

Stereotypes of romantic love may perpetuate gender-based violence

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The media have become key agents of socialization in the construction of teenagers' and young people's identities. In particular, media representations of sexuality and love become informal educational agents of the first order on these issues.

A very good example of this was the series for Spanish teenagers *Física o Química* (2008-2011), produced by *Ida y Vuelta* and broadcast on Antena 3, of which some episodes reached more than three million viewers. The series focuses on the stories of a group of high school students and their teachers. The success of the series extended to other countries like France, Portugal, Italy, the United States and countries in Latin America, where it received acclaim and support from teenage audiences.

Física o Química also gave rise to social controversy, for and against, due to its the representation of sexuality, gender-based violence and teenage pregnancy, among others. "These polarized perspectives of *Física o Química* are

neither new nor unique to this series", states María José Masanet, a researcher with the Department of Communication at UPF and co-author of a paper that performs a qualitative analysis of the contents of the series. This research was published jointly with Frederik Dhaenens, a researcher at the University of Ghent (Belgium) on 22 January in *Journal of Youth Studies*.

Analysing how young people interpret the representation of gender-based violence

The main goal of this study was to analyse how young people interpret the representation of gender-based violence in the series *Física o Química*, focusing on how the audience discusses the representation of male aggression towards women represented through the teenage characters Ruth and Gorka. In addition, the authors analysed how audiences are reflected in gender stereotypes and romantic inequalities and/or teenage sexual relations. In this fictional television series, the characters Ruth and Gorka have a stormy romantic relationship characterized by [psychological abuse](#) by the boy towards the girl. Although they split up on several occasions, they always end up getting back together and the abuse intensifies throughout the series until serious health problems arise and the relationship breaks up definitively.

"Studying the discourse of the young people about gender-based violence in *Física o Química* has provided us with an insight into their way of thinking about this issue and about romantic myths, as well as the role that the series plays in shaping adolescents' outlook on violence," say the authors of the study.

The authors analysed the feedback in the fans' forum of the series *Física o Química* and, more specifically, the comments dealing with issues or scenes related to gender-based violence among the adolescent characters. The aim was to explore the meanings the audience gives to the violence

depicted in the series and how they reflect on gender stereotypes and romantic myths. For example, the work found that "participants in the forum did not identify Gorka's verbal and psychological abuse towards Ruth until the violence became unbearable."

These data concur with previous studies that have shown that Spanish young people and teenagers do not consider issues such as controlling time, money or friends, blackmail or threats and insults as being aggression. They perceive verbal abuse as just another aspect of the relationship and can go as far as justifying it "in the name of love". Abuse is mainly associated with physical aggression.

As a result of the analysis, this study reveals that teenagers have internalized a set of stereotypes and myths of romantic love that can be very dangerous because they justify male violence towards women. The value of this work is twofold. First, it provides us with information on how gender-based violence and romantic relationships among adolescents are perceived and discussed in Spain, since the research exposes how they understand gender-based violence and the motives or actions that lead to justifying it or criticizing it. Secondly, "our work also has an educational value. We demonstrate that a teen series has the potential to explore and work to prevent gender-based [violence](#) . The series provides material for a debate on controversial and provocative representations without trying to lecture its audience on morals and providing a discussion on its fans' forum," conclude Masanet and Dhaenens.

More information: Maria-Jose Masanet et al, Representing gender-based violence in teen series: young people's discourses on the Spanish series *Física o Química*, *Journal of Youth Studies* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2019.1570096](https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1570096)

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