

Influence of Romantic Love and Sworn Pacts of Masculinity in Gender Violence Experiences in Nurse Students

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Abstract

Gender violence as cultivated by manners and customs is a teaching transmitted from parents to children, learned and replicated at home, in school, at work place, and in society in general; then the objective of this research was to describe the influence of the romantic love and pacts sworn on masculinity in gender violence experiences in nurse students. The methodology focus was qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive; there were 19 informers, nurse students from first semester, attending the course Gender Equality. Information collecting instruments were focal group, narrative, and testimonies; among the results, five categories emerged with sub-categories, which highlighted the teachings from home modeled and experienced by the family, in couple relationships, and their relationships with peers, as well as the observed in the media and social networks, and the normalization of gender violence in society. It is necessary to institutionalize education towards a peace culture and gender equity in all social spheres.

Keywords

Romantic Love, Masculinity Pacts, Gender Violence, Nurse Students

1. Introduction

Introducing ourselves to gender violence involves several concepts as starting point, among them is gender “gender is a category of analysis that help us to understand how the relationships men-women had been built, and the meaning of male and female in different societies along time”. The next concept is violence “a

deliberate act directed towards domination, controlling, or injuring exerted by persons of higher hierarchy or in a power relationship”, which highlights that for to experience violence a power imbalance between those involved is needed; it is very common among lovely relationships, based in learned schemes and phrases said to children along their growth, in their social life and in the interpersonal relationships, in human resources training, in clinical practices were many female students are enrolled, leading to gender violence in the physical, psychological, sexual, economic, assets, and digital scenarios, which have been boosted due to social networks use by the current digital generations, that incremented stress and anxiety in students (Poggi, 2019; Viorato-Romero et al., 2023).

Another relevant concept is the power to “impose the willpower of one of those involved on the action, the thought or the will of the other”, it is done through individuals’ relationships where responsibilities are at play, as well as abilities to act, and interest conflicts; along the person’s life a great diversity of power relationships, where gender violence occupies a relevant place, since it is part of the social construction and control of gender, leaving in disadvantage to one of the involved persons. This is constructed and functions from power, multitude of political, economic, social, and cultural issues, and from power effects on human beings; it is created from objective realities, i.e., institutionalized (Gutiérrez & Navarrete, 2023).

There are familiarization spheres that lead to experience complex aspects, among them is maternity, romantic love, hysterization of women’s body, and the sworn pacts of masculinity. Maternity refers to the experience of being mother, and how women, since childhood, are modeled by social and cultural expectations. It can be seen as a source of personal fulfillment; however, historically society has reduced the female identity to be a mother, giving great significance to their reproductive capacity in lovely relationships, which can be seen as “social control”. In current generations having children is not a priority, which does not hinder their value nor are they unsuitable to form a family. During motherhood it is expected a familiar conciliation, social protection policies that favor organization in their labor life, as well as their home life, without one cancelling the other (Flores, 2019). Romantic love relates to the constructed ideas or beliefs as to how we should behave in a couple relationship, it is a concept transmitted and reinforced through literatura, cinema, music, and other media affecting the manners of lovely relationships. It is important to recognize that romantic love ideas lead to unequal relationships, including gender violence; then, each relationship is unique and it can be constructed via communication, according for the welfare of both with respect, confidence, and responsibility (Tapia et al., 2025a).

Hysterization of women’s body is a concept that relates to how women’s body has been medicalized and controlled throughout history. The concept was developed by Michel Foucault leading to qualification or disqualification the women’s body; this was seen as excessively sexual, and it was identified and associated with diseases or disorders, such as hysteria, and constrained them to their biology, their body, and their decisions were determined by it, leaving them in disadvantage (Robles, 2021).

The sworn pacts of masculinity start from childhood, where boys learn to live with “male pacts”, implicit agreements or beliefs that reinforce the meaning of being “a true man”. This process begins in the family, and continues in school, among friends, the media and other organizations.

It is necessary to educate towards a positive masculinity, which consists of co-responsibility for actions and equal opportunities, with new paternal and partner roles, without sexist or homophobic actions.

