

¡QUE NO TE EDUQUE LA ROSA DE GUADALUPE! A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF
GENDER AND STEREOTYPES IN MEXICAN TELENÓVELAS.

ANA C. GÓMEZ PARGA

Department of Communication

APPROVED:

Roberto Avant-Mier, Ph.D., Chair

Richard Pineda, Ph.D.

DeAnna Varela, M.A.

Charles H. Ambler, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

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By

Ana C. Gómez Parga

DEDICATION

Dedicado a las mujeres de mi vida:

A las de mi familia, porque de haberla elegido yo, no hubiese tenido una tan perfecta:

Alicia Reynoso de Parga (Aya): Porque tu vida es un ejemplo de lucha, de sacrificio, de sufrimiento y de determinación. Porque tu historia no se repita, y porque a tus casi 90 años sigues siendo un ejemplo de valentía.

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PREVIEW

ABSTRACT

Gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence prevail in cultures where sexism and violence are usual. According to feminist organizations our best solution is education from an early age. However, in places where means of formal education are scarce, we may turn to alternative solutions such as television. Television has been examined in multiple studies for its role in the formation of gender, and other type of stereotypes. But also it has been considered a useful tool in challenging traditional notions about gender and in helping to promote social change. For this reason, a textual analysis was conducted on *La Rosa de Guadalupe*, a telenovela that claims to be educational, in order to analyze gender-role representations in Mexican media and evaluate if they either challenged or reinforced traditional notions about gender, which have proven to be detrimental in the advancement and empowerment of women in Mexican society.

Key words: women, telenovelas, education, culture.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“The media we use and the stories they tell help us to make us who we are.”¹ Maria Mastronardi

1.1 The Situation of Women in México: From Gender Discrimination to Femicides

Analyzing the role of women in México is important for one particular reason: México has a history of violence towards women. Although certain groups within Mexican society believe that México is no longer a country that suffers from sexism, and federal governments have created institutions which focus entirely on women’s problems, inequality and discrimination are still prevalent in this country, and violent forms sexism still manifest themselves in many places in México. The feminist culture does not exist in México, according to Rosario Castellanos, and even though there are laws to prevent gender-based violence or discrimination, the reality and the law are not equal (Castellanos, 2012). But this equality fails to exist not because Mexican men are culturally sexist, but because Mexican women are mostly ignorant about and uninterested in participating in the intellectual arena or in the political debate (Castellanos, 2012). Machismo is not just about men, almost every machista man has a machista mother.

I will begin this study by providing some background statistics about Mexican reality. In contemporary society a substantial number of women in México often fail to attend school, finish school, or have access to formal jobs (INEGI, 2014). In 2013, out of the total number of

¹ Mastronardi in Julia T. Wood, *Gendered Lives* (p. 260, 2012)

population employed in the formal sector in México, 60.1% were males and 39.9% were females, in a country in which the sex ratio is 95 males to 100 females (INEGI, 2014). When it comes to higher education, 23.7% of men have a bachelor's degree, compared to 20.3% of women (Alvarez de Vicencio, 2002). What these numbers reflect is that women still struggle to find equal opportunities in México. Whether it is for education or job opportunities, it is still the men who have easier access to most of them.

When discussing education, research suggests that gender constructions in México may be the cause for this inequality (SEP, 2009). For example, Mexican families place more interest on the fact that men should get an education; women are instead often required to help with the housework. In addition, families who can't afford education for all of their children prefer to send their boys to school instead of the girls, mainly because they feel that the girls will eventually marry someone who supports them and therefore they will be protected. Furthermore, when girls do have access to education in México, they oftentimes deal with high levels of discrimination from peers, teachers, and other authority figures (SEP, 2009), resulting in an unfriendly environment that obstructs their academic development and also, an environment that shapes their understanding of gender. From a very young age, Mexican girls learn that discrimination and abuse is normal and accepted as part of the definition of womanhood.

When it comes to access to jobs and gender constructions in Mexican society, it is interesting to note that women who have access to formal jobs in México often come from specific civil status. When analyzing women's participation in the formal job market in México, 74% of them are divorced, 63.6% are separated from their partners, and 40% of them are single (Alvarez de Vicencio, 2002). Married women are not desired by Mexican employers, and experts suggest this is because of the possibility of pregnancies and because employers feel that their

primarily commitment will be towards their families instead of their jobs. On the contrary, married men are desirable for employers because, according to Mexican society, a man who already has a family is perceived as a man who is already mature and responsible.

