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Chapter

Key Elements in the Representation of Sexual Violence in Spain: Consent, Myths and Stigma

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Abstract

This chapter presents the deepening knowledge of consent, myths and stigma in the social representation of sexual violence. A critical, empathic and sensitive scientific framework that allows redesigning better political and social actions for victims is presented. This also improves educational programs that seek the eradication of rape. An exhaustive bibliographic search was conducted utilising different databases. Recommendations include the need to construct counter-representations of current hegemonic stories that provide victims of sexual violence with elements and narratives that influence healthy, recovery-based outcomes.

Keywords: sexual violence, rape, consent, rape myths, stigma, representations

1. Introduction

International society currently lives in a context of global feminist protests related to sexual violence. As Rosa Cobo said, the current feminist movement is in its 4th stage of its historic movement, and its more strong vindicative statements consist of visualising, reporting and eradicating of any sexual violence against women [1]. Different International Organisations and governments also assumed this goal, aligned with the Agenda for Sustainable Development for the year 2030 around the globe [2]. According to Castells and Subirats [3], people in Western society have the freedom to decide with whom they want to have sex, as well as the freedom to recognise their own personal sexual desire and enjoy it. Nevertheless, these assumed freedoms of behaviour—especially in women—are constantly thwarted [4–6]. On the one hand, the way the mass media treat sexual violence cases does not favour its eradication from the source. In the mass media, it does not take long to disembowel cases of sexual violence and recount the most lurid details, all from the point of view of sensationalism, without any critical reading of the facts [7].

Regarding the visualisation and reports of abuse and sexual aggression, a turning point for the Spanish feminist movement, as well as for Spanish society, was when the national media received a case of multiple-sex aggression against a young girl

during the Feast of Sanfermines¹ (a nine days worldwide known festival) in 2016 [10–14]. This particular case of sexual assault led to an unprecedented mobilisation in the days after the media became aware of the incident. The same happened when the Provincial Court of Navarra published the judicial sentence almost two years later. In this judgement, the judges state that what happened to this girl was a crime of sexual abuse rather than aggression, a relevant nuance in the Spanish criminal justice system. Besides that, one of the judges in charge of this case declared that despite finding no signs of physical abuse on [the woman], he realised that there was a sign of joy and fun amongst the participants involved in this act of violence, including the woman [10, 15]. A huge number of citizens reacted with indignation to this situation online (social media) and offline (protests). The indignation was due to both the conceptualisation of the crime as abuse rather than aggression and because of the opinion of one of the judges responsible for sentencing. Popular proclamations in the Spanish context were shouted, such as *¡Sola, borracha, quiero llegar a casa!* (“Alone and drunk, I want to get back home!”). By this, women were trying to let people know that they deserve to be safe whilst coming back home from any place at any time during the night. They were also proclaiming that women have the right to be wherever and whenever they want, don’t matter if it is dark or if they are alone: by shouting in Spanish *¡La calle, la noche, también son nuestras!* (“the street and the night are ours too!”). They were also demonstrating support for the woman involved in the “wolf pack” crime by shouting *¡Tranquila, hermana, aquí está tu manada!* (“Do not worry, sister, here is your pack!”) [16, 17].

Without a shadow of a doubt, this case of violence visualised the ideological debate about consent in the current Spanish society. The existing myths about rape, alcohol consumption, the truth behind the testimony of this woman, the assumptions about her promiscuity and more, caused this debate to last, with a high impact on the political agenda and in the social media sphere [10, 18–20]. Since that time, the concept of consent has become a fundamental discourse for the Feminist Movement in Spain. In fact, it went from saying *No es No* (“No means no”) to *Solo sí es sí* (“Only yes means yes”), thus pointing out that the lack of consent due to various other situations also means no. In this way, another point made visible by the Sanfermines gang rape case was the discrepancy in the conceptualisation of sexual violence between the majority of public opinion and the legislative and judicial powers. For Sanyal, the visibility of this particular discrepancy was a key point to understand this event as the beginning of the Spanish #MeToo movement that put the Spanish legislation in check and sent the Penal Code “for exam”, specifically, in relation to crimes against sexual freedom [17, 21].

