is based on the theories of Casetti and Di Chio (2007). It is a qualitative instrument inherited from the contributions of leading authors such as Chatman (1990), Greimas and Propp, mainly concerning to iconographic, psychological and sociological aspects. These factors, used as indicators in the analysis, verify that “every character is defined by his being, by his actions and by the relationships he establishes with other characters, which involves a series of characteristics that individualize it” (Sánchez, 2000, p. 126). With this, it is intended to describe the construction of characters that might be coming from real life.

Data processed through this worksheet is as follows:

- a) Film genre.
- b) Analysis of the scene in which the act of sexual violence occurs: b1) type of act represented according to the current Spanish Penal Code, b2) analysis of male and female characters according to the role they played (main or secondary), b3) physical, psychological and sociological dimension, b4) attitude at the time of the act, b5) relationship between victim and victimizer.

- c) Film treatment: c1) types of shots, c2) presence or absence of sounds, c3) existence or not of dialogue, c4) duration of the scene.

The methodology employed in this stage of the study was based on multimodal analysis, inherent to film narrative, which addresses the study of characters and the roles that they play (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Content analysis has been also employed to identify each one of the technical and filmic elements making up the sexual violence sequence, including all the codes involved in the construction of the shots and their duration, in search of those common elements to all the films analyzed here, looking for patterns of audiovisual representation and analyzing whether such patterns are justified within the framework of the storyline or is merely for the sake of spectacle.

## **Participants**

Once the aforementioned films had been analyzed, and with the intention of gauging the respondents' reactions, a survey methodology was employed. The seventy-eight respondents participating in the survey were all university students. These students were attending to "Communication and Gender" subject when the survey took place, so it is interesting to observe how they interpret the representations of sexual violence in Spanish films, despite having knowledge about gender studies. In addition to that, the choice of these students is interesting to check if they are able to detect situations of aggression, abuse and/or harassment. A relevant issue in the current Spanish landscape, following a cascade of complaints related to sexual assault and sexual abuse among young people. In this connection, the "The Pamplona pack", "The Alicante rapists", "The rapists of ColladoVillalba" and "The group rape during the Gines carnival" are just some of the most well-known cases.

The questionnaire contained a total of eleven questions (including closed and open ones), divided into two parts: the first with items aimed at getting to know what the respondents understood by rape and their perception of aggressors (as indicted above, most of questions were mainly focused on rape

because it is the act of sexual violence more represented in the analyzed films). Then, after screening the previously analyzed films, they were asked to complete the second part of the questionnaire<sup>(6)</sup>. All the participants knew that it was an investigation and gave their ethical consent for scientific collaboration.

## Results

### Results of the film analysis

Prior to start commenting the results, it is first necessary to specify that male aggressors do not follow any specific pattern. It is also remarkable that rape is the most widely represented type of sexual violence and, in addition, that this kind of representation is independent of film genre since 83.2% of these acts appeared in films classified as dramas or comedies, and 16.8% in those belonging to the thriller genre. The analysis yielded a total of sixteen characters who suffer any kind of sexual violence, 93.75% of whom are women and 6.25% men.

Based on the kind of sexual violence cataloged by the current Spanish Criminal Code, including both female and male characters, the analysis carried out on the selected films shows that 62.5% are victims of sexual assault through rape (in *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*, *Salsa Rosa*, *Kika*, *Perdita Durango*, *Solas*, *La piel que habito* and *Princesas*), 18.75% suffer sexual abuse (in *Hable con ella*, *Mientras duermes* and *Kiki, el amor se hace*) and 18.75% are subjected to harassment (in *El pájaro de la felicidad* and *Todos a la cárcel*).

Focusing on the aggressors' profiles, there are fourteen characters in total following such profile, indeed, there are films in which there are up to two characters who play that role: *La piel que habito*, *Perdita Durango* (in which there is both a male and female rapist) and *Todos a la cárcel*. The analysis shows that there is the same proportion of leading and secondary characters (42.8% in both cases), while the remaining 14.4% are supporting or circumstantial ones. In respect to the physical features, although variable, all

the aggressors share similar appearance: they are middle class; average age is between 30 and 45 years old, Spanish nationality, medium-high height, medium complexion and brown hair.

