



A woman with dark hair and bangs is shown in profile, looking out a window. She is wearing a white, lace-trimmed top and a pink skirt. The lighting is warm and soft, coming from the window behind her.

Promises
of Happiness
and discourses
of Violence
in Mexican Cinema

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Abstract

This paper reflects on the practice of violence, its forms, and processes of production, allowing an understanding of how culture, over time, has been concentrated in the film industry as a menacing expression of the unconscious. This induces subjective behaviours, even though the patterns of behaviour and actions summoned by social discourse are part of the symbolic reality that validates our behaviours. This study is the result of an interinstitutional research project aimed at examining violence as a mechanism reproduced as an internalised practice within our culture, imposed on certain generations through a pedagogy of sentimental education, as expressed in Mexican cinema from the Golden Age. To achieve our objective, we employed two fundamental concepts as analytical tools: Bourdieu's *habitus* and Foucault's concept of the *dispositif*, anchored to the narrative field of five films that symbolically depict violence through their sequences, images, and dialogues as an expression of cultural dimensions. From this perspective, we present a descriptive methodological approach supported by the design of a matrix that allowed us to record and analyse narrative and scenic resources and contexts of violence against women. These served as part of the pedagogical mechanism that helped shape the stereotyped behaviour of Mexican women before the influential Hollywood hegemony. We conclude that the *habitus* of violence became a *dispositif*, whose social structure is externalised not only in the actions and construction of women's images but also as a structuring practice that shaped everyday attitudes and perceptions towards women.

Keywords: violence; cinema; habitus; dispositif; culture

Promessas de felicidade e discursos de violência no cinema mexicano

Resumo

Este artigo reflete sobre a prática da violência, suas formas e processos de produção, permitindo compreender como a cultura, ao longo do tempo, se concentrou na indústria cinematográfica como uma expressão ameaçadora do inconsciente. Isso induz comportamentos subjetivos, mesmo que os padrões de comportamento e ações convocados pelo discurso social façam parte da realidade simbólica que valida nossos comportamentos. O presente estudo é resultado de um projeto de pesquisa interinstitucional orientado pelo interesse em examinar a violência como um mecanismo reproduzido como prática internalizada em nossa cultura e imposto a certas gerações por meio de uma pedagogia da educação sentimental, expressa no cinema mexicano da época de ouro. Para alcançar nosso objetivo, utilizamos dois conceitos fundamentais como ferramentas de análise: o *habitus* de Bourdieu e o conceito de dispositivo de Foucault, ancorados ao campo narrativo de cinco filmes que simbolicamente retratam a violência através de suas sequências, imagens e diálogos como expressão da dimensão cultural. Sob essa ótica, apresentamos uma abordagem metodológica descritiva, apoiada no desenvolvimento de uma matriz que permitiu registrar e analisar os recursos narrativos e cenográficos e os contextos de violência contra as mulheres. Esses aspectos compunham o mecanismo pedagógico que ajudou a moldar o comportamento estereotipado da mulher mexicana antes da influente hegemonia de Hollywood. Assim, aproximamo-nos da conclusão de que o *habitus* da violência se constituiu como um dispositivo, cuja estrutura social se externaliza não apenas na ação e construção da imagem das mulheres, mas também como uma prática estruturante que condicionou as formas de agir e pensar na vida cotidiana em relação às mulheres.

Palavras-chave: violência; cinema; habitus; dispositivo; cultura

Promesas de felicidad y discursos de violencia en el cine mexicano

Resumen

Este trabajo reflexiona sobre la práctica de violencia, formas y procesos de producción, permitiendo entender como la cultura a lo largo del tiempo, se ha concentrado en la industria del cine como una ominosa expresión del inconsciente, que induce subjetivamente a pesar de que los patrones de comportamiento y las acciones convocadas por el discurso social son parte de lo simbólico real que se valida en la promoción de nuestros comportamientos. El presente trabajo, es resultado de un proyecto de investigación interinstitucional, orientado por el interés de pensar la violencia como un dispositivo que se reproduce como práctica internalizada en nuestra cultura y que fue impuesta a algunas generaciones

por una pedagogía de la educación sentimental, expresada en el cine mexicano de la época de oro. Para lograr nuestro objetivo, hemos recurrimos al uso de dos conceptos fundamentales como herramientas de análisis: el habitus de Bourdieu, y el concepto de dispositivo de Foucault, anclados al campo narrativo de cinco películas que simbólicamente muestran en sus secuencias, imágenes y diálogos, la violencia como expresión de la dimensión de la cultura. Bajo esta óptica presentamos un trabajo metodológico de corte descriptivo apoyados en el diseño de una matriz que permitió registrar y analizar los recursos narrativos y escénicos y entornos de violencia ejercida contra las mujeres que formó parte de ese dispositivo pedagógico que ayudó a modelar la conducta estereotipada de la mujer mexicana antes de la influyente hegemonía hollywoodense. De esta manera nos aproximamos a la conclusión que el habitus de la violencia se constituyó en un dispositivo cuya estructura social se externaliza no solo en la acción y construcción de la imagen de las mujeres, sino como una práctica estructurante que condiciona las formas de actuar y pensar en la vida cotidiana respecto de la mujer.

Palabras clave: violencia; cine; dispositivo; cultura

Prologue

The media are mass information devices that show expressions of everyday life through stories or narratives whose proximity is revealed in discourses or images constructed through a series of sequences that formalize the reality of events. In this context, cinema has been one of these devices¹ that offers a vision of the world by presenting narratives and stories rooted in the social imaginary and culturally anchored in the fabric of a society's social relationships. These manifestations are evoked and reinterpreted through social attitudes and behaviours that operate simultaneously within individuals and in spaces such as family and groups of friends.

They are representations that are not limited and cross every social and cultural context. These constructions act as point of reference that influence how people relate to one another and provide a variety of ways of acting, speaking, and expressing oneself that are adopted by individuals. In this way, cinema has become an important benchmark not only by revealing the social conflicts, but also by creating imaginaries, establishing positions, and setting examples based on the social groups to which we belong. From this standpoint, cinema exerts influence, educates, and shapes individual identities by portraying and guiding lifestyles, conflicts, and hostilities rooted in the structural narratives and spaces we inhabit.

Thinking about a sociological approach, the cinema, must be understood as a device that shapes perspectives and emphasizes ideological content for its viewers, creating a framework of signs and meanings that are reinterpreted in specific ways by each social group. In this sense, the

elements that make up a film are accepted and internalized as part of the audience's mindset, as they are interwoven with music, images, dialogues, and sounds. These are structures that merge the screen with the viewer's consciousness (Sorlin, 1985, pp. 22–24).

In this way, cinema stimulates learning sustained by emotions and empathy, functioning as a pedagogical device that lends cognitive value to a given context and era. It is, so to speak, a form of teaching and learning whose cognitive structure connects the present with fiction and memory, intersecting with personal history. It represents a kind of exchange between representation and shared social experience.

Thus, cinema offers its own visions of reality, whose truth is recreated through a mosaic of patterns and stereotypes that in the end influence how people live and what they do in daily life. In this regard, the purpose of these pages is to reflect on the violence that is produced and reproduced within the framework of a pedagogy of sentimental education, expressed through the discourses, images, and music of Mexican cinema, and its internalization in the dichotomous practices of the Mexican woman stereotype. Our reflection is a partial result of the research project titled *Searching for an Explanation: The Virus of Violence, an Interdisciplinary Reading*, funded by the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM)-Xochimilco. This is a study based on a qualitative approach and narrative design, as it allows us to explore how violence is understood and seen through repeated encounters with scenes from films.

