The representation of sexual violence in fiction series: the case of *I May Destroy You* (HBO, 2020)

La representación de la violencia sexual en las series de ficción: el caso de I May Destroy You (HBO, 2020)

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Abstract:

This paper analyses the acts of sexual violence in the miniseries *I May Destroy You* (HBO, 2020), with the objective of finding out how they are treated in fiction and identifying the main defining features of their representation from three main perspectives: the individuals involved (aggressor and victim), the act of sexual violence committed and the consequences of said act for the victim. To do this, we will use a methodology focused on content analysis and, based on an analysis sheet, the data obtained from the 12 episodes analyzed are recorded and categorized for subsequent analysis and interpretation. The results show that the representation of sexual violence is carried out from a feminist perspective, far from stereotypes that contribute to perpetuating the male hegemonic perspective, and that said representation has an informative vision which aims to educate the viewer's gaze in terms of consent and sexual freedom.

Keywords:

Aggressor; fiction; series; victim; sexual violence.

Resumen:

En este trabajo se analizan los actos de violencia sexual de la miniserie I May Destroy You (HBO, 2020) para conocer qué tratamiento se hace en la ficción de ellos e identificar los principales rasgos definitorios de su representación desde tres grandes perspectivas: los personajes implicados (agresor y víctima), el acto de violencia sexual acometido y las consecuencias de dicho acto para la víctima. Para ello, se recurre a una metodología centrada en el análisis de contenido y, a partir de una ficha de análisis, se registran y se categorizan los datos obtenidos de los 12 episodios analizados para su posterior análisis e interpretación. Los resultados ponen de manifiesto que la representación de la violencia sexual se hace desde una perspectiva feminista, alejada de estereotipos que contribuyan a perpetuar la perspectiva hegemónica masculina y que cuenta con una visión divulgativa que pretende educar la mirada del espectador en materia de consentimiento y libertad sexual.

Palabras clave:

Agresor; ficción; series; víctima; violencia sexual.

1. Introduction

Sexual violence has become one of the most pressing problems in our society but it is still "one of the most silenced crimes and with the highest rate of impunity worldwide" (UN Women, 2021, p. 11). It is a complex reality that affects people of any gender, age, race, economic and sociocultural level, although women and girls are the most vulnerable groups to become victims of any act of sexual violence. Thus, this type of violence is framed within gender violence, since what its intention is to harm a person for reasons of gender, making use of social inequality and abuse of power. Thus, its consequences go further from the individual sphere. That is why victims of sexual violence are prone to developing a high degree of secondary victimization; this implies an increase in their suffering as a result of the damage caused by the institutions involved in the case, which have a distorted image both of this type of crime and of the victims themselves. This leads the victims to fear, for example, not being believed, being blamed or having to confront their aggressor, among other aspects (Córdoba, 2022).

The sexual violence suffered by women is understood as a global problem and as "a powerful mechanism of social control that prevents them from both appropriating the public space and making use of their autonomy and freedom" (Cobo, 2019, p. 138). Understanding sexual violence in a broad sense and not only as rape has allowed an evolution both from the educational, cultural and penal point of view in order to contribute to making the fight against this social scourge more and more effective. Despite this, it is still difficult to find a unitary definition of sexual violence, since it is a phenomenon with multiple edges which holds a very important cultural component that conditions its interpretation. Sexual violence refers to any instance in which an unwanted sexual act is consummated or attempted through threats, force, intimidation or coercion and which can cause serious damage to the physical and mental health of the victim. The World Health Organization defines sexual violence as:

> Any sexual act, attempt to perform a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or actions to market or otherwise use a person's sexuality under duress by another person, regardless of the person's relationship to the victim, in any setting, including the home and the workplace (WHO, 2013).

Regardless of the definition, sexual violence is synonymous with an attack on the sexual freedom of another individual, a violation of a right that, through imposition, can be exercised through bodily contact or without it, with physical violence or intimidation or without it. Therefore, consent is configured as the essential key which will determine whether an act is considered sexual violence or not; so much so that there are many aggressors who base their defense on the diffuse limits that exist on sexual consent (Cense, Bay-Cheng and Van Dijk, 2018). However, "consent cannot be inferred when there is force, threat, coercion or use. No action of the victim can be considered consent when she is unable to give it or when there is a relationship of power or influence (Vázquez and Vázquez, 2021, p. 9). The International Criminal Court and the Rules of Procedure and Evidence of the Rome Statute share this concept. The principles of proof regarding sexual consent in Rule 70 state that:

> a) Consent may not be inferred from any word or conduct of the victim when force, threat of force, coercion or taking advantage of a coercive environment have diminished her ability to give free and voluntary consent.
>
> b) Consent may not be inferred from any word or conduct of the victim when the latter is capable of giving free consent.
>
> c) Consent cannot be inferred from the victim's silence or lack of resistance to the alleged sexual violence.

d) The credibility, honor or sexual availability of the victim or a witness cannot be inferred from the sexual nature of the prior or subsequent behavior of the victim or a witness (UN Women, 2021, p. 43).