The psychological dimension of the aggressors, albeit diverse, is stereotyped to a certain degree: in *El pájaro de la felicidad*, the aggressor is violent (in this case, a robber); in *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*, he rapes two different people (the fact that he is a policeman places him in a position of power and authority); in *Kika*, he is a porn actor moved by his desire for sex. In *Perdita Durango*, on the one hand the rapist is a violent man, and, on the other hand, we find a young and violent woman who rapes a teenager; the way of being of both aggressors makes the rest of characters showing respect to them. In *La piel que habito*, Zeca has escaped from prison; and in *Solas*, Juan, in addition to being violent is also persuasive and manipulative. For their part, in some cases, the directors of these films resort to people with psychosocial problems, such as obsession in *Mientras duermes*, César's introversion in *Hable con ella*, emotional instability in *Perdita Durango* and Ludo's mental impairment in *Todos a la cárcel*.

Focusing on the female characters who have been victims of sexual violence, it can be observed that 68.75% put up a fight and attempt to defend themselves, albeit unsuccessfully. This situation denotes the intention to represent the hegemony of masculinity against women. Among these, there are three isolated cases in which the act of rape is attenuated since the victims are engaged in continuous dialogue with their aggressors during most of the time that the scenes last. This is the case with the characters in *Kika*, *La piel que habito* and *Perdita Durango* (in this case she seems to be enjoying herself). At this time, we believe it is necessary to comment that the character of Vera, being transgender, is included like female character. In each one of these cases, the women are in full possession of their faculties, except for Norma in the film *La piel que habito*, who suffers from mental problems and she is on medication. The rest of the female characters (12.6%) do not react at all because they are either unconscious (in *Hable con ella*, Alicia is in a coma) or asleep under the effects of sleeping pills or chloroform (Paloma in *Kiki, el amor se hace* and Clara in *Mientras duermes*). Nor do those characters who

are victims of harassment (18.75%) in the films *El pájaro de la felicidad* and *Todos a la cárcel* react in any way.

As to the psychological dimension defining the profile of the female characters, it should be noted that the women experiencing any kind of sexual violence are constructed on the basis of inner conflicts stemming from a lack of self-esteem (in *El pájaro de la felicidad* and *Solas*) or on the emotional instability sometimes caused by men in the role of partners (in *El pájaro de la felicidad*, *Kika*, *Princesas* and *Solas*). In *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* and *Salsa Rosa*, the victims are women whose attitude and physical appearance is casual, cheerful and provocative. In the only case of a sexually assaulted man (*Perdita Durango*, movie in which the boy is forced to have sex), his reaction is remarkable insofar as neither does he appear reluctant at any moment nor does he attempt to defend himself from his aggressor. The psychological construction of this character is that of a weak, fearful young man lacking in initiative.

In reference to the filmic treatment, it should be mentioned that 81.25% of the sexual violence represented in the films are explicit, with pan shots of the setting, close-ups of the faces of the aggressor and the victim, high-angle shots from above and detailed shots of some or other erogenous zone. As to sound effects, these are conspicuous by their absence in all the cases analyzed here (use of dialogue between the victim and the aggressor or ambient sound). Curiously enough, in those films in which the sexual assault or sexual abuse is not explicit (18.75%), the female characters are not in full possession of their faculties. In these cases, the soundtrack coincides with aggression: in the films *Hable con ella* and *Kiki, el amor se hace* classical music and opera are used, respectively. In the rest of the cases, the setting varies: in the bushes of a garden (Norma in *La piel que habito*), in the workplace (*Salsa Rosa*, *Solas* and *Todos a la cárcel*), at a restaurant (*Princesas*), in a hospital room (*Hable con ella*) and in the street (*El pájaro de la felicidad* and *Todos a la cárcel*).

In respect of to the duration of these scenes, this varies between two and five minutes, except in the case of *Kika* in which it lasts eight. This scene denotes the spectacular nature of the act led by a male character who exposes his hegemonic masculinity in front of the woman who appears helpless.

Lastly, in 56.2% of the cases the aggressors and their victims know each other—in the film *Kiki, el amor se hace* they are husband and wife—while in the rest (43.8%) the aggressors are strangers to the victims

### **The respondents' perceptions**

It is important to specify that although the students were surveyed in class and results might be conditioned by such context, it is observed that the interpretations they are doing become disturbing. As explained in the methodological section, the questionnaire, that was designed to discover the perception of the young respondents, included questions splitted in two blocks with different objectives: to gain insights into their idea of sexual violence by means of real rape, and their perception of this kind of violence in the films. Of the seventy-eight respondents, who were all university students aged between 20 and 26 years old, sixty-two were women (two of whom were rape victims) and fourteen were men, while two respondents left the “Sex” item unanswered.