In order to be more specific, our job is methodologically based on the description and analysis of classic and contemporary films to approach microhistories of women, expressed through the dramatization of roles, norms,

¹ We understand that a "dispositive" as defined by Agamben, as a set of practices, knowledge, measures, or institutions whose purpose is to manage, control, or guide human behaviour, gestures, and thoughts in a useful direction (Agamben, 2014, p. 12).



and identities portrayed in the films that are analyzed. In our reflection, subjectivity is not only part of the interpretative process but also a creative tool for explaining and analyzing the films, from a critical standpoint that allows us to make sense of various everyday practices represented and given meaning through repeated stories and events that culturally shape the role and stereotype of Mexican women, her condition, physical attributes, beliefs, and values as constructed within our cultural history. The films we analyze depict issues that are socially recognized, where the metaphors in the discourse, scenes, and contexts are drawn along the lines of conflict and violence. These are cinematic portrayals marked by abuse and submission. They present women enmeshed in a divided concept of femininity: victim and victimizer, wife, whore, saint, and demon, pure and perverse. This dichotomy reflects a patriarchal culture in which submission, obedience, devotion, and self-denial are valued as both accepted and rejected models that conceptualize sexuality and materiality as distanced expressions of subordination to patriarchal power (Lagarde, 1993, p. 17).

In this sense, as a methodological tool, we developed an analytical structure based on a matrix with six variables, aimed at identifying the film title, year of production and director, the role of the victim, the aggressor, and a general description of the issue. For this paper, we focused on the film *Él* (He) which, although produced in an earlier era, presents a trajectory marked by violence that helps us discuss the roles and stereotypes through which women were culturally perceived in that time and context. It is a revealing film that exposes the mechanisms of violent behaviour in a relationship—obsessive and pathological jealousy rooted in the traits of a psychopathic, narcissistic man who abuses his wife. This film offers us the opportunity to reflect on the profile of abusers—those femicide perpetrators who are everywhere and proliferate as a result of our cultural conditions. We have structured the presentation of this work into four sections that will allow us to examine the data and contextual framework of violence, the narrative of symbolic violence, the phenomenon of machismo, and violence as image and consumption, concluding with a brief conclusion.

The Confession of the Data

The data helps us to understand the present and make sense of the past, like a film that shows how society has changed

through images made of numbers and statistics. These can be compared to the melodramas of everyday life, revealing the significant gaps resulting from human missteps. This is particularly evident in the conditions women face: violence, stigmatization, exclusion, and domination. The data paints a clear and revealing picture of the blurred aspects of a present that is part of daily drama (Amelang, 2015, p. 30). According to data from UN Women, ENDIREH, and INMUJERES, nearly 8 million women in Mexico have been victims of physical violence, and almost 3 million have experienced sexual violence. This means that nearly three-quarters of Mexican women have suffered some form of violence, with partners being the aggressors in 4 out of 10 cases. Furthermore, these institutions report that 13 million women have been intimidated or stalked by their boyfriends, husbands, cohabitants, or intimate partners, and nearly 10 million have experienced humiliation. Within this group, 40% of the aggressions are committed by current or former partners, and 60% of femicide victims are women who have lived in contexts of domestic violence (García, 2021).

These are images of women who are seduced by love, caught up in strong feelings shaped by cultural and mythical ideas. These ideas do not show how complex real relationships are. Instead, they appear in films as messages that present love and women in a very limited way. Women are shown as either pure or bad, saints or witches, and are judged mostly by how they look. This creates a cultural idea of women as objects, especially in stories that try to teach people how to feel or love.

In this view, a woman is seen as the object of a man's desire, but once she has children, she stops being seen as a woman, a lover, or someone desirable. Instead, she becomes "the mother of the children," the helper, the servant. In our culture, women are often seen through the image of the mother, like the Virgin of Guadalupe, who is viewed as the mother of the nation. The wife is also seen mainly as a mother. This way of thinking creates a strange idea that a woman becomes pure again like a virgin, so she is once more chaste, innocent, and untouchable (Zunzunegui, 2013, p. 112). This idea appeared in many films from Mexico's Golden Age of cinema. Today, it still shows up in everyday stories about the good, patient, and suffering woman—just like the image created by that classic cinema.

In these films, scenes of romantic love and sentimental moments are now reflected in statistical data, demonstrating what people are capable of when in love. For example, according to figures from the National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), in Mexico, 8 million women have been victims of physical aggression by their romantic partners, experiencing pulling, hitting, injuries with sharp objects, suffocation, or attempted murder with firearms. These aggressions are part of a framework rooted in the cultural and social structures of our communities, persisting in maintaining stereotypes and stigmas towards women by their partners (García, 2021).

In this sense, we present these data because we believe it is a way to highlight social practices deeply rooted in our cultures. These experiences are anchored in feelings constructed by individuals based on cultural and social structures, disseminated through cinema and television. Thus, roles and patterns continue to be reproduced by men and women, regardless of whether they are in urban or rural settings. Sadly, the data resembles a film exemplifying how our social order perpetuates deplorable customs.

Following this argument, we can point out, supported by data, how feelings, as a constitutive element of the social, express social ways of thinking, feeling, and loving. Therefore, we aim to construct an objective explanation not only expressed in the narrative description of films. For example, today, emotional violence experienced by women from their partners affects 50.6% of them, while economic and patrimonial violence affects approximately 34.1% (INEGI, 2019).

As observed, data serves as a bridge allowing us to establish a dialogue with the present reality and the past. This is illustrated in the film "Él," directed by Luis Buñuel and released to the public in 1953, which showcases significant aspects of sentimental education. The film not only portrays the role of women when marrying a man with psychopathic traits.

It is a melodramatic film centred on the relationship of an individual named Francisco, who falls in love with Gloria, a young woman engaged to his friend Raúl. After orchestrating an encounter with her, he courts her and

manages to make her fall in love with him. They marry, and she leads a life marked by violence, harassment, and humiliation.

Following certain scenes and dialogues from the film, we will attempt to account for the emergence of this sentimental education and the reality women face today.

We particularly distinguish the gestures, emotions, and feelings contained in some scenes filled with violence, a violence now easily discernible through the data we use and exemplify, supported by readings and comments on a classic film from Mexico's Golden Age of cinema.

We use as a resource the reading of facial expressions that Buñuel emphasizes through close-up images, showcasing the code of gestures, as gestures reveal objective meanings of what they represent, what causes them to emerge, and the values attributed in the social world (Flusser, 1994, pp. 17-21).

In the first minutes of the film, there is a scene where a butler harasses and assaults a maid. After being reprimanded by his employer, Francisco, he is instructed to fire the maid to prevent such scenes from recurring.