Then, the aim of the current research is to identify gender violence experiences in couple relationships, based in the beliefs of romantic love and sworn pacts of masculinity in nurse students.

2. Method

Qualitative research with phenomenological, descriptive, and exploratory method.

2.1. Informers

Participated 19 students, female and male from the first and third semesters of nurse career, enrolled in the topic Gender Equity, being of 18 - 20 years of age, from a public university of the State of Mexico; they were selected through intentional sampling up to reach the theoretical saturation. The selected students were enrolled in and taking the Gender Equity course in the Nursing program. The students most participative in the dynamics and brainstorming sessions were considered for forming the focus groups to ensure the focus group flowed smoothly. Data saturation occurred when no new information was obtained and the information already mentioned in previous sessions was repeated.

2.2. Inclusion Criteria

Students fulfilled the following inclusion criteria:

- Being enrolled in the nurse career;
- Attending the topic Gender Equity;
- Being residents of the metropolitan area of Mexico City;
- 18 years of age or older;
- Being interested to participate in the study;
- They read and signed the informed consent.

2.3. Data Collection

Data collection was through 5 focal groups with 3 - 4 members and with verbal and written testimonies. A guide of oriented questions list validated by expert judges was used. The questions guide were: Which are your most significant experiences in your lovely relationships? How do you experience your couple relationship? How are your interpersonal relationships with your partner, your peers, and your friends? Which emotions and thoughts you identify from these experiences? Eight sessions of two hours each were conducted in the university classroom, during August through October 2025. Sessions were recorded in audio, and

it was complemented with the participant observation, and field notes. Participants' confidentiality was kept by using pseudonyms, and it was accepted via the informed consent to be part of this research.

2.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis followed the Souza Minayo's model, which contemplates three stages: information acquisition, data transcription, and encoding. Obtained information was transcribed and tagged to keep anonymity of those interviewed. Qualitative data analysis allowed to question about their vivid experiences and expectancies (Souza Minayo et al., 2023).

Ethical aspects

The study was conducted after the Ethics Committee from the university approved the protocol (CE/FESI/092023/1658). Participant students were oriented on the goal and the importance of the research, they signed an informed consent, and they authorized the audio recordings while their names were kept anonymous; at all times respect and human rights protection were observed, to maintain individuality.

Several ethical aspects were considered for this research, such that the validity of the work was supported, using diverse sources: Ethical principles of the Helsinki statement, point 6 "Rights of persons must be respected to maintain their integrity all the time". All needed precautions must be observed to respect intimacy and to minimize the research's impact on their physical, psychological, and personality aspects. To reach the objective of confidentiality, the intimacy information should not be revealed, and the recordings must be used for this research only, but giving them total freedom to leave the study (World Medical Association, 2023).

In the Belmont inform, part B, essential ethical principles, considers the respect to persons, the benefit, and the justice; as well as part C, writing of the informed consent as a document including information, comprehension, and will. It also evaluates the risks and benefits, and explains that there is no risk for this research (The Belmont Report, 1979).

3. Results

63% of participants were female and 37% were male, to maintain anonymity, they used a voluntarily selected pseudonym, related to their dominant emotion in the romantic relationship (Table 1).

Table 1. Informants' characteristics.

Studen	Age (years)	Gender
Dread	18	Female
Rage	18	Female
Sadness	18	Female
Displeasure	18	Female

Continued

Surprise	18	Female
Happiness	18	Female
Disdain	18	Female
Shame	19	Female
Anguish	19	Female
Guilt	19	Male
Fear	19	Female
Worry	19	Male
Vulnerability	19	Male
Ridicule	20	Male
Annoyed	20	Male
Corralled	20	Female
Hurt	20	Male
Impatient	20	Female
Exasperated	20	Male
Total	19	

Source: 19 students of Nursing, Mexico, 2025.

After the qualitative data analysis the following categories emerged (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Emerging categories.