Most drug-facilitated sexual assault cases, those in which the victims are in a vulnerable state after taking drugs voluntarily or involuntarily, have not being reported for two main reasons. Firstly, because women apparently have too many doubts about themselves, they do not remember what happened or they partially do. Apparently, after the abuse, women have a notion of being sexually assaulted, but they are still not quite sure about what really happened. They feel full of blame and shame [22, 23]. Secondly, in many cases, the person that abuses these women is usually someone who knows them personally. This is something that causes them (women) to feel inadequate at the time of reporting these issues to the authorities,

¹ Every year, during nine days of July, the city of Pamplona (Navarra, Spain) is transformed into a giant festival. This worldwide feast invades the squares and streets of the city [8]. Unfortunately, cases of sexual violence are frequent in this kind of festival [9].

therefore, making them doubt and not willing to report at all [23–25]. As Abdulali states: “7 out of 10 cases of sex crime are committed by people that the victim already knows, and this increases the feeling of self-blaming and unwillingness from the victim to report the crime” [26]. According to Samara Velte [12], “the decision of reporting these sort of cases responds to many factors, such as trust in institutions, social support, personal perception that it is worth reporting these violence, assessment of personal safety if reported, etc.”. Also, Barreto supports the idea of giving testimony of the sexual assault is not only useful at the judicial sphere level (specially for the victims of such crimes), but that it is also useful for the healing of the feelings of justice that the victim perceives at a symbolic and a social level as well. In the same way—the author continues—breaking the silence eases the fact for other people who have suffered similar situations to make contacts and networks in order to stop feeling isolated. On the other side, reporting obliges our society to define its political inclinations and take part in moral discuss. In this way, victims have political power [27]. Another important point is that as the majority of rape is not reported, a considerable number of rapists are not caught by justice, which results in the impossibility to study and get deeper scientific knowledge of sexual violence and its perpetrators [28, 29].

Sexual violence is a social scourge that requires in-depth research and some degree of reflection that allows us to understand the nuances surrounding this topic. It is necessary to compose a solid theoretical framework from which to start to design educational programs and prevention policies that aim to eradicate this type of violence [30, 31]. This review aims to provide clarity in the identification and description of some keys to sexual violence as fundamental as consent, myths about rape and stigmatisation from a sociological, anthropological and feminist perspective. It will facilitate and promote treatment from a scientific approach, as well as more empathy, from listening and having tenderness towards female victims of sexual violence.

2. Sexual violence and rape

The concept of “Sexual violence” was introduced into the European and North American political-feminist discourse in the 70s and 80s of the twentieth century. At that time, the private sphere begins to be analysed as a place where the political happens and materialises, as the famous proclamation by Kate Millet points out, “the personal is political” [32, 33]. Authors such as Kate Millet [34] and Susan Brownmiller [35] are the ones who sow the seeds and take the first steps when analysing rape as sexual and sexist violence, protected by an unequal distribution of power. From this moment on, two lines of interpretation of rape and sexual violence will be opened. The first one emphasises the question of power, pointing out that sexual abuse and aggression are part of control mechanisms [36] to maintain a *status quo* of power, transcending the sexual, a position of analysis that Susan Brownmiller maintains [33], as well as other authors [37, 38]. This continues to this day through researchers such as Rita Segato [39, 40]. In the second line, the attention will be paid to the sexual question. From this perspective, it will be understood as sexualised violence, where the hierarchy of power is eroticised and sexualised. This position has been defended from the 90s by authors such as Catherine MacKinnon [41].

The World Health Organization (WHO) sets out a very complete definition of sexual violence, which includes both the facts and the intentions, by classifying “sexual violence” as: “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual

comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of the relationship to the victim, in any setting, including—but not limited—to home and work” [4]. For González-López from a sociological and feminist perspective, it is important to define sexual violence from the position and subjectivity of those who have experienced it. This author points out the importance of the person being attacked or abused feeling a certain way, in order to be classified as violence. As she expresses it, sexual violence encompasses those “attitudes and behaviours (verbal and non-verbal) that one or more people exercise towards other human beings and can invade and/or damage their sense of integrity, security and erotic-sexual well-being”, from the most subtle practices to the most visible and well-known, such as sexual exploitation, rape or genital mutilation [42]. Canseco follows the line of this author when speaking of the recognisability of the violent character. According to Canseco, in order to name it as sexual violence, an act or intention must be recognised as such and this will depend on the person who receives the damage or threat [43]. There are other perspectives on the definition of sexual violence. The Argentine anthropologist Rita Segato focuses on the mandate of masculinity as the origin of this type of violence, based on her exhaustive study in the prisons of Brasilia with inmates convicted of rape. According to her, the main motivation for sexual assaults has an origin linked to power and “the mandate of male peers or brothers that requires proof of belonging to the group” [40].