The aim of the first section of the questionnaire was to gain a better understanding of what the respondents understood by rape, a brief overview of which is shown in Table 3.

Table 1.  
*Perception of rape*

Items	Perception of rape					Differences between the answers of men and women
	Any	20-40	30-50	40-60	NR/DK	
1. Age of the rapist	35 (44.87%)	19 (24.35%)	19 (24.35%)	4 (5.12%)	1 (1.28%)	No
	Always	Not always				
2. Unknown rapist	2 (2.56%)	73 (93.5%)			3 (3.84%)	No
	Yes	No				
3. Propitious situation for rape	12 (15.38%)	59 (75.64%)			7 (8.97%)	No
	Yes	No				
4. Women provoke rape	0	77 (98.72%)			1 (1.28%)	Only one male respondent answered NR/DK
	Yes	No				
5. Rape as a premeditated act	21 (26.92%)	36 (46.15%)			21 (26.92%)	No

In this first section, the item “Cause of rape” deserves special attention because of the many different answers that the respondents gave to this open question.

Table 2  
*Breakdown of the “Cause of rape”*

Sex	Item Cause of rape					
	Superiority of the rapist	Mental problems	Education / patriarchal society	For fun	Influence of porn	NR/DK
Women	38	11	10	1	1	2
Men	6	6	1			1
Undefined		1	1			

As to the films analyzed here, the respondents had the following perception of fictional rape:

Table 3  
*Perception of fictional rape in films*

Perception of rape scenes in films				
Items	Yes	No	NR/DK	Differences between the answers of men and women
6. Does the rapist seem real?	26 (33.33%)	28 (35.89%)	24 (30.7%)	No
	Anxiety / tension / fear	Nothing		
7. Does watching the rape of a woman elicit any feelings?	74 (94.87%)	2 (2.56%)	2 (2.56%)	No
	Anxiety / tension / fear	Nothing		
8. Does watching the rape of a man elicit any feelings?	66 (84.61%)	10 (12.82%)	2 (2.56%)	Yes
	Yes	No		

Table 3 (Continued)

*Perception of fictional rape in films*

9. Is the rape scene necessary?	21 (26.92%)	34 (43.58%)	23 (29.48%)	No
	Yes	No		
10. Is the purpose to decry rape?	18 (23.07%)	46 (58.97%)	14 (17.94%)	No
	Yes	No		
11. Is it recommendable to include rape scenes in films?	17 (21.79%)	46 (58.97%)	25 (32.05%)	No

When the scene contained the sexual assault of a man, the answers were the same, although 20% of those respondents who had admitted to feeling “anxious” in the previous item, now changed this for “tense”, but the proportion of the semantic field remained the same. Ten female respondents changed “anxiety” for “nothing”, while the male respondents admitted to feeling “tense” as regards the two items dealing with the rape of women and that of men (except for two male respondents who declared that they felt “tense” when the rape victim was female and “fear” when this was male, i.e. exactly the opposite to the answers given by the female respondents).

Table 4.

*Open answers to Items 9 and 10.*

Item	List of reasons for the respondents' replies				
	Form of condemnation	Reflection of reality	Narrative strategy		
9. It is necessary to depict rape in films as a ...	16	3	2		
	(76.19%)	(14.28%)	(9.52%)		
10. The reason is not to condemn rape, but for ...	Morbid interest	Dramatic realism	Ridiculing it	Substantiating the crime	NR/DK
	19	12	1	1	13
	(41.30%)	(26.08%)	(2.17%)	(2.17%)	(28.26%)

## Discussion

Results obtained in this work meet Sadaf Ahmad's approach (2016) when he states that, directors normalize sexual assaults. In this sense and taking into consideration the interpretations provided by the students, the approach defended by Donnerstein and Linz (1986) cited above, it is clearly reaffirmed in this work. Cinema, among other factors, helps to normalization of any representation of sexual violence. In this line, high percentage of films classified as comedies that represent situations of sexual violence is disturbing. Representations of any act of sexual violence from the comedy genre perspective shows a lack of responsibility on a film treatment basis, as well as lack of empathy with the victims who might be watching the movie.