Category	Sub-category
Category 1 Asymmetric relationships	1.1 Dominant
	1.2 Dominated
Category 2 Power legitimization	2.1 Uses and costumes
	2.2 Regulations
	2.3 Revictimization
Category 3 Romantic love in couple relationships	3.1 He loves me that is why he is jealous
	3.2 With my love he will change step by step
	3.3 I love him and then I forgive him
	3.4 He is my partner and I must please him
Category 4 Sworn pacts of masculinity	4.1 As a man I command
	4.2 Men do not complain
	4.3 We men do not show emotions
	4.4 As a man I have to pay
	4.5 I should choose the woman

Continued

	5.1 I am ashamed to say he mistreats me
	5.2 I must have sex when he wants
Category 5 Gender violence	5.3 He yells and pinch at me when upset
	5.4 He makes me feel insufficient
	5.5 He says to whom I could speak

4. Discussion

To construct identity is an essential task in the subjective formation of persons. It results from an internal and personal process considering the individual characteristics, but at the same time it also externally reflects through practices, speeches, modelling, and behaviors that develop in the interpersonal relationships according the context of living coexistence (Torres et al., 2022; Robles, 2021).

The gender mandates, as socializing processes, constitute the persons from their thoughts, feelings, and actions through the existing dominating sociocultural systems. Violence, as the manifestation of intentional damage from one to another, is learned from these mandates reproducing behavior patterns (Tapia, Juárez & Camacho, 2025b), as exemplified in **Category 1** Asymmetric relationships, and sub-categories Dominant and Dominated:

[] In our relationship he guides what to do and with whom we will share, usually we share with his friends or his family, which has been along the 3 years we have been together. **Displeasure**

[] During our courtship we met Thursdays and Sundays, since the beginning he established those days because he is busy the other days, like be with his friends or his mom; if something occurs those days, we met the following week. **Sadness**

The hegemonic or traditional masculinity involves androcentrism and gender stereotypes rigid and exclusive standards. Hegemony of masculinity dictum a social organization system, where the positions of political authority, economic, social, religious and others, are occupied and executed by men only (Madolell, Gallardo, & Alemany, 2020), which is coincident with **Category 2** Power legitimization and sub-categories Uses and costumes, Regulations, and Revictimization, as observed:

[] I was sexually abused in a party, I was drinking with my friends and then I had a blackout, I awoke hurt, bitten and did not what to do; my companions helped me to get clean and alleviated. I did not denounce because the Prosecutors' office is mostly atended by men, and I was afraid they could say me since you were drinking, it is your fault. **Shame**

Romantic love as seen in movies, series, novels, and stories lead to a false idea in women that by loving everithing is possible, and it is worth even giving life, opening the opportunity for abuse that reproduce gender violence with a disguised touch of love. It is important to recognize that the romantic love ideas lead

to unequal relationships, including gender violence; each relationship is unique and can be constructed through communication, in accord to welfare of both with respect, trust, and responsibility (Tapia, Juárez & Camacho, 2025b).

Masculinity, recognizing the sociocultural context and the sex-gender system, has effects in the relations: personal, familiar, scholar, labour, and even in the society in general, becomes reproducing from generation to generation, and its setting is the family and the society (Madolell, Gallardo, & Alemany, 2020). As shown in **Category 3** Romantic love in couple relationships, with sub-categories He loves me that is why he is jealous, With my love he will change step by step, I love him and then I forgive him, He is my partner and I must please him.

[] My boyfriend has a tough personality, but he loves me, he gets upset if I am chatting with my peers and he complains at me, we end fighting. He says that as my couple y have to respect him, I should dress as he likes and avoid what he does not like, later on when calmed we chat. I mention that I will be more aware to what he asks me, then it is ok and we continue as if nothing happened. **Corralled**

[] In my relationship there has been abuse, shoutings, and even beats on me, but we had talk about and he asks me for forgiveness; I know that he puts everything of his side, I love him but sometimes he is under pressure for school issues, and his family problems. **Afraid**

The premises of the masculinity hegemonic model validate its dominant practices, which could lead to exert psychological, physical, and even sexual violence against women by men in a normalizaed manner (Tapia-Pancardo et al., 2025).