Regarding the concept of rape, for Segato [39] it is understood as all use and abuse, all access to the body of the other, when that person is not participating in the act at the same level or with a similar intention. Another current study focuses on the aggressor-victim relationship, which places rape as a demonstration of power, dominance and contempt for another person, as well as a demonstration of men's fear of being humiliated and undervalued [13, 44]. In fact, amongst the motivations for committing a rape, Segato defends the existence of three main reasons [39]. The first consists of the manly demonstration of strength and virility before equals, to maintain or achieve a position of power, something very common, according to the author, in gang rapes, especially by young people. A second reason is its value as a punishment against the generic woman, as a disciplinary mechanism through which it is intended to remind her which is her rightful place as a woman and what happens when she transgresses the norms, be it a real or imagined transgression [45]. A third and final motive is rape as an assault or insult to the generic man, as a challenge of power. This is the case of rapes in territories at war, where the body of women is another space to be conquered, an action that weakens and humiliates the male enemy [46]. As Kate Millet pointed out, “rape as an offense by one man to another, by using, abusing and desecrating the other's woman” [34].

In a novel way, Segato offers a compelling interpretation of the phenomenon of rape that focuses its gaze on the horizontal axis (the rapist's relationship with his peers, the aggressor with other men), instead of analysing the vertical axis (rapist-victim) [39, 40]. According to Segato, due to their status as equals, men form alliances and compete amongst themselves in order to see who is the most capable of dominating other people. For the author, rape establishes a dialogue between the perpetrator and his peers, a dialogue in which virility and personal prestige come into play. From this logic, rape is an expressive and instrumental violence that seeks the repair or acquire prestige and communicates a status. In the words of the author: “the raped woman behaves as a sacrificial victim immolated in an initiatory ritual; [the aggressor] competes with them, showing that he deserves, due to his aggressiveness and power of death, to occupy a place in the virile brotherhood and even to acquire

a prominent position in a phratry that only recognises hierarchical language and a pyramid organisation” [40]. This interpretation of rape coincides with the ethnographic research carried out by Philippe Bourgois in which the author establishes a relationship with young people linked to the black-market economy and drug sales, who become his key informants. At a certain point during the fieldwork, these youths claimed to have gang raped as teenagers as a training and strengthening for group membership. In fact, one of them relates the complications to get excited and says: “At that time I was the youngest. The bug would not stop me. It kind of disgusted me, you know; I didn't like that [...] I didn't like it, but I still helped to prepare the mess because the girl had to go through that mess. Sometimes I had to stand guard with a bat to force her to stay in the room with whoever was there with her” [47].

In analysing the victim-offender axis, but focusing especially on the offender, the work of David Lisak stands out. According to Lisak, it is common for perpetrators to practice sex more frequently than other men of the same age and social group. In terms of their attitudes, they often share a belief system in which women are sexual objects to be used for one's own pleasure. In addition, this author argues that perpetrators have feelings of anger towards women [48]. He also indicates that most rapes are committed by men who sexually assault on a recurrent basis (serial offenders) [49]. Lisak focuses on the predatory nature of sexual violence, highlighting the seriality of perpetrators, as well as their multifacetedness. Amongst other characteristics, rapists were defined as hostile, angry, dominant, hyper-masculine, impulsive and antisocial. But, the most powerful predictor of committing sexual assault in early adulthood (18–24 years) was having committed sexual assault during high school years [50].

3. Sexual consent

When studying sexual violence and rape, one of the centres of gravity for both phenomena is the idea of sexual consent, since it is used to discern between sex and rape [51]. Sexual consent is taken for granted in its conceptualisation, alluding to what is commonly understood: an agreement between two or more people to carry out a certain sexual practice [52, 53]; an agreement between equal individuals, with the agency to accept or reject sex [51]. However, it is a concept that quickly generates debate, since its practice is immersed in a social context, in which different systems of oppression and discrimination mediate, such as racism, chauvinism or colonialism, amongst others [51], which lead to a first breach of the “agreement between equals”. It is obvious that sexual consent is an important and complex concept of which there is currently no unanimity in its definition or consensus amongst public opinion, legislation or institutions [24, 31].