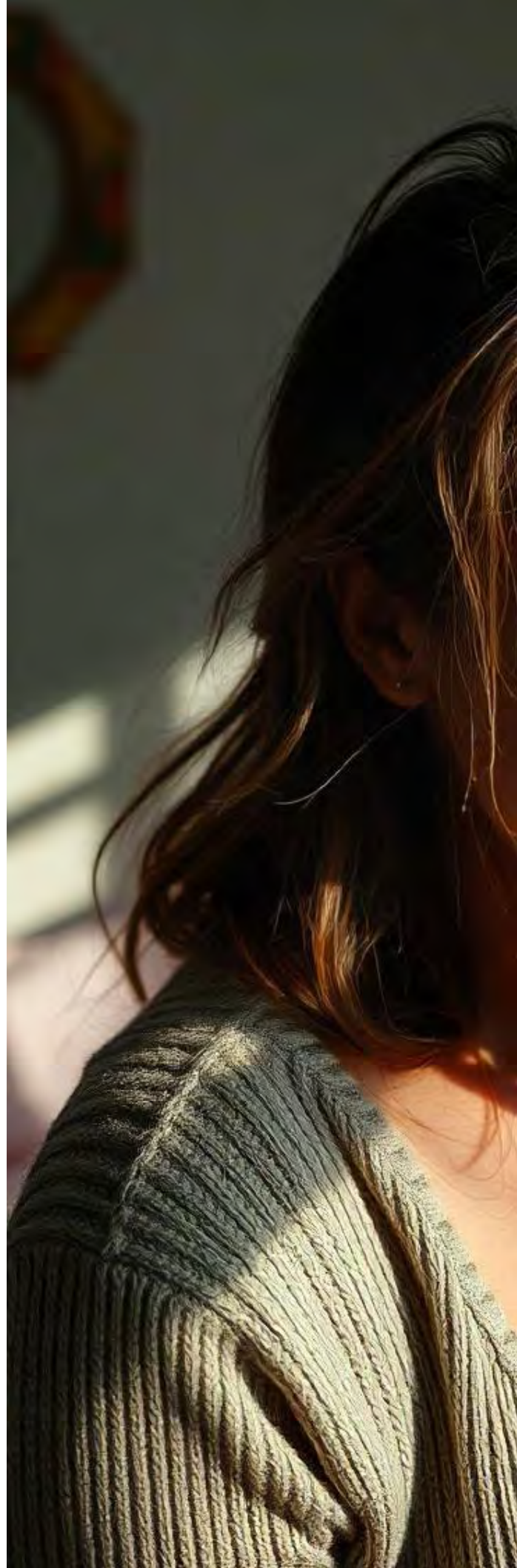
Subsequently, following the melodramatic plot, Francisco hosts a dinner for his friends, intending for his friend Raúl to bring his fiancée so he can seduce her. However, during the dinner, it is announced that Raúl and Gloria will marry. Francisco seizes the opportunity to share his views on idyllic love with the guests, then steps into the garden, where Gloria yields to a kiss from Francisco.

Around this scene, there is significant consensus driven by the emotions of the viewers, evidently aiming to showcase the value scale in the image of the saint and whore woman. These are contingent images that trigger basic emotions and are socially interpreted within the framework of stereotypes and beliefs referencing other women.

This is indicated in the scene where the pretender's morbid jealousy unleashes his rage at the mere thought that Raul kissed Gloria, even expressing the idea that they might have had sexual intercourse.

Anger, annoyance, and irritation as emotions are masterfully portrayed by Francisco, manifesting with a strong dose of physical and verbal aggression, including insults and slurs directed at Gloria. This discomfort leads to physical violence as a result of his fury.

While on their honeymoon in Guanajuato, Francisco's egocentrism is evident in a scene where he takes photographs alone on some of the city's iconic streets and the steps of the University of Guanajuato. Subsequently, Gloria encounters a





friend, which displeases Francisco. Back at the hotel, Francisco notices that the friend is staying in the adjacent room, triggering his rage. He furiously confronts Gloria's friend, who responds with a punch. Francisco interprets this as an act provoked by Gloria and blames her.

Undoubtedly, this is a childish attitude whose emotional expression is unconscious, hindering violence inhibitors. Francisco's anger is evident in his expression and gaze. His eyes and Gloria's face emotionally display the impact and reaction of the victim's response. This is a disturbing action commonly seen in daily life when women face violence from their partners due to jealousy behaviors that affect the physiological mechanisms involved in the development of blind violence, caused by the obscuration of actions that obstruct the inhibitors allowing conscious control in the individual (Sanmartín, 2012, p. 28).

Francisco creates an artificial environment, gradually isolating Gloria from her friends and family. Later, he organizes a party to celebrate her birthday. At a certain point during the celebration, Francisco asks Gloria to attend to his lawyer, a request she complies with, offering him a drink and agreeing to dance with him.

The group's moral standards are expressed through the priest's judgments, who tells Gloria's mother that "a decent woman cannot accept dancing with a stranger." Thus, the priest, as a moral authority, determines which habitual behaviours are appropriate and which conflict with the group's morals, subjecting them to the collective judgment.

Subsequently, Gloria, together with the lawyer and another couple, goes out to the garden, an action that annoys Francisco, to such an extent that he does not speak to her all the following day. During dinner, they argue, and he accuses her of being a whore, for having gone for a walk in the garden with the lawyer.

The use of silence as a weapon has a devastating effect on the victim, who does not understand what is happening and becomes part of the perpetrator's game. This generates anguish, fear, and stress in the victim, who is left unsure of how to act, what to do, or what to say—an attitude that grants impunity to the perpetrator. It creates a particular sense of guilt in the victim,



stemming from the perpetrator's reactions and behaviour, forcing her to recall, in the memory's reminiscence, the eruption of an act that violates the socially prescribed order—moral guilt—understood as an act judged to be good or bad, right or wrong, according to cultural beliefs or behavioural norms (Luna, 2015, p. 231).

What we can clearly observe are scenes of violence whose structure belongs to the film *Él*, a movie in which its events can be interpreted through the lens of everyday occurrences, which we assume may be distant or familiar—passages and stories narrated by women who, in real life, have endured and continue to endure what Gloria and Francisco portray.

After not speaking to Gloria all day, Francisco accidentally drops his glasses during lunch. As he picks them up from under the table, he gazes at his wife's calves, displays a lustful expression, and immediately lunges at her, kissing her abruptly. Gloria reacts angrily and tries to push him away.

In these scenes, gestures form part of a suggestive and ideal definition that replaces all verbal discourse, especially when we understand that gestures are movements of the body itself—as instruments intrinsically connected to it—that require no causal explanation. That is, the gesture is capable of defining itself satisfactorily, as it is central to the discourse and thus requires no further elaboration, insofar as form becomes a kind of knowledge whose meaning spreads rapidly and continuously, enabling gestures and movements to be read from a culturally linguistic perspective (Flusser, 1994, p. 9).

Immediately following Gloria's discomfort at having been assaulted by Francisco, we see a dimly lit staircase where Gloria's screams are heard, implying that Francisco is sexually assaulting her. The butler hears the commotion and checks the clock, which reads two in the morning.

Sexual violence is perhaps one of the forms of violence that causes the most harm to women. This is confirmed by underreported statistics. For example, according to data from the National Urban Public Safety Survey (ENSUR),

it is estimated that nearly five million Mexican women were victims of sexual crimes during the second half of 2020, and 98.6% of the cases of sexual violence experienced by women over 18 years of age went unreported (México Evalúa, 2020).

Anticipating a possible report from Gloria, Francisco pretends to be understanding and affectionate and seeks advice from Gloria's mother. But when Gloria tells her mother what happened with Francisco, her mother replies: "He's just jealous. Your behaviour isn't right. He acts this way because he loves you so much that it blinds him." Gloria responds: "I see he's deceived you," to which her mother answers: "When a man loves with all his soul and is brought to tears, he cannot lie [...] listen to your mother, who loves you more than anything in the world. Be good to him, treat him with kindness, and peace will reign in this house." Faced with her mother's refusal to listen, Gloria seeks out the priest, but he sides with Francisco, claiming he is a perfect gentleman, a pure man, and takes the opportunity to criticize her manners in front of the lawyer. Gloria confides in her friend Raúl that she is afraid, anguished, alone, and helpless in the face of a deranged and sick man.