As shown in the “Results” section, Spanish film directors (all men, except for Pilar Miró) whose films have been examined here, created diverse aggressors’ profiles on their works.

If we contrast data obtained in our research with psychological and legal studies published on the profile of sexual aggressors, the way of representing the figure of the rapist in Spanish cinema coincides with reality. As it has been observed in the films that we have analyzed, Sánchez (2013) states that majority of individuals who commit sexual assaults are mainly men (2013, p. 31). Aliaga Moore et al., (2005) affirm that there is no a clear pattern on the aggressor profile but, predictably, it would be a man with age between 30-50 years old, medium complexion and medium-high height as it was observed in the presented results. This author considers that being in this age may affect physical strength as a factor in the aggressor’s effectiveness. Interestingly, this approach meets the idea expressed by the students regarding the sexual aggressor. In the same way, and from the perspective of the psychological and sociological dimension, data obtained coincide with the studies published by Sánchez (2013), Stangeland and Hernández Sánchez (2002) and Pereira Cuadrado (2008). Doctors and forensics affirm that the sexual aggressors do not have previous pathologies, nor specific psychiatric pathologies, instead, “when a diagnosis is found, the most frequent disease is personality disorder, instability or obsession” (Aliaga Moore et al., 2005, p.39), as noted in *Mientras duermes*, *Hable con ella* and *Todos a la cárcel*. In that regard it can be added that, after analyzing representation of male aggressors, we observed that violated women show signs of weakness in comparison with the profile of their aggressors, thus corroborating the hegemony of masculinity.

At this point, it seems appropriate to address the way in which both male and female directors treat the representation of rape. This idea may provide future research in this respect with a point of departure.

Rape is defined as vaginal, anal or oral penetration without the consent of one of the parties, the other forms of sexual violence being classified as sexual abuse or harassment. In the film sequences analyzed here, one of them technically portrays “sexual abuse” without penetration, an aspect that the respondents failed to notice. These data demonstrate that the normalization of

the act represented through cinema is such that the students have not detected it. The difference between the narrative analysis of the film sequences and the perception of the respondents, the majority of whom were female and not rape victims, leads to the idea of a lack of reflection on the act per se on their part. This should come as no surprise insofar as the studies performed on raped women as a whole, such as the research conducted by Donde et al., (2018), indicate that “significantly more women acknowledged experiencing sexual assault than rape” (p. 11), notwithstanding the fact that all of the women interviewed had been raped.

The answer to the different items in the first part of the questionnaire is necessary to dwell on a number of issues. The deductive syllogism that can be drawn from the majority of the answers is that the audience (male or female) understands that heterosexual male rapists can be of any age, known or unknown to their victims, capable of committing this crime by using physical strength or their dominant position over women, whenever the situation or setting is favorable, without premeditation or provocation, or cause attributable to their female victims.

There are two worrying aspects about these conclusions: on the one hand, the reason behind rape is based, according to the respondents, on physical domination and power, from what it can be gathered an androcentric thought by means of a stereotyped idea of man as a strong individual that shows his masculinity in front of female characters. From this answer it's noted that students draw from the physical weakness and lack of power of the female victims, assuming a physical and symbolic powerlessness. On the other hand, the aggressors' acts are not premeditated, which does not mean to say that they are psychopaths, but simply that they improvise, driven, for example, by an incontrollable (instinctive?) sexual. These data, which point to the preconceived idea that the respondents had of the profile of rapists and the circumstances and the settings in which rape was perpetrated, coincide with the results obtained from the films analyzed here, which are similarly corroborated by Ruiz and Garrido (2018) when noting the existence of social imaginaries and rules that fuel violence against women, in this case in films.

From the majority of the answers to the items in the second part of the questionnaire, the following statement can be underscored: the representation of rape scenes in films provokes anxiety and fear, needlessly and with no aim to decry or reflect on the issue, but only to cater to the audience's morbid fascination (Table 3). These results corroborate, once again, the statement made by Sadaf Ahmad's (2016). Furthermore, we have found out that a substantial proportion of the university respondents claimed that they felt "nothing" when the rape victim was male, what is really unsettling. From this it can be deduced that there is a greater awareness when the victim is a female character. We believe that this is no coincidence but is based on the causality of the real rapes committed in our society, plus the normalization of such representations in cinema (regardless of its nationality) in which the majority of victims are women.