Consent and will are related but are also different phenomenon [51, 53]. You can consent and simultaneously not wish; not have the will for various reasons such as fear or desire to please. Thus, an unwanted sexual relationship is accepted, something very feminine. And it is that, as Castells and Subirats point out, “abnegation is the attitude traditionally demanded of women as their most precious virtue and implies the capacity to deny themselves, the capacity to give without limits, the capacity to show submission” [3]. Is there real consent in this situation? At the very least, the proposal fits to reflect and rethink what sexual relations take place within the heterosexual couple. As Tardón points out, not even when there is an explicit *yes* can it be assured that there was no sexual assault since “victims cannot always say no, since in

sexual violence there are other aspects such as coercion, manipulation, blackmail, the social, political, cultural context, the age of the victims, etc.” [33]. According to Velte [12], for consent to be real, “a positive response is necessary, it takes desire, will, and freedom of action”. This inevitably leads to the recognition that “the consent debate entails a much deeper questioning. It also implies thinking about what one's own desire is and how it is constructed: sometimes what exists is a consent that has to do with accepting the desire of the other, but not taking one's own desire into account” [12]. Along these lines, Cuenca raises the term “consensual rape” to precisely emphasise those sexual relationships that women agree to have without any desire or sexual appetite. For this author, it is about a “sexual self-micro-violence produced, basically, as a result of the construction of the gender and sexual identity of women” [54]. In addition, different studies show that consent is vitiated as the relationship is more stable and there is a greater commitment: the longer the couple's history, the lower the importance of obtaining explicit consent [24, 55, 56].

As was mentioned, the anal, oral and vaginal aggression carried out by a group of men during the Sanfermines of the summer of 2016 was only considered abuse and not aggression in the sentence of First Instance due to the absence of force or intimidation. The Spanish Penal Code established that sexual abuse is carried out on people who are deprived of meaning or whose mental disorder is abused (for example, due to the effects of alcohol consumption/other drug intakes), people on whom it is not necessary to use violence or intimidation to obtain their consent [57]. This case, shows, as in many others, the absence of verbal and explicit consent was used in the defence of the perpetrators [58]. Their argument appealed to ignorance: they denounced not knowing that there had been no consent—because they thought it had been granted implicitly. In this way, they transformed themselves into victims due to the lack of communication, misunderstandings or subsequent regrets [24, 51]. Judicial failure generated a wave of popular indignation that led to the questioning of the enunciation of crimes against sexual freedom, whilst it became another matter on the political agenda.² This popular questioning is relevant in symbolic struggles, for the conceptualisation and visibility of the phenomenon of sexual violence, since, as Segato points out “the struggle for the Law, both in the sense of formulation of laws as in the sense of making effective the status of existence of those already formulated [...] is, on the one hand, the fight for the nomination, for the legal consecration of the names of human suffering” [40]. In turn, it is a way of transforming society, since the Penal Code produces and reflects the current morality of this [39].

Another controversy related to the presence or absence of the use of force by the aggressor is that, opposing the aggression with greater or lesser force as a means of resistance, can lead to the aggressor also acting violently [62]. Faced with this

² In July 2018, a few months after the demonstrations following the sentencing of “La Manada”, the political parties Unidas Podemos, En Comú Podem and En Marea presented the Proposed Law for the Comprehensive Protection of Sexual Freedom and for the eradication of sexual violence. This proposal aimed to eliminate the distinction between aggression and sexual abuse, but also “all those aspects of prevention, care, healing, specialisation or reparation that, even if they were in force for other forms of violence, did not have specific measures to adequately and transversally address sexual violence” [59]. In addition, in 2022, the new law on the Comprehensive Guarantee of Sexual Freedom has been put into effect. In this law, the distinction between sexual abuse and sexual assault has finally been eliminated. On the other hand, it puts the focus on consent, stating: “Consent shall only be understood to exist when it has been freely manifested, through acts that, in view of the circumstances of the case, clearly express the will of the person”. In fact, this law has been known as the “only yes is yes” law [60].