As we can see, the internal logic of language reveals how feelings and emotions such as anguish and fear are internalized emotions that can become pathological. This is a situation marked by repeated actions, hence the search for familial refuge against threats in the absence of protection, amid emptiness and despair (Gadamer, 1993, pp. 167–176).

The life shared by Francisco and Gloria is marked by a path of violence, as in many real-life couple relationships. For example, according to data from the National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships (ENDIREH) (2006), it was found that one of the main causes of conflict for women in relationships in Mexico stems from the family or social relationships their partners or spouses maintain. This issue accounted for nearly 14.4 million responses, and the most frequent scenario within this category was the woman talking to or befriending other men (20.3%).

Francisco's distorted face shows his frustration as he sees Gloria arriving in a vehicle with Raúl. He confronts her and calls her a bitch, a whore.

The rage triggered by the blurry scene witnessed by Francisco unleashes his fury and causes him to lose control, becoming unaware of his actions. In a fit of madness, while Gloria is asleep, he tries to tie her up and strangle her. However, Gloria's screams unleash a mix of emotions in Francisco—he runs to hide in his room, overwhelmed by anger, fear, hatred, compassion, guilt, shame, and love.

Francisco harasses and abuses Gloria. This is clearly shown in a scene where she is sleeping, and he tries to restrain her with a rope. After this, Francisco grabs a pistol and goes out to find his friend. Reflecting this kind of act, during 2020 in Mexico, 1,102 women were killed with firearms; 259 by drowning, strangulation, or suffocation; 217 with sharp objects; and 16 by fire (García, 2021).

As we can see, the images and scenes of violence against women are grounded in everyday reality. They serve as a framework for understanding cinema as a space where concepts such as violence, transgression, and power emerge from an imaginary representation of socially constructed feelings as depicted through the director's lens. In this sense, we draw from the idea that the Mexican Golden Age of cinema, along with boleros, radio soap operas, and early *telenovelas*, laid the foundation for a pedagogical device of sentimental education. This created a model

of expected behaviours in which public recognition of a relationship defined the expectations for both men and women. At all times, communication was meant to be established privately, upholding, as seen in the story of Gloria and Francisco, the romantic notion that love conquers all. This idea led to submissive behaviour in women and a misunderstood sense of abnegation and devotion to the husband, ultimately reinforcing the power of the abuser in this case, the spouse who assumed the role of the violent and sexist perpetrator.

The context of the violences

Based on the report presented on November 23, 2021, regarding the situation of violence against women in Mexico, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) made public the data concerning the perception of insecurity, which had increased reaching 78.8% among women and 72% among men². In addition to this, public spaces such as ATMs were identified as places where women most frequently reported feeling unsafe. However, the most striking figure is that 20% of women stated that they felt unsafe in their own homes.

For years, institutions have tried, with little success, to create programs aimed at reducing the statistics on violence against women. However, factors such as economy, society, and culture, along with insufficient public policies to combat gender violence, educational lag, and early school dropouts, combined with the influence of media including music, television, and online content (such as films and social media), have contributed to the fact that violence, instead of decreasing, continues and even increases.

Physical violence puts the physical integrity and lives of people at risk, as seen in the scene where Francisco attempts to tie up and strangle Gloria. Although the director leaves the resource of imagination to the viewer, the photography, the atmosphere, the setting, the voices, and the sequence of chiaroscuro accompanied by sinister background music highlight that something very dark is happening in the protagonist's bedroom. Remember that *Él's* storyline presents the story of a marriage during a time

when the topic of violence could not be portrayed in such an open and explicit way. Even though Buñuel was recognized as a director of ideas and themes ahead of his time, it was a cinematic product, alongside other films that shocked audiences for the way they narrated the harsh realities through his direction.

In some films from more recent decades, we can observe that the violence practiced by men, which they try to change because of their love for their partners, it is not as simple as the cinematic narratives suggest. In the movie *Te doy mis ojos* (Bollaín, 2003), Pilar, the protagonist, and her son flee from her partner, but Antonio tries to find them and change for her and their son. Pilar begins to transform her outlook on life and question her own identity, discovering areas of opportunity and transforming her surroundings and the people around her. Another example is the series *Maid* (Smith, 2021), released this year on the Netflix streaming platform, which tells the story of Alex, a young wife and mother to a daughter, who, as a victim of economic and symbolic violence, flees from her partner with the firm resolve that her daughter will not grow up in a violent home and will have better life opportunities. With economic and educational factors against her, but determined to create a space for herself and her daughter free from abuse, she runs away and starts working as a house cleaner. However, she is first victimized by the very U.S. A, where, in as in many countries, the support system for women who are victims of symbolic violence (where there is no physical evidence of abuse) often involves degrading, inquisitive, and even limited treatment for those who suffer it. It is worth noting that, in many cases, the victim does not even speak about these violations within her close circle and is even less likely to report them or seek help from specialized hotlines for dealing with violence (Figure 1). Bureaucratic system, which questions her and closes doors on her, as in the United States, as in many countries, the system for supporting women victims of symbolic violence (where there are no physical signs of abuse) involves a degrading, inquisitive, and even limited treatment for those suffering from such forms of violence. It is important to note that in many cases, the victim does not even discuss these humiliations with those close to her, let alone report or seek help from specialized hotlines dealing with violence cases (Figure 1).

² Data from the 2021 National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Safety (ENVIPE). <https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/saladeprensa/boletines/2021/EstSegPub/envipe2021.pdf>

Relative Share of Emergency Incidents in Total Real Calls (%) January–February 2021

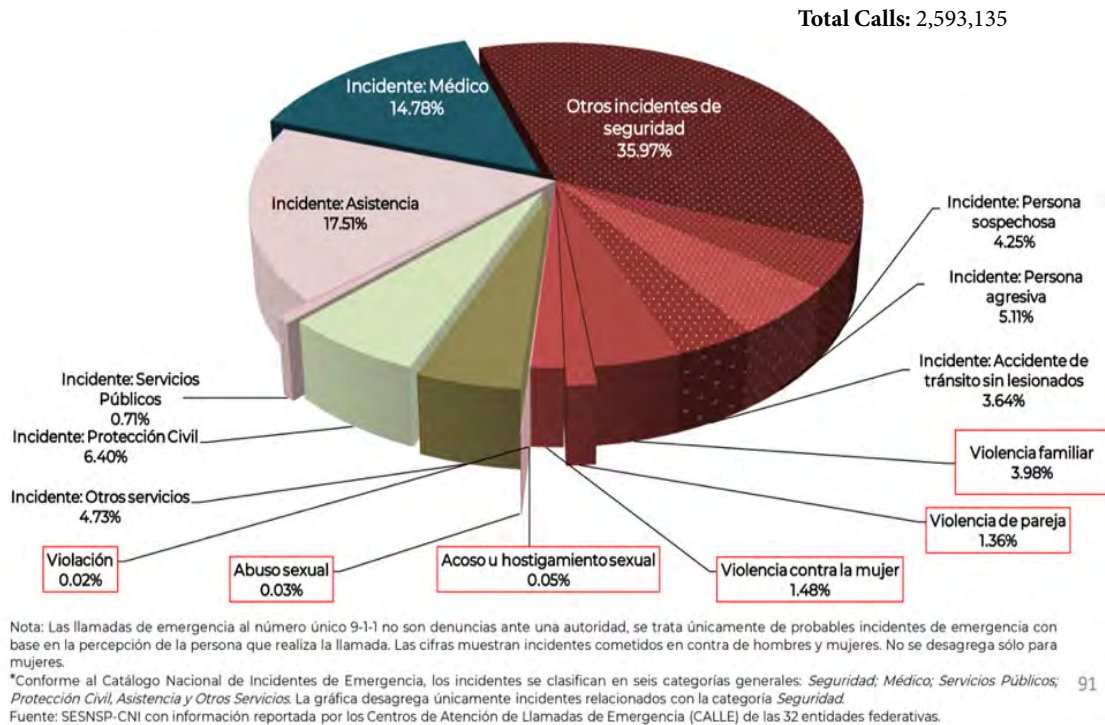


Figure 1. Relative Share of Emergency Incidents in Actual Assistance Calls (January–February 2021)