Another good example of gender inequality in México is in family responsibilities. According to Álvarez de Vicencio, in México child care responsibilities are female activities, whereas men's only expected responsibilities are to be providers even although they are considered the natural leaders of the families (Álvarez de Vicencio, 2002). Andres Oppenheimer, a Latin American journalist and advocate for a comprehensive immigration reform, discusses parental roles in Latin American societies by examining the effects of so many years of male immigration from Latin American countries into the United States, which has resulted in many children growing up without a father. In his opinion, the absence of a father figure in so many families and the overwhelming responsibility placed only on women, may be related to the increasing number of teenagers involved in delinquency in these places (Oppenheimer, 2009). He says that the definition of *fatherhood* should mean something more than “sending money and buying sneakers” (p. 49). In other words, in Latin American cultures most fathers believe that their only job is to provide material goods for their families, and we must challenge this notion by analyzing the possible consequences of placing all the educational and child-raising responsibilities on only one parent, particularly the mother.

According to Marina Castañeda, there is another concept that we must consider when analyzing gender discrimination in México: “the invisible male chauvinism” [el machismo invisible] (Castañeda, 2007, p. 13). She defines *male chauvinism* or *machismo* as a group of attitudes and behaviors that operate under two basic assumptions: 1) the exaggerated contrast between what is considered to be feminine and what is considered masculine, and 2) the

overwhelming cult to masculinity, and the idea that masculine qualities are better than feminine ones (p. 26). Invisible chauvinism, according to her, regulates the norms and codes in Mexican every-day-life, social communication, public discourse, health discourse, and sexuality (p. 29). She argues that every woman in México knows that the way to communicate is through a language full of sexism in which it is understood that women will communicate better with men if they decide not to contradict them. In that same way, Mexican women understand that the way to be accepted in society is by approving or disapproving certain attitudes in other women. In short, invisible chauvinism hides behind conventional conversations and subtle attitudes, which guide relationships and mark a difference between men and women (p. 29).

Moreover, Castañeda argues that Mexican chauvinism is a condition that marks a notorious difference not only in the division of housework and in the rules of social life, it also affects economics (p. 334). She argues that in contemporary society machismo has affected productivity, competitiveness, and economic rates in México. She discusses that if more than the half of a country's population is displaced to secondary positions in places like home, the workforce, and the decision making processes, then the whole population suffers the consequences. In México half of the population is neglected, which unnecessarily complicates the economic and social development of México as a country. Castañeda concludes that machismo in México, whether visible or invisible, is hurtful and it is not economically efficient (p. 334).

Although some forms of chauvinism, particularly the invisible ones, are not necessarily violent or at least not physically violent, México does have unfortunate problems related to violence towards women. In 1993 México, most specifically Ciudad Juárez, appeared in the international headlines due to a then unknown phenomenon called *femicides*. Femicides are

defined by Koutsoyannis as “the killings of women by men because they are women” (Koutsoyannis, 2011, p. 1). According to this scholar, femicides are considered to be “the most extreme form of misogynistic violence” (p. 1), victims of femicides are usually mutilated, raped, or tortured before they are murdered, and the killings are most likely to occur in environments where violence has become normal. Normalization of violence, along with a culture of sexism and crime impunity, results in government’s insufficient efforts in dealing with the problem due to the lack of social pressure in the demand for justice. In the year 2012, almost 20 years after the first documented femicide, México still appeared in the rankings of incidences of femicides in the world, appearing in 16th place according to the organizations Catholics for Choice [Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir] and the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights [Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos], (CDD and CMDPDH, 2012). Thus, in México, being a woman does not only represent a disadvantage, it also represents a danger.

In addition to the historical problem of femicides and violence towards women, the recent struggle with the drug war has provided new complications for Mexican women. Research indicates that drug gangs have always been a considerable threat to women in many places in Latin America (Koutsoyannis, 2011). Lydia Cacho, a Mexican acclaimed journalist, makes three statements about the relation between drug cartels and crimes against women: 1) that in any patriarchal society, being a woman is always dangerous because women are not only likely to be abused, but also society and family may not prevent or challenge such violence by considering it normal; 2) that there are no stories of mafia without sex, which means that in the history of mafia, prostitution and women trafficking have always been present; and 3) that based on her investigations, men who control the industry of women trafficking prefer to work in societies in

which women are culturally “loving and submissive” (Cacho, 2010, p. 265), and this is because women who are taught to please men and think of men as superior, are easier to be deceived and abused by them.

All of these types of discrimination, violence, and inequalities that women suffer in México have been linked to the constructions of gender in Mexican culture, and researchers agree that this culture is possible largely due to the complicity of an entire society. Washington argues that the only possible explanation for the lack of interest from the local authorities to solve the killings and disappearances of hundreds of women from the state of Chihuahua, is the indifference and silence from the local people (Washington, 2005). About this, Tabuenca Córdova criticizes the indifference from middle and upper classes because the victims of these murderers came mostly from lower and working classes. In her words, it was until the elites were disrupted by the extreme violence towards women, that later spread to the whole state and began to affect the middle classes as well, that they became aware of a problem that had been occurring for over 15 years, and then began to clamor for justice and peace (Tabuenca Córdova, 2013).