situation, many victims "let themselves be done" in order to survive [12]. Then, it will be questioned whether or not there was consent ("because she allowed herself") and, furthermore, in the Spanish case, it will be taken for granted that it was not a rape or an aggression, but an abuse, since it was not necessary to use violence or intimidation. For Barjola, the absence of violence allows us to open the way to the myth—that maintains that—"women seduce their aggressors" or "they do not resist enough, because deep down they want to make it happen" [63]. Those thoughts and beliefs make it difficult to discern between consent and non-consent. Therefore, to demonstrate the veracity of the woman's testimony, "physical evidence and violence were a requirement, otherwise it meant that there had been no resistance" [62]. In addition, a "resistance assessment" of the victim is carried out, with which a quasi-mathematical relationship seems to be established: the greater the resistance, the greater the credibility. In this way, a perverse game is entered where not only the aggressor is judged, but also the victim [64]. According to Velte, the credibility of the victim is one of the main testimonies to evaluate to consider what is true. Instead of questioning the testimony of the aggressors, that of the victims is called into question. Amongst the different mechanisms used to judge women, this author highlights the use of psychological reports on the "trauma" that the event has left on the victim (the greater the trauma, the greater the credibility, which is also perverse at the same time rather than deterministic), the measurement of the coherence between the totality of statements made by the victim, as well as beliefs and topics related to "socially punishable" female behaviour, such as the manner of dressing, appearance or attitude [12]. For all the above, Kessel [51] speaks of the "cruel optimism of sexual consent" because, as it is currently conceptualised, instead of helping to distinguish rape from sex, consent serves to exchange narratives: victims become responsible for not having showed consent or lack thereof more vigorously or fiercely and in turn, the perpetrators become victims of misunderstandings or manipulations. In short, instead of simplifying, the current notion of consent makes it possible to reinforce inequalities of power and the inversion of the categories of agency and victimhood.

4. Sexual violence myths

In a case of sexual violence, aspects such as the way of dressing, appearance or attitude are also judged, elements that are part of the "sexual violence myths" or better known as "rape myths". Those were named for the first time in the 70s [32, 33, 64]. Bohner defines the rape myths as "descriptive or prescriptive beliefs about rape (its causes, context, side effects, the aggressors, the victims and their interactions with one another) that are used to deny, minimise or even justify sexual violence that men impose over women" [65]. For Tardón the functionality of these myths—supporting the arguments according to the research done by Barthes [66]—is based on the depoliticisation and simplification of reality, replacing complexity (of these particular issues) with essentialisms without any scientific basis [33]. Believing these myths means evaluating in a distorted way and from stereotypes an assault or sexual abuse, with the aim of blaming the victim, doubting what happened, exonerating the aggressor or categorising women as "more likely to be raped" [7, 32, 33, 67, 68]. Myths serve as a social surveillance tool. They are part of a punitive system since, through them, behaviours are corrected, spaces are vetoed, schedules are controlled and movements and gestures are limited. Their operation is assured because "they are schemas of meanings that most people recognise or have internalised" [62]. However, the importance of these

myths as guides or orientations of sexual behaviour should be emphasised in the face of the educational void that exists around sexuality [69], which favours the normalisation and assumption of sexual violence as a way one relates [15]. Myths are deeply rooted in culture and can be found in religious doctrines and cultural prescriptions, commonly encompassed in "tradition" [67].

Since the 1970s, there has been a composition of what a "real rape" looks like: a young, virgin woman, who is violently attacked at night by a stranger; she resists, but is dominated and ends up being injured and raped [68, 70]. This stereotype of rape is pernicious insofar as it disqualifies, discredits and ridicules the most frequent rapes: the aggressors are people known to the victim—friends, family members, colleagues or acquaintances—without obvious signs of violence, in which the victim responds in a distinctive way: from doing nothing (which is also a reaction) to being friendly and trying to dialogue with the aggressor [23, 25, 26, 40, 50, 71]. Due to this widespread myth, many of the personal experiences of the victims do not fit with the pre-established ideas about what and how rape should be, which makes it difficult to recognise the experience as sexual violence, resulting in high levels of impunity [67]. By focusing on "real rape" beyond stereotypes, the focus shifted from talking about rapes that happened with acquaintances and friends to talking about "acquaintances rape" and "date rape". However, these categories were not without new myths. Ideas such as that date rapes are lighter—less traumatic, less violent, less "rape"—and therefore the perpetrators in a date rape are less culpable [50].