Source: <https://www.zonadocs.mx/2021/04/15/en-el-primer-bimestre-de-2021-solo-13-de-cada-100-homicidios-de-mujeres-estan-siendo-investigados-como-feminicidios/>

Women who also endure the emotional and bureaucratic rejection and irony of government agencies are those seeking to terminate their marital union. In the film *The War of the Roses* (DeVito, 1989), the protagonists are unable to negotiate the terms of their divorce, and the couple resorts to physical violence not to find a solution for dissolving their marriage but with the sole intention of destroying and harming one another. The movie *Sólo mía* (Balaguer, 2001) tells the story of a woman subjected to everyday violence to the point of normalizing it she lives with it daily yet refuses to admit her reality. Its protagonists, Ángela and Joaquín, base their relationship on love at first sight, which leads to unleashed passions once she becomes pregnant: the first reproaches, the first shouting matches, and the first blows. Each time her husband lashes out, Ángela excuses him by saying he's had a terrible day and that it won't happen again yet those "first times" are already brutal beatings.

Violence has increased in recent years, as shown by the statistical data, and this is nothing for public institutions or society at large to feel satisfied about. It makes it seem as if violence has become fashionable among young couples, which is deeply troubling. In socio-affective human development, the courtship stage is meant to foster trust and fulfilment: discovering similarities, affinities, and shared values, with expressions of affection, interest, and love taking many forms. Tragically, our society has normalized and reproduced destructive

behaviors that eventually reveal a person's true nature, and sometimes the relationship turns violent, with partners beginning to humiliate, beat, and insult one another.

Unfortunately, these manifestations are occurring all too naturally among young people and neither schools nor families speak openly about them until it is far too late. In the film *No One Would Tell* (1996), based on the true story of Jamie Fuller and Amy Carnevale, two 16-year-olds meet in high school: Stacy (played by Candace Cameron) falls for the popular wrestler Bobby (played by Fred Savage), and they begin a fairy-tale romance that seems perfect until Bobby becomes controlling and possessive—so much so that he isolates Stacy from her friends and even her own mother. He criticizes her wardrobe as “slutty,” and eventually the abuse turns physical over innocent gestures by Stacy, culminating in Bobby murdering her and dumping her body in a lake after Stacy ends the relationship and he asks for “one last talk” as friends.

Violence in films and in real life is often hidden, disguised as a form of love, and some of its signs are nearly invisible. Women may mistake their partners' controlling behaviour as a strong expression of affection and love. These are often the relationships at most risk of experiencing various forms of emotional violence, economic, psychological, or even discrimination. Violence occurs both during and at the end of a relationship, because men tend to view women with a sense of ownership, as objects, which is not the case. For this reason, violence tends to occur more frequently in informal relationships.

Cinema that focuses on violence against women can depict stories that objectify women. In traditional film “classic cinema,” as some call it the male protagonist always takes center stage, while women appear as unimportant or are relegated to stereotypical “female” roles such as cooking, hairstyling, makeup, or wardrobe (Núñez, 2016). Prejudiced stereotypes about women's leadership abilities or alleged lack of ambition create additional barriers, influencing financiers' perceptions of risk when deciding whether to fund women-led projects. It is easier to recall male directors' names than those of female directors.

Discussing about films, we want to emphasize its power as a socializing agent it models behaviours, elicits reactions, and conveys beliefs and values (Núñez, 2016). Yet some viewers see it merely as entertainment and overlook its role in shaping sentimental education, consuming portrayals of violence against women without considering the harm inflicted on viewers. At the same time, films can offer glimpses of the harsh realities' women endure daily and our ongoing failure to report abusive partners out of fear of physical or psychological retaliation perpetuates these injustices.

Symbolic Narrative of Violence

Throughout history, men and women have lived under the taboo of speaking about violence, despite it being a phenomenon of enormous scale with deplorable and visible consequences. The creation of language and modes of communication have played a crucial role in how we address these problems and meet the basic need to socialize violence as a significant issue. Moreover, the appropriation and transmission of certain bodies of knowledge and codes of conduct grew ever

more complex, becoming true vehicles of social formation and cornerstones of our culture and identity through cinema, literature, and music.

For social coexistence with defined objectives, individuals assume social roles shaped by our identity, which, whether individually or collectively, accompanies us throughout life. Hence, identity is an intimate part of ourselves and determines our actions and responses to the stimuli we encounter in daily life. Gender identity is one facet of this, and, according to Lagarde (1993, p. 1):

The identity of subjects is formed from an initial, generic classification. The references and contents concerning our social construction of gender are primary milestones in the formation of subjects and their identities. Upon these are organized and thus integrated other elements of identity, such as those derived from real and subjective belonging to class, to the urban or rural world, to an ethnic, national, linguistic, religious, or political community.

Throughout history, society has created and assigned social, physical, and personal traits to each gender, showing what is expected of men and women at different times. These expectations remained mostly unchanged until recent years

Due to social roles have been culturally and historically defined and accepted for each gender, educational systems have long neglected the pedagogy of human feelings and emotions. While modern social psychology and psychoanalysis have sketched frameworks accessible to medical and academic fields, they have not permeated popular culture—as evidenced by the statistics presented in the section “The Confession of Data,” which show we remain in a primitive stage in terms of emotional communication, education, and resilient, adaptive behaviours.

Let us revisit the historical narrative of virtue as a model of conduct, rooted in religiosity and expressed symbolically particularly in Mexico through the archetype of the Virgin Mary, cementing her as an ideal within the institution of the family. Because symbolic violence is expressed subjectively, understanding the logic of domination within family or social structures is imperceptible to many. As Bourdieu (2000) described it, symbolic violence is “a form of symbolic power that cannot be exercised without the contribution of those who suffer it, because they construct it as such”. In this way, symbolic violence assumes the guise of naturalness and becomes internalized across social strata and group reproductions as a way of life.

Within the intimacy of a couple’s relationship, one can only see what is exposed to the outside. Yet, as we saw in *Él*, Francisco and Gloria’s marriage what happened behind closed doors was anything but a healthy bond of mutual affection and commitment. For many generations, symbolic violence (which could not even be described or conceptualized until Bourdieu developed it in the 1970s) was deemed unreal—a product of imagination or irrational fears or, in Gloria’s case, mere exaggeration, as her priest and her own mother claimed.

Bourdieu (2000) also introduces the concept of domination to understand this type of violence: the social processes between a man and a woman rest on a reinforced belief in female exclusion, imposing submissive attitudes and other constraints through her smile, her dress (to

limit what may be seen), lowered gaze, and acceptance of interruptions. He shows how women have been subtly forced into a space of symbolic confinement, with literature, music, and cinema serving as powerful educational niches for generations.