The percentage of NR/DKs in the second part of the survey was alarmingly high, from which it can be understood that some of the respondents did not reflect about the filmic narrative designed for mass consumption from a critical perspective. As mentioned above, continuous representations of these acts have been normalized by viewers, and this might be the reason why 28.26% of students did not condemn these rape scenes and they did not make any critical judgment about it either.

In narratives of sexual violence nothing is unwarranted, and each isolated representation of rape may not mean anything, but, when sequenced, it is possible to observe a silently established and consolidated narrative program in Spanish cinema, as with rape culture per se in the West, being a barrier to reach gender equality. As Berridge (2011) observes: "only by contextualising our analysis can we, as feminist scholars, begin to fully unpack the individualised understanding of sexual violence presented in these programmes to expose and critique the gendered sexual inequalities that lie beneath" (p. 480).

## **Conclusions**

This study confirms the initial hypothesis showing the rape as the most represented act of sexual violence in the Spanish cinema. Data obtained has allowed us to know that, despite the variability of the profiles, male characters are dominant to female ones (the analysis of the physical, psychological and sociological dimension of both types of characters, previously developed, has confirmed it). Consequently, our research also demonstrates that the representation of scenes with sexual violence, where women are victims and male characters show their masculinity, continues feeding the collective imaginary with regards to this criminal offence. Thus, this is the reason why respondents answered that they felt afflicted with those scenes in which women were victims but not in the same way when the victim was a man, what it does confirm the second part of the hypothesis.

The sample analyzed here represents a social and artistic fiasco as regards gender equality as a narrative strategy. We agree with Morera (2014) when he writes that this analysis cannot establish a direct relationship between fictional and real violence, but can indeed approach the debate from a perspective that confirms the presence of a narrative that distorts the values attributable to the other sex, both male and female, reproducing a twisted and unfavorable image of women, men and the relationships between them both.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that the issue of sexual violence is treated with excessive insensitivity, being appreciable the lack of empathy for the real victims. The results obtained in this study confirm what Bonorino (2011) mooted when condemning the treatment and representation of rape as a spectacle. Thus, the images of sexually assaulted women in these films lead to a new exhibition of symbolic violence, i.e. their re-victimization. Although eccentricity is the adjective that best defines such representations, artificiality and frivolity become the leitmotif of scenes portraying sexual assault, sexual abuse or sexual harassment since they are unnecessary, superficial and not very empathetic with women. It should be recalled that cinema socializes, it cultivates a way of understanding the world, consolidating beliefs, mental representations and attitudes that, ultimately, influences people's conceptions

of reality. Thus, it is essential that this issue be broached from a feminist perspective, fostering awareness and condemnation.

### **Limitations and implications**

The limitations of this study have to do with its second part, being focused on the surveyed audience. This study has aired the opinions of university students with a solid education in audiovisual communication. Additionally, the respondents belong to a specific culture implying that their perceptions may differ from those of other non-Western audiences. The fact that they were screened with a number of selected sequences, without having the explicit intention of going to the cinema or resorting to some other platform to see the films analyzed here, might have conditioned their responses, depending on their level of interest and the moment chosen to screen them. Accordingly, we share the opinion expressed by Barker (2007): “we sometimes forget to take into account the opinion of the people who decide see these films for themselves” (2007, p. 194-195).

Taking into account the aforementioned limitations, two other alternative studies might be considered, either by analyzing other audiovisual products, or by using a different group of population, performing in this case an analysis on the perceptions of audiences aged between 40 and 70, who are the largest consumers of Spanish cinema.

### **Notes**

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<sup>2</sup> From a social dimension, a macro-survey has been recently launched in Spain through social networks with the intention of getting to know more about this type of violence <https://www.quesesepa.org/faq>

<sup>3</sup> Francoist period is a dictatorial stage occurred in Spain from 1939 until 1975

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/18769>

<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing this work, the Minister for Equality in Spain presented a preliminary draft of the Organic Law for the Comprehensive Guarantee of Sexual Freedom, to modify the

current regulation of crimes against sexual freedom, but it has not yet completed its relevant bureaucratic process, which is why we maintain the current typology to Spanish Criminal Code.

<sup>6</sup>The respondents' answers were analyzed using the ATLAS.ti program.

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