Another series of well-established myths are those that are based on the eighteenth-century pseudo-argument of "male sexual incontinence" to justify rape [21]. In this speech, not only was rape justified, but it was preferable to the act of masturbation. Sanyal also argues that other myths that survive to this day arise from the myth of the steam boiler—referring to a man's sexuality functions like a steam boiler—when the pressure gets too high, he has to "let off steam". Going on with these myths, the woman who "as a guardian of the divine order (Hegel) or the moral order (Rousseau), is also hers, the responsibility of controlling male sexuality by modifying the way she dresses and her behaviour so as not to set his libido on fire [...]. Warning women not to drink too much alcohol when they go out and not to send the wrong signals to men is a holdover from the widely criticised steam boiler model". Phrases like "she asked for it", "she provoked it", "she shouldn't have dressed like that", "she shouldn't have been there", "it only happens to bad women", etc. are part of the meaning schemas that emerge from the arguments about male sexual incontinence and that are part of the myths that circulate around sexual violence [7, 68].

Likewise, two opposing representations circulate around the figure of women, but they precisely feed off each other and participate in the myths of rape. On the one hand, a weak female subject is made up of a predisposition to be the victim that requires the strength of a man to be saved and, at the same time, the image of the woman is conjugated as a master of manipulation that uses feminine tricks to achieve their goals and deceive and use the male [51]. Faced with this duality, the presence of one or another representation will prevail as appropriate to justify and reinforce beliefs, which ultimately blame the woman and exonerate the aggressor. These myths, in turn, allow the circulation of speeches and narratives that rank women according to their public behaviour and determine the seriousness or socially punishable measures for these situations. In short, you get an assessment of "how much she deserved it". As Samara Velte has reported, in the social (and shared) imaginary, the rape of a girl drugged without her consent versus a rape of a girl who has voluntarily drugged herself is not equally valued, although the act of rape is the same. In the second case, the

woman (who has voluntarily taken drugs) will be held liable for the rape to a greater degree [12]. What is in the background is a mechanism to control female behaviour: “if you become uninhibited” (by taking drugs); “if you dress in a certain way” (and not as the social rule says); “if you walk alone”, etc., you are increasing the risk that someone hurts you, you are exposing yourself and therefore it is your responsibility [12, 33, 62, 71].

5. Stigmatisation: a derived problem

Erving Goffman points out that in Ancient Greece: “the term stigma was used to refer to bodily signs with which it was tried to display something bad and unusual in the moral status of those who represented them”. Today, this term is used practically the same, with the nuance that it does not refer only to bodily signs, but to a discrediting quality or attribute. According to Goffman, when we know the stigmatising attribute of a person, we stop seeing them “as a total and ordinary person”, they “become someone less desirable” [72]. The notes that Goffman makes are of great interest in this current study because, this social and dynamic process is what a victim of sexual violence usually suffers after confessing to being a victim, a process inserted in re-victimisation or double victimisation [73]. Although this process is usually associated with the effects of the actions of professionals who deal with the victim (such as the police, judges or lawyers), society as a whole, in interpersonal relationships, participates in the construction of the stigma of raped women [74, 75]. Sexual violence occurs at a specific time and place, in a social context that shapes how victims judge themselves and how they are evaluated and treated by others [75]. Amongst the different aspects in which a socially reviled stigma influences, damage to self-esteem, loss of (social) status, isolation and adaptation problems stand out amongst others [73, 76]. In certain times and countries, the stigma of a woman who is a victim of sexual violence not only affects her but also her family, so that, in the most severe cases, the woman must leave her home, be abandoned by her family or community or even commit suicide or be punished with the death penalty in order to prevent her social stigma as a tainted woman from reaching the rest of the family or community [22]. This is exemplified by Virginie Despentes when she recounted the case of the rape of a friend: “Through her story, I understand that rape is something that a person can get caught by and that you cannot later undo”. Contaminated. Until then, I thought I’d coped well, that I had thick skin and better things to do than let three rednecks traumatise me. But I saw the rape of my friend as an event from which nothing would ever be as before”. In fact, when reflecting on her own rape, the French author expresses how she avoided naming the word rape to refer to her experience, using other expressions that unloaded the meaning (of stigma) of what happened: “whilst it does not bear the name, the (sexual) aggression loses its specificity, it can be confused with other aggressions, such as being robbed caught by the police, arrested or beaten up. Because, from the moment a rape is called rape, the entire surveillance device for women is set in motion [77].