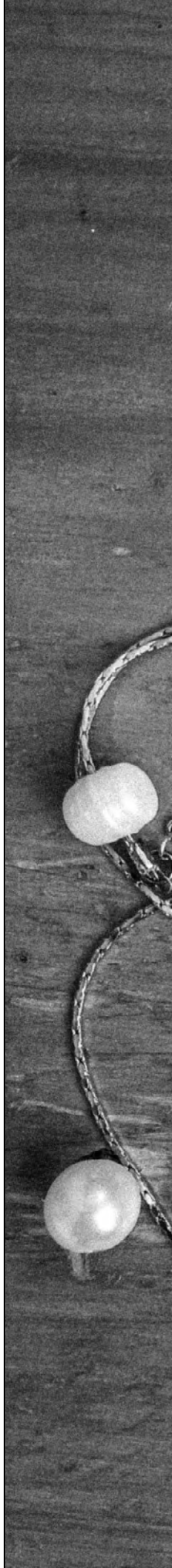
Below, we highlight key moments of symbolic violence in Luis Buñuel's *Él* that help to illuminate our arguments more clearly:

Table of Key Scenes Illustrating Symbolic Violence in *Él*

Minute	Scene Description
4:23	During the Catholic Holy Thursday festivities, Francisco assists the parish priest with the traditional foot-washing ceremony. While he carries the water jugs, he notices two attractive legs belonging to a young, beautiful woman (Gloria). Feeling his gaze upon her, Gloria lowers her eyes modestly before returning her attention to the altar.
37:03	Newlyweds Francisco and Gloria are in Guanajuato celebrating their honeymoon at the hotel restaurant. As they dine, Francisco compliments her physical beauty but confesses that what attracts him most is “your sweetness, that aura of kindness and resignation.” Gloria replies that her mother always told her she was the opposite.
46:22	It's Gloria's birthday night, and Francisco is delightedly preparing a small evening gathering in her honor. He asks her to be charming and pleasant to a very special guest handling some of his legal matters. Resigned, Gloria takes his hand and says, “You know I always do whatever you want.”
54:03	After months of waiting to speak with her mother and following a brutal beating by her husband—Gloria finally calls home. When her mother is late, Gloria asks the butler if she has arrived. He replies that she's been talking with Mr. Francisco in his study for some time. From the doorway, Gloria watches as a smiling, genial Francisco greets his mother-in-law: “There she is she's not bad, but she needs a good sermon.”
56:48	Following a meeting with the parish priest to unburden her fears and sorrows over her marriage, Gloria is told: “My daughter, you've told me things that would make any Christian wife blush just thinking about them.” The priest concludes that her “truth” is mere imagination, insists Francisco is a good, pure soul, and dismisses Gloria's character not as “bad” but as “light.”
1:18:16	Suspecting an affair with her former fiancé Raúl and discovering that Gloria confided in him about her private life, a jealous and enraged Francisco enters Gloria's bedroom at night. He watches her sleep, rope in hand and a violent look on his face. As he begins to tie her up, Gloria wakes in horror and screams, while he snarls, “Shut up, bitch, shut up.” He then returns to his room with the rope and a knife unnoticed by the servants outside, who reassure her: “Calm down, ma'am, it's nothing,” oblivious to the attempted abuse lurking in her bedroom that night.

In these scenes, we can see how certain behaviours between couples are shown as normal or expected, and they don't seem to have changed much over time. But there is also a moment (at minute 1:26:19) where we see the man's feelings, showing how vulnerable he is in a society that quickly judges and gives opinions based on a shallow idea of virtue—an idea shaped by institutions like the Church and repeated patterns of behavior that made certain forms of violence seem normal.

1:26:19	When Gloria finally gets away, Francisco searches everywhere his in-laws' house, Raúl's place, the streets but he can't find her. Heartbroken and desperate, he ends up in a church and, lost in his own fears, becomes convinced everyone inside is laughing at him and flashing the “horns” sign that in Mexico means you've been cheated on.
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With the inclusion of this sequence, the reader can draw two interpretations. First, that Francisco is being consumed by a mental illness that increasingly and intensely erodes his grip on reality an illness that has been present from the very start of his marriage to Gloria, conjuring fantasies in which his wife is harassed, behaves lewdly, and ultimately betrays their marriage by carrying on a romance with her ex, Raúl. Second, that in a moment of emotional crisis, Francisco's jealousy and desperation cause him to "see" things that are not there. In neither case should these readings be taken as an invitation to absolve or forgive the protagonist; rather, they invite the reader to analyse how symbolic violence exposes the fragility of the dominant male figure.

It is likely that many of these subjective behaviours, which seem "normal" in couple relationships, originated in the tragic narratives of Mexico's Golden Age cinema. In terms of narrative construction, an entire generation was educated under stories like that of Francisco and Gloria and others with subtler symbolism stories that must be re-watched several times before one fully grasps the symbolic violence hidden behind the façade of male protection and romantic love.

These fictional tales occupied a privileged place among mothers not only as recreational or cultural entertainment, but as pedagogical models during the Golden Age of Mexican film, later succeeded by *telenovelas*, theater, popular songs, and, in modern generations, social-media videos and stories.

Under the banner of sentimental pedagogy, the couple-as-archetype has left a social debt. When the affectionate feelings expressed in an early relationship like courtship translate into domination and violence in marriage, it is partly because of a pervasive cultural expectation of symbolic violence that "things are supposed to change once you're married; no marriage is perfect" and we always assume that courtship will naturally evolve into harmonious married life.

As discussed, the sense of ownership or domination granted to one partner (typically the man in a heterosexual relationship) can lead to behaviours we accept as part of married life dynamics. In Gloria and Francisco's story, apart from economic violence since Francisco is a wealthy property owner embroiled in legal disputes over his family land in Guanajuato (where they honeymoon) all other forms of violence are both overt and covert. Although certain themes were too delicate to depict explicitly at the time, two key sequences nevertheless reveal Francisco's erotic desire and sexual dominance over Gloria. In the opening church scene, he is captivated by her silk-stocked legs and high heels during the Holy Week ceremony. Later (at 52:07), after an entire day in which they had not exchanged a single word, during dinner he looks under the table and gazes at his wife's legs, then suddenly kisses her with frenzy and fury. She reacts with distance, unable to understand how a man can go an entire day without speaking to her and then suddenly kiss her with such uncontrollable passion. This situation leads to a fight and a night of violence, as we can infer from the sequence of that scene.

This idea of normalizing violence is shown again in another scene (minute 53:52). You can hear hitting coming from the couple's room, but the house staff downstairs keep working and ignore Gloria's crying and the noise. The butler checks the clock it's two in the morning. This scene shows that people have been taught to stay out of others' relationships, especially when it involves their bosses.

Sexuality was once taboo on screen, and today it is exposed explicitly in audiovisual media and social networks—yet true sex education remains lacking in our country. As a result, 2.4 million women have experienced severe sexual acts—from threats and blackmail to marital rape—while nearly 700,000 women suffered sexual violence in the past twelve months at the

hands of partners or spouses. This category includes coerced sex through threats or blackmail, use of physical force to compel intimacy, forced participation in unwanted sexual acts, unprotected intercourse, and being compelled to watch pornographic scenes (ENDIREH, 2006).

Luis Buñuel was a visionary director in many respects. Through Gabriel Figueroa's cinematography, he allowed us to perceive numerous signs of this couple's violent subjectivity and of a society that turned its back on Gloria judging her as overly dramatic, insensitive to her husband's "pure" love, and "light" in character, and therefore unworthy of a "perfect" man like Francisco.