The involvement of the middle and upper classes, men and privileged women, whose role in Mexican society will be explained throughout this analysis, is crucial if we seek to challenge these notions of gender, and to prevent this type of discrimination and violence. In this regard, Castañeda states that machismo exists because the whole society participates in it, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, and uses it as a language to communicate. In her experience, educated men and women are sometimes blind to the types of attitudes that make them sexist, and she believes that by helping them to identify these attitudes and become aware of the hidden norms that prevent them from understanding and valuing each other, change is possible (Castañeda, 2007). She explains that in order to create a new way of communication

different from machismo, we all must identify the sources for this type of education, and take a stand in the process of change (Castañeda, 2007). In short, gender construction involves society in general, which means that just as an entire culture is an accomplice for gender-based violence, it is also the one with the power to change it.

In summary, whatever problem in México one desires to analyze, the most vulnerable parts of Mexican society are always the people who live under circumstances of extreme poverty such as the children, but most importantly, women in general. If you want to discuss poverty, poor women are always at the bottom. If you want to discuss education, women are the first ones who drop out of school. If you want to discuss violence, women are assaulted and murdered in some places in México, just for being women. And if you want to discuss the recent struggle with the drug war, women are now the merchandise that is being trafficked. However, if we seek to find new ways to produce changes in gender construction in Mexican culture, we must first consider three major conditions: 1) the historical situation of women in México; 2) the importance of education as a tool for a change within cultures; and 3) the importance of the participation of society in general.

For this investigation I turned to the media because I consider it offers the possibility to cover the three elements described above. Television in México, as it will be explained later on, is a very important source for gender construction within Mexican culture. In this work I will analyze one particular television show called “La Rosa de Guadalupe” (2008), whose elements offer a chance to examine the Mexican culture by reflecting the cultural understandings of gender. What I seek to analyze are the potential dangers in the current representations of gender in Mexican television, along with the opportunities for change that, based on literature, are viable through the combination of entertainment content that is produced with social responsibility. All

of these are in an attempt to analyze some of the elements involved in the normalization of violence and discrimination towards women, but at the same time in an effort to create awareness which will lead us to demand television content that challenge harmful representations of women and men, and to praise the ones that are helpful in this urgent process of change.

1.2 Discrimination and violence begin with (or end with) Education.

One of the best ways to challenge gender discrimination is through education, especially education from a young age. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, puts special interest on the importance of education from an early age because they consider that “working with youth is our best bet for faster, sustained progress on preventing and eradicating gender-based violence” (Focusing on prevention..., 2014). “Education for Prevention” is a campaign whose efforts are targeted at the education of younger audiences, usually from 5 to 25 years old, with the goal to eliminate violence by helping young men and women to communicate, coexist, and value each other (UN Women, 2014). However, among the various solutions proposed by the UN Women, they also believe that it is important to include campaigns that create awareness in the general population, not only the youth and children. In this regard, the efforts are centered in collecting and publishing evidence, research studies, and statistical analyses, which help in the understanding of the situation of women in different parts of the world in order to create specific campaigns depending on each situation (UN Women, 2014).

In the particular case of México, the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) created a report in 2000 dividing the Mexican population by level of education, and the results described that most of the population was located under the classification of incomplete basic education. Basic education in Mexico includes elementary and

middle school, which means that most adult Mexicans did not finish either of them (INEGI, 2005).

In the year 2009, the Mexican Federal Department of Education [Secretaría de Educación Pública] (SEP) published a whole book about an extensive study conducted in public schools around the country. In it, researchers describe the challenges faced by young and teenage girls whose educational life is hindered by various forms of discrimination and violence. In this report the findings were divided in three categories: 1) the persistent culture of sexism in México, which focuses on the ideas of gender that children learn at home which clearly mark a difference between men and women; 2) the challenges that arise when girls and boys coexist within a physical environment, when discrimination, intimidation, violence, and abuse become part of the lives of Mexican children; and 3) the notions of gender that teachers, principals, and other authority figures have, which prove that they are not properly qualified to deal, solve, or change gender-based discrimination nor violence (SEP, 2009). All of the findings reflect that the current notions of gender within the Mexican culture obstruct the education of boys and girls and end up being harmful for the advancement of Mexican society, and at the same time, they exhibit an urgent necessity for providing better training for education authorities.

The first argument described in the book describes the notions that children learn at home about gender. The first finding describes how 50% of the children in sixth grade believe that women should not be sexually active until marriage, and that pregnancies are a female responsibility. At the same time, Mexican children seem to have different expectations about their future based on their ideas of gender. On the one hand, girls are expected to be less professionally ambitious, and if they do become professionals, they are expected to go for caregiving professions such as teaching or working in health care. On the other hand, Mexican