The verbal or non-verbal acceptance that an individual gives freely and with which they indicate their willingness to participate in a sexual act is what differentiates an imposition from a choice. And that means the absence of violence and of non-consensual sexual activity (Humphreys & Herold, 2007; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). Effective communication so that there are no misunderstandings or misinterpretations is what guarantees the free choice of an individual to have sexual relations, despite the fact that the word "yes" is not the only way to show that acceptance. As Hickman and Muelhlenhard (1999) point out, there are multiple behaviors with which consent is suggested: from direct to indirect verbal language and from direct and indirect non-verbal language to non-response. Be that as it may, the truth is that sexual consent has a strong cultural component in which gender inequality plays a very relevant role. Thus, consent is inserted in the sex/gender system and is sustained on unequal positions: "men play the active role of asking, insisting and convincing: harassing; women, the passive role, to be requested, to be the object of insistence and to consent: to resist" (Pérez, 2016, p. 758).

The invisibility of sexual violence, the reduction of this crime to isolated incidents carried out by men who have been tempted by women who are in public spaces to which they do not belong (Bernárdez-Rodal, López-Priego and Padilla-Castillo, 2021) or the conceptualization that it is something natural for the aggressors, usually men, to attack and something natural to accept by the victims, usually women, makes it impossible today to know the true magnitude of sexual violence in society. A difficulty to which we must add the current crisis occurring in modern patriarchies, which, instead of facilitating the disappearance of this type of crime, has led to "the development of more subtle and imperceptible discrimination strategies" (Baquerín, 2021, p. 9). Along these lines, we must also not forget the lack of complaints on the victims' side. The omission of the crime, ignorance, insecurity, the feeling of guilt or the lack of protection for the victims contribute to making it very complex to prevent, act and prosecute acts of these characteristics, even more so in cultures where patriarchy is strongly established.

This work is framed in this context of sexual violence, consent, aggressors and victims, which analyzes the fictional miniseries *I May Destroy You* (HBO, 2020) in order to answer the following research questions: How is sexual violence represented in this miniseries? From what perspective is it staged? Does it show a stereotyped vision of sexual violence or is it trying to break with it?

Based on these questions, the main objective of this work is the following: to analyze the representation of sexual violence suffered by the characters of *I May Destroy You* in its twelve episodes, an objective that is complemented by two secondary objectives (SO):

– SO1: To know the different manifestations and types of sexual violence.

– OS2: To identify its main defining features, emphasizing the figure of the victim.

To achieve these objectives, a methodology focused on the analysis of mixed content is used, in which, based on an ad hoc analysis file, the data is categorized into three large blocks: Characters, Acts of sexual violence and Consequences of sexual violence. This is a useful and innovative methodology, not only for this work but also for the entire scientific community, since it contributes to understanding the treatment and the perspective from which the acts of sexual violence that take place in this fictional miniseries are represented.

1.1. Sexual violence in fiction

Fiction series are configured as cultural products in which, through their discourses, they are capable of creating awareness and generating knowledge that is inserted and interacts in society. Audiovisual language contributes to the constitution of viewers as people (Fernández-Castrillo and Lara, 2022), so much so that, from it, social imaginaries are formed and disseminated and, in them, violence is configured as one of the narrative elements that have the most presence. That is so because violence in fiction has the ability to arouse multiple emotions in the viewer, from fear, anguish, surprise or fascination. Its intrinsic characteristics make it easy to resort to it as part of audiovisual entertainment, since it is a phenomenon that, despite not being natural, has a universal scope and is rooted in all those communities in which there are social interactions between two or more individuals (Saavedra, 2022).

The representation of violence in fictional content has been characterized by the stereotyping with which it is staged on the screen. So much so that when women transgress their gender role, they usually appear distorted in order to damage their feminine identity:

> Incapable of subverting the relationship of domination, they have the effect, at least, of confirming the dominant image of women as evil beings, whose completely negative identity is essentially made up of prohibitions [...], from magic, cunning, lies or passivity (in the sexual act above all), even the possessive love of the possessed, that of the Mediterranean mother or the maternal wife, who victimizes and blames herself by victimizing herself and offering her unlimited surrender and suffering in silence as a gift with no possible return or as an unpayable debt (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 26-27).