If there is a charge of sentimental pedagogy that the media and entertainment industries have executed with great display in every era, we can say that cinema fulfilled its mission by serving up romantic love on a platter that concealed countless absences of balance and dignity. Then as now, there is resistance to reporting one's abuser—whether due to economic dependence or the belief that institutions charged with protecting women and administering justice will do nothing, despite any evidence. Women prefer to remain silent and stay with their abuser, hoping he will change or that nothing truly bad will happen.

Many cases of violence go unreported out of fear that the abuser will retaliate, so women remain in violent relationships hoping the situation will improve. Abusers often promise they will not strike again and will seek help—but the reality is that this cycle, once it starts, rarely stops by the abuser's own will; outside intervention by a specialist is necessary.

- When a woman decides to seek help for intimate-partner violence, 68.5% turn to a judicial authority, and 47.3% approach other institutions such as the National Women's Institute or the National System for Integral Family Development (DIF).
- Of those who go to a judicial authority, most turn to the public prosecutor's office (34.8%); among those seeking help from non-judicial institutions, 39.1% go to the DIF.
- During the past year, only one in ten women sought help from any institution when they experienced violence (ENDIREH, 2006).

Machismo and Its Reflection in Cinema

As the statistics show, many couples suffer some form of violence, often reinforced by machismo. This mindset promotes the humiliation and denigration of women reducing them to decorative objects, assistants, or housewives with no aspirations beyond domestic roles. In film, women often express a desire to excel and be self-sufficient, but these ambitions are frustrated by men who hold machista beliefs that a woman's only duty is housework. If a woman questions this belief, it can trigger violence from tone of voice and rude insults to physical blows or psychological abuse and may also involve economic coercion or blackmail.

In *Mona Lisa Smile* (USA, 2003), art-history professor Katherine Watson (Julia Roberts) arrives at the prestigious all-female Wellesley College, where the curriculum centers on home economics and "how to serve your husband," reinforcing female conformity and marriage as a woman's goal. Outraged, Katherine defies the school's ultraconservative board by encouraging her students to think for themselves, overcome insecurities, and pursue their own ambitions. She becomes a role model and mentor to many but the price for her "insubordination" is a formal warning: she may no longer teach that life holds anything more important than marriage and family. Katherine's rebellious spirit then drives her to seek out new ideas and awaken her students to other possibilities.

Machismo, as we have seen, is a socially entrenched behaviour reinforced by institutions and even by other women who teach young women to obey their husbands and limit themselves to home life. Human beings are not merely biological creatures driven by instinct; we are socially, culturally, and historically constructed. From this perspective, personality factors can influence a person's likelihood of engaging in aggressive behaviour.

Throughout life, people are exposed to situations of violence that vary depending on their family, social environment, and particularly their gender. Violence in intimate relationships is always a difficult topic to address, as both women and men experience humiliation or physical abuse (active or passive behaviour) from those they expect

to receive love, support, and respect from. Relationship violence is any action or omission that harms a person physically, emotionally, or sexually, with the intention of dominating and controlling them. It can manifest as attacks on self-esteem, insults, blackmail, manipulation, or physical violence. While the physical consequences of partner's violence are easier to identify, the most serious consequences are often psychological, as they leave long-lasting emotional scars that complicate the lives of those who suffer from them.

A very useful model for understanding this issue is the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), which allows us to identify the different levels at which violence manifests, the factors that influence it, and the interactions between these factors. According to this model, violence can interact on four levels: individual, familial/relational, community, and societal.

The individual level includes the history of family violence in a person's family of origin, as well as learning violent conflict resolution strategies, authoritarianism in family relationships, low self-esteem, among other factors.

The familial/relational level refers to the context of the closest relationships in which a person develops. It involves authoritarian family relationships and marital conflicts as predictive factors of violence.

The community level consists of all the social institutions where a person operates and develops, such as schools, churches, healthcare systems, the judicial system, and the state. A violent environment is characterized by legitimizing or tolerating violence in these spaces, a lack of adequate legislation, insufficient support for victims, and a deficit in training professionals to prevent and address violence.

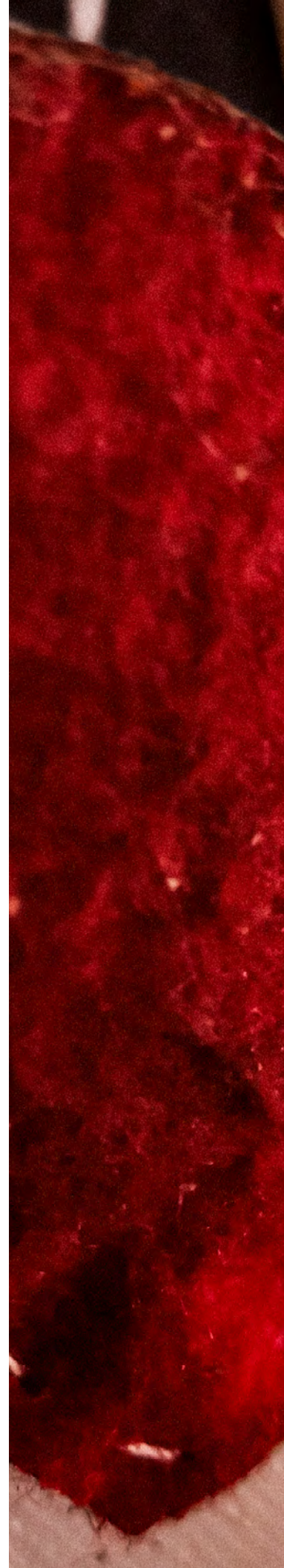
This violence affects the entire society, and behind it lies a cultural exercise of power rooted in stereotypical beliefs and cultural patterns about women, family, and children's roles, which fosters gender inequality and social group differences. Violence is not only perpetrated by an individual but is also influenced by the society in which it occurs. The ultimate purpose of violence goes beyond mere aggression, as it also seeks to exert power and dominate the other, with methods ranging from the simplest to the most extreme. This is reflected in relationships and family units, which tend to repeat violent cycles without realizing it or recognizing they are living in a violent situation.

One of the models for this process refers to couples with aggression issues who fall into a Cycle of Violence (Walker, 1979a). This model, still in use today, occurs in three phases: the first phase is an increase in tension, which may or may not lead to an outburst of physical violence. This phase can last hours, days, or even months. If the aggression happens, the second phase follows: physical violence, which ends the tension. The third phase is remorse, which may or may not be verbalized. During this phase, the abuser acts conciliatory, kind, and affectionate, or tries to restore the relationship, while the victim hopes that it won't happen again. However, the more this cycle repeats, the less remorse the abuser shows. Initially, the abuser may feel bad for their actions, but as violent events continue, they become indifferent, and the remorse phase disappears. The violence becomes habitual. The victim becomes more dependent on the abuser, their self-esteem decreases, and they are afraid to make decisions to resolve their situation, fearing they will lose their partner and that they won't be able to take responsibility for their own life. Usually, it takes a long time for the victim to dare to separate, and in many cases, the cycle of violence ends tragically.

At this point, women are the primary victims of such violence in relationships, and they often fail to recognize it for various reasons (being in love, believing their partner will change,

etc.). These situations are often portrayed and socialized in popular movies from the golden age of Mexican cinema, which will be shown below.