At the same time, the stigma of the raped woman draws attention to the importance of presenting herself as the “perfect victim” in cases of sexual abuse or assault. We are talking about the social construction of the woman who is the victim of sexual violence, a construction that when it is not complied with is further evidence against the testimony of the victimised woman. This happened in the trial of the multiple aggression of the *Sanfermines* in 2016. One of the lawyers of the five

aggressors hired a private detective to demonstrate that the victim had consented to the aggression since she was “leading a normal life” after the sexual assault. The private detective's report was presented as evidence for the defence, although it was ultimately dismissed [10]. “The perfect rape victim” is one who has received physical violence, one who has resisted, but also the “perfect victim” is one who is traumatised after the assault, paralysed, unable to go out on the street, to interact with men, to have fun, etc. [18, 77]. According to Segato, in cases of sexual violence, there is in turn a moral violence, with which the most emotional aspect of the victim is harmed through resources such as “ridicule, moral coercion, suspicion, intimidation, condemnation of sexuality, the daily devaluation of women as a person, their personality and their psychological traits, their body, their intellectual capacities, their work, their moral value”. These attitudes and behaviours towards the victim can “occur without any verbal aggression, manifesting exclusively with gestures, attitudes, looks...” [39]. This situation generates intense discomfort in the victim and an increase in guilt, which in turn decreases the probability of reporting the abuse or sexual assault. The social suspicion that the victim's testimony is misleading, the irony contained in the collective judgement that is issued in the face of this type of crime, together with shame and fear of reprisals, are factors that contribute to silence [73, 78, 79].

6. Reflections and moving forward

According to different authors [39, 40, 62, 69, 77], representations and narratives of sexual violence have direct implications and impact on the experience of this kind of violence, both for the victims, their closest counterparts and society as a whole. These representations of a social phenomenon or fact are an amalgam of socially shared knowledge, notions, beliefs, attitudes and values that are associated with the event itself and guide the action that follows. In fact, the capacity of said representation to “challenge individual subjectivity and to impact and influence” will depend on the presence—acceptance, reception—of such representation in the dominant or hegemonic discourses [62]. The impact of sexual violence on a considerable percentage of victims includes physical consequences, from superficial injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies to even death. However, in most cases, the most present and at the same time the most lasting damages are the psychological ones (related to the mental health of the victim), but also to their social relationships and life opportunities, which are reflected in a poor performance in education, difficulties finding/keeping a job and the misuse of alcohol and drugs [80, 81].

So far, the dominant discourse around sexual violence is the sexist one, a discourse that, according to Barjola [62], serves to make docile bodies and limit women's sexual freedom, that is, as a control mechanism. For this reason, and based on Despentès, it encourages women to re-signify sexual violence, and specifically the story about sexual danger, so that a violation does not have the implications or impact that it currently has (or seems to have) on the life of the victim and breaks with the control mechanism that this story supposes [77]. In this way, Barjola defends the elaboration of counter-narratives to sexual danger, the resignification of sexual violence, “providing a new schema”. Part of the Feminist Movement is already immersed in this task. These exercises, feminist counter-representations, “have the ability to modify behaviours by proposing other meanings, from which to understand and position themselves in the face of sexual violence. The representations strengthen, show and

establish systems of behaviour. Thus, they are the best antidote against the victimising, blaming, aggressive and violent universe of a patriarchal rhetoric” [62]. From this position, the need to work for the construction of counter-representations that grant new schemas of meaning to sexual violence is defended, leaving behind the expressions “what a horror” or “poor girl”, so that women have more tools and a greater ability to react and overcome these experiences. That they also have the right not to be the perfect victim. For a representation to become dominant, all possible socialisation agents come into play, so that all, individuals, collectives, institutions and organisations, have the responsibility to break with the discourse that disables and infantilises women, without minimising the importance or respecting the recovery times of each victim.

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