However, despite the fact that the studies carried out to date on gender stereotypes in fictional content indicate their evolution (Tous-Rovirosa, Meso and Simelio, 2013), they continue to be perpetuated; on the one hand, in those that show a biased vision of a woman who has great obstacles to "appropriate the construction of her identity" (Díaz, 2022, p. 3) and, on the other, in those in which the use of violence is associated with masculinity. The social superiority of man is revealed by making use of violence and aggressiveness as an exercise of power, strength and virility and, therefore, within the framework of a patriarchal culture "violent men are easily excused because they present their violence as something normal and natural" (Fisas, 1998, p. 15).

If this violence associated with masculinity gains strength in any area, it is in that of sexual violence. Rape or any other form of sexual violence has a clear instrumental purpose, something that is manifested through control not only of the woman's body, but also of her freedom and sexual autonomy (Tardón, 2022). Thus, there are many plots in which sexual assault or abuse is used to develop the most dramatic aspect of the characters: generally, the heroic, vengeful and powerful from the male point of view (aggressor) and the compassionate, traumatic and fragile from the feminine point of view (victim). Regardless of this, the common element that prevails in the victim's profile is that they are sexually objectified to "legitimize the violence against her by stripping her of her individuality and turning her into a product" (Criado, 2022, p. 62).

The exploitation of sexual violence as a narrative resource has not received adequate treatment on many occasions, because consent is presented as an ambiguous concept, sexual violence is justified and thus creates problematic symbologies and imaginaries (Byrne and Taddeo, 2019). The media's (and, more specifically, television's) ability to shape and influence the perception schemes of viewers means that the approach on how to treat or address sexual violence in fictional content is always the focus of attention, precisely because of the fear that they contribute to the normalization of this type of act or to the

dissemination of an idealized or stereotyped image of both the aggressors and the victims; this favors sexual assaults against women being seen as normal and acceptable (Aghtaie et al. 2018) and, therefore, society can internalize this ideology and this can have an impact on their way of dealing with these situations, on their expectations and on their level of acceptance of said sexual violence (Lundgren et al. 2001; Pornari, Dixon & Humphreys, 2013).

The stereotyping of the protagonists of sexual violence leads to the formation of myths around them and, therefore, women (victims) are represented as people who want and deserve to be raped because of their attitude and provocative behavior; they are shown as women who lie about their rape and who victimize themselves, while men (aggressors) are portrayed as not being responsible for the rape and their sexual violence not being actually harmful (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011). All this contributes to a staging of sexuality from a masculine prism, focused on "the interest and satisfaction of the desire of men" (Herce, 2015, p. 136) and where the perspective of the woman either remains in the background, or appears hypersexualized by representing a passive and submissive role that is combined with the need to "show oneself desirable, but at the same time cautious when participating in a sexual relationship" (Herce, 2015, p. 138).

With all this, and despite the fact that, hegemonically, sexual violence has had men as aggressors and, as such, it has been represented in fiction this way, it does not mean that violence is an exclusive phenomenon of the male gender. Its staging in the media corresponds to the mirror function that they develop by transferring what happens in society or, failing that, by reducing reality in reductionist constructs to simplify it. Thus, being violent is a quality that is associated with men as proof of a masculinity in which strength, aggressiveness and superiority take on special prominence, since from childhood they have been raised under certain patterns and ideas that they must follow in order not to deviate from what is socially stipulated (González y Fernández, 2009).

In this line, although the series represents, mainly, the man as a sexual aggressor, in some exceptional cases it can also represent man as a victim. A man who suffers an act of sexual violence moves away from what is stipulated in the masculine stereotype, since it means accepting that he is vulnerable, fragile and lacks the strength and virility to defend himself against such an offense. Thus, the scant representation in fiction of men as victims of sexual assault or abuse, as well as the social inability to conceive that a man can be raped in a daily context, corresponds to the silence of victims in real life (Kaufman, 1993). The stigmatization of male victims of sexual violence is such in real life that it causes silence and invisibility in fictional content, hence it becomes strange for a victim of rape, harassment, abuse, etc., to not be represented as a woman.

3. Design and methodology

3.1. Sample selection

The sample that makes up this work focuses on the television miniseries *I May Destroy You*, broadcast on HBO in June 2020. The fiction was created, co-directed and starred by Michaela Coel and has received numerous nominations and awards, among which five Bafta Awards (2021) and an Emmy Award (2021) stand out. In it, the author recounts the autobiographical experience of Arabella, a young British writer who suffers a sexual assault facilitated by drugs. This event marks the plot of the miniseries, since throughout the episodes the consequences of this aggression for the protagonist are addressed, but the

different aspects of sexual violence are also represented and experienced by both Arabella and her own friends. The miniseries has a season of 12 episodes, which make a total of 5 hours, 23 minutes and 42 seconds of viewing, as can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Episode list of *I May Destroy You (HBO, 2020)*