Film	Time	Scene
Two Kinds of Care (Dir. Ismael Rodríguez, Mexico, 1953)	0:33	During a picnic, Jorge Bueno (Jorge Negrete) and Pedro Malo (Pedro Infante) agree to declare their love to their sweethearts (Carmelita González and Yolanda Varela). They notice, however, that the two women have agreed not to pay attention to them until they abandon their other conquests, saying, “But that can’t happen, right?” To which Jorge replies, “Of course.”
Basket of Mexican Tales (Dir. Julio Bracho, Mexico, 1956)	1:29:45	After marrying Luisa (María Félix) and Carlos (Pedro Armendáriz)—two people from different worlds—they arrive at his estate. Carlos asks his wife for a cup of coffee; she answers, “I’m not your maid.” Frustrated, he asks the same favor of the parrot, the cat, and the horse. When none comply, he shoots them—sparring only the horse because Luisa, terrified by the parrot’s and cat’s deaths, suddenly screams. Carlos then asks his wife again, and she submissively replies, “Yes, my love.”
Santa (Dir. Antonio Moreno, Mexico, 1931)	10:33	While walking outside her village, Santa (Lupita Tovar) hurries to meet her lover, the lieutenant (Carlos Orellana), because her brothers might see them talking. When her brothers catch up, they scold her for speaking to an outsider in the fields, warning that such behaviour will scandalize the town—and that’s not “proper” for a decent girl.
Eugenia Grandet (Dir. Emilio Gómez, Mexico, 1953)	1:34:31	When Eugenia (Marga López) reunites with her childhood love Carlos (Ramón Gay), she confesses that she never married while waiting for him, gave up her inheritance, never took another husband in hopes he would return, paid off his family’s debts, and filled her life with bitterness and loneliness in her sentimental devotion.
Enamorada (Dir. Emilio Fernández, Mexico, 1946)	1:35:49	The final, iconic scene illustrates sentimental education: Beatriz Peñafiel (María Félix) has abandoned a prosperous marriage to Mr. Roberts (an American played by Eugenio Rossi) and the comforts offered by her father amid the revolution. She renounces everything to follow revolutionary general José Juan Reyes (Pedro Armendáriz). As the cavalry battalion rides out—with soldiers on horseback and soldaderas marching on foot behind—the general looks back at Beatriz, who clings to the saddle and follows him on foot.
The Power of Desire (Dir. Miguel M. Delgado, Mexico, 1955)	19:04	Worldly art teacher Arturo (Armando Calvo) tells his colleague, teacher Laura (Rosario Granados), about his idea of the ideal woman: he describes her as beautiful but ignorant and naive.



Violence as Image and Consumption

The representation of any discourse typically follows certain processes and stages of elaboration, in which the selection of elements to be shown based on criteria of interest, audience familiarity, or the customs one wishes to depict must be done in a way that is representative or typical of a person or group. If these symbols are repeated frequently, they eventually give rise to stereotypes. An image is representative when the viewer identifies with it, which in turn amplifies the impact of the media products that employ those images.

Violence often plays a central role because it conveys both positive and negative messages at various levels. In the media, we distinguish between two kinds of violence explicit and implicit, and both affect audiences just as powerfully.

“Explicit” is used to classify the content of films, TV shows, albums, and other works. It lets us differentiate between material that merely suggests certain situations (such as a murder or a sexual encounter) and material that depicts them directly (showing a knife piercing a body and blood spurting, or the naked bodies of protagonists). Works with explicit content typically carry warnings so parents can judge whether they’re appropriate for children. Films receive ratings (e.g., “not suitable for under 18,” “suitable for all audiences”), and albums with explicit lyrics bear a “Parental Advisory: Explicit Content” label.

By contrast, “implicit” content is contained within a work without being directly shown. For example, in film, we call a scene implicit when two characters slip naked under the sheets and the bed moves you infer they are having sex, even though no explicit sexual acts are shown on camera.

On the consumer side, the entertainment model dramatic portrayals of violence cater to an audience that demands violent content, not only for its depiction but also out of a morbid fascination with the images and stories the media provide: battle scenes, assaults, murders. Scholars of this phenomenon point to viewers’ need for excitement and strong emotions. Zillmann and Bryant (1996) explain that people are drawn to media violence because it satisfies morbid curiosity, fosters emotional sensitivity, and invites social comparison between viewers’ own lives and those of the characters portrayed. Imbert (1992) argues that “represented violence” wields social influence by showing societal norms and helping construct reality; viewers learn new behaviors by identifying with attractive real or fictional models.

Once media producers detect this impulse toward morbid fascination, the cycle is set: sensationalism and dramatization of violence drive profits. The political economy of media violence shows that violent scenes can be shot cheaply and sold easily on the global market. Violence thus becomes a universal language: in cartoons, for instance, violence is often portrayed humorously, and plots are recycled with new characters. Commercial strategies extend beyond production and exhibition—cartoons spawn video

games (e.g., Pokémon) and toy lines, while high-budget films enjoy wider distribution and promotion.

A clear effect of decades of exposure is habituation: audiences grow desensitized to violent content and may even prefer it over lighter fare. Unless we stop treating citizens as mere consumers, media will continue to sacrifice their educational role. In a democratic society of free, rational, informed individuals, the press has a duty to uphold its instructive mission.

Today, the most marketable films are those featuring violence—beginning with American cinema’s early embrace of it. There have been movies about juvenile delinquency, historic massacres, domestic violence, and more, creating an audience accustomed to—and demanding of—ever-greater levels of on-screen brutality. Yet while family violence might seem less dramatic, film audiences who confront it onscreen often realize how serious it is—yet cinema rarely depicts its full reality. Hollywood’s production codes historically restricted graphic violence.

In 1929, with Catholic editor Martin Quigley and Jesuit priest Daniel Lord, the industry drafted what became the 1930 Production Code (later known as the Hays Code). Beyond general moral precepts protecting marriage and public decency it laid out strict guidelines for sex and violence: crimes could be shown only in moderated form, and weapon use had to be minimal. As audiences craved more realism, the Hays Code was abandoned in the late 1970s in favor of today’s age-based rating system.

Conclusions

We are culturally contradictory beings when it comes to violence. On one hand, we reject it; on the other, we are fascinated by it precisely because of its connection to power. We live in a culture that penalizes violence yet simultaneously coexists with it. Walter Benjamin, one of the most brilliant thinkers on the media, described our fascination with violence as follows: “The destructive character is young and cheerful. Because to destroy is to rejuvenate, since it wipes away the traces of our age; and it brings joy, for the one who destroys, to cast aside means perfect reduction.” From this, we can conclude that violence continues to be perceived as the solution to most human problems, whether interpersonal or social, as we sadly observe in our own time.

Cinema which is considered as an art form is capable of portraying unimaginable, fictional, or real stories and, moreover, serves as a vehicle for critiquing cultures, societies, traditions, personalities, and events over time. Reflecting on cinema and intimate-partner violence requires us to examine our culture’s fascination with violence and the very conception of it, which has shaped how we construct and tell our stories. Denial or anger at the idea that intimate-partner violence has existed for decades visible in both Mexican and foreign films does not make it disappear. Nor must we learn to accept violence as an everyday fact of life, remaining silent instead of acting reporting or helping the person who is suffering so that the abuse does not continue. In many couples, violence stems from the family nucleus, perpetuating an endless cycle and reinforcing the belief that men hold power.

After studying and analysing the problem of domestic violence within couples through films and historical texts we can say that its roots lie in a sentimental model that sharply defined gender roles and aspirations, granting men and women different spaces for personal development and imposing a misinterpreted moral dichotomy on women’s expected behaviour. Analysis of Luis Buñuel’s film further suggests that women’s support networks arise within family intimacy and close social circles and play a crucial role in finding solutions—provided the abuse is recognized in time and help is sought.

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