If whitin this environment normalized violent practices and speeches occur, it is probable that the person thinks abstractly about and then are part of its identity, such that the same violent pattern is reproduced, being transformed in a symbolic form of violence, almost imperceptible due to its normalization (Tapia et al., 2025a), as shown in **Category 4** Sworn pacts of masculinity and its sub-categories As a man I command, Men do not complain, we men do not show emotions, as a man I have to pay, I should choose the woman, with the following speeches:

[] When I go out with my girlfriend, I have to save some money to be able to pay what we will spend, and according with my savings I decide where to go, some times she wants to pay but I feel uncomfortable; I did not learn that, and she gets upset with me because I do not allow her to pay, or she does not enjoy the play or movie I chose. **Exasperated**

[] My girlfriend and I have tough discussions, some times she says to me things that hurt, but I do not let her know about and better I get upset at her; we fight and I shout at her, then I do not talk to her for some time, until I get calm or she shearchs for me, that is the way we do. **Hurt**

The dynamics of these type of relationships is known as *Love bombing*, meaning breaking the couple relationship without consent, intending to come back then leave again, i.e., coming and leaving of a relationship in a continuos manner.

The hysterization of the female body refers to how women's bodies have been

controlled throughout history. Developed by Michel Foucault, this concept led to the categorization and devaluation of women's bodies. They were viewed as excessively sexual, or through the lens of motherhood, the experience of being a mother, and how women are shaped from childhood by social and cultural expectations. This reduces women to their biology, their bodies, and the idea that their decisions are determined by them, thus placing women at a disadvantage (Robles, 2021; Flores, 2019).

[] My relationship with my girlfriend is wild; we have a great time, we do everything, but she's not the woman I would choose to be my wife and the mother of my children. That woman should have other characteristics, like being more serious and not thinking about working. I like the idea of her taking care of me and my children. **Irritated**

Inside gender violence *Gaslighting* does exist, which is a pattern of emotional abuse such that the person doubts of its own perception, judgement or memory, normalizing the facts; also the *Victim blaming* where the victim of the offense is partial or totally responsible of it, due to its gender (Torres et al., 2022), as observed in **Category 5** Gender violence, and its sub-categories: I am ashamed to say he mistreats me, I must have sex when he wants, He yells and pinch at me when upset, He makes me feel insufficient, He says to whom I could speak, with the following speeches:

[] My boyfriend and I have sexual relations since a year ago, and when he wants sex but I feel not ok, he gets upset and he forces me to have it; even sometimes he hurts me by being so rude at the momento, and says that I do not get upset if he is disloyal since I do not serve as his girlfriend. **Anguish**

[] When my boyfriend and I fight, and he or I shout at each other he pushes me and even he pinches me, he says that I make him to show his worst part due to my way of being, and now I have to deal with the consequences; I know he loves me but without been aware, I make him upset. It is not intent to bother him when I salute my Friends, women or men, with a Kiss because we always do. **Guilt**

Lovely relationships are marked, in a high percentage, of micro-macho behaviors understood as daily macho actions, used discretely and not noticeable, up to being normalized (Rubio & Sanz-Díez, 2018).

It is necessary to reasonably identify social patterns of masculinities, and their influence in gender violence expressions, in all settings, in couple relationships to prevent being reproduced and to promote gender equity through education of positive masculinity in all situations.

5. Conclusion

It is important to identify that ideas for romantic love generate unequal relationships and even gender violence, it is a priority to promote the positive masculinity, understanding that such masculinity gives sense and existence to his life, through corresponsibility of actions and equal opportunities, with new parental roles as

well as in the couple, without homophobic nor sexist actions. Each relationship is unique and it can be constructed through communication agreements, for the wellbeing of both with respect, trust and responsibility. In addition, it is necessary to educate men and women about gender equity, and its replication in all settings.

The implementation of the Gender Equity course in the degree programs of the National Autonomous University of Mexico is a timely intervention measure; this research provides elements that support the need to institutionalize gender equity in all university areas.

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Authors' Contributions

DCT-P designed the research protocol, DCT-P, JEC-G, JDR-R and JLC-A implemented training sessions, collected information, and analyzed qualitative data, DCT-P wrote and revised, and all authors approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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