Episode	Title	Duration
1x1	Eyes, eyes, eyes, eyes	00: 28:19
1x2	Someone is lying	00:28:37
1x3	Don't forget the sea	00:28:29
1x4	That was fun	00:29:35
1x5	It just came up	00:28:46
1x6	The Alliance	00:28:46
1x7	Happy animals	00:28:50
1x8	Line spectrum border	00:29:41
1x9	Social Media is a grear way to connect	00:28:58
1x10	The cause the cure	00:29:11
1x11	Would you like to know the sex?	00:29:31
1x12	Ego death	00:34:47

Source: prepared by the author

Of the total sample selected, only those acts of sexual violence that take place in the development of the plot will be studied. That is why any other type of violence that is represented explicitly or implicitly in fiction is excluded from the analysis. Below are the acts of sexual violence on which the bulk of the analysis in this work is based and in which Arabella (the protagonist of the miniseries), Kwame and Terry (friends of the protagonist and secondary characters of the miniseries) are involved:

a) Sexual assault (Episode 1 and 2):

Arabella is the victim of a drug-facilitated sexual assault. One night she goes out for drinks with a friend, Simon, and his coworkers, unknown to her. She takes a shot, dances with the group and begins to feel bad; she can't stand up, falls to the ground and tries to leave the venue on her knees, almost unable to walk. The next day she shows up at her workspace, where she writes a draft of her novel. She goes outside and feels a little dazed and disoriented. It's hard to get home. When she succeeds and enters her room, images come to mind in which she can only see the face of a boy (low angle shot) who is panting, sweating and blocking a door while pushing towards it. Arabella finds it impossible to clearly remember what happened, how the party ended, and how she got to her workspace. She talks with her friend Terry and her roommate and together they begin to discover some events that Arabella is unaware of (for example, that she withdrew money from an ATM in an area quite far from where she went out with her friend), something which leads her to talk to Simon and one of his coworkers and she comes to the conclusion that she was hurt and drugged. She decides to go to the police station to report what happened. Two agents specialized in rape cases interrogate her to learn about her case, they perform some tests (including DNA), they take photographs of her body (she has bruises and scratches) and go to her house to collect evidence (clothes and personal belongings from the night of the alleged assault) to investigate what happened.

b) Terry's sexual abuse (Episode 3):

Terry is the victim of sexual abuse by deception. On a trip she made to Italy to visit her friend Arabella, they both go out to have fun at night. They use drugs and alcohol. At one point, Terry tells her friend that she wants to go home and leaves alone. On the way, Terry passes a cocktail bar. There are people on the street, including two boys. Seeing her go by, one of them goes inside the premises and the other goes to her and begins to flatter her. He strikes up a friendly conversation with Terry and convinces her to go into the club to dance. When the boy leaves for a few drinks, Terry is left alone and the other boy's friend appears on the scene (Terry has not realized that they both know each other). He invites her to dance and she agrees. When they are dancing, the other boy appears, tells them to continue and finally the three of them end up in bed having a threesome. Terry feels empowered because she has had sex with two men and tells Kwame over the phone. When the two boys leave the house, Terry sees through the window how they both walk away together, laughing and with a lot of complicity, something that is a bit strange because she assumed they didn't know each other. Over time and after discussing it with her friends, she comes to the conclusion that the sexual encounter was not fortuitous and that it occurred through deception, since the two boys devised a plan to have sexual relations with her by pretending not to know each other.

c) Arabella sexual abuse (Episode 4):

Arabella is the victim of sexual abuse through deception. She meets Zain, a writer from the same publishing house where she works who helps her finish her draft. There is a strong connection between them and they end up having sex in Arabella's room. She asks Zain if he has a condom for her to put on and he does. In the middle of the sexual act and taking advantage of the fact that her back is turned to him, Zain removes the condom without telling Arabella. At the end, Arabella realizes that the condom has been removed and he justifies it by saying that he felt uncomfortable and that he thought she had noticed, since she did not say anything. She doesn't seem too distraught, as she just tells him that now she has to take the pill and he has to pay for it.

d) Kwame's sexual assault (Episodes 4 and 5):

Kwame is the victim of a sexual assault in which physical force is used. He has a date with a man through the dating app. Kwame goes to the man's house and they have consensual sex. When Kwame wants to leave, the other boy holds him back and tells him to stay because they are going to play. Kwame tells him that he doesn't want to have sex again, but the boy forcefully restrains him, throws him on the bed, and rapes him despite Kwame's repeated telling him to stop. Kwame's reaction to this event is silence and contradiction: he is unable to admit that he has been raped because he previously had consensual sex with him. At first he does not tell anyone about what happened, but then he decides to report it to the police station. Kwame feels uncomfortable and humiliated at not finding empathy on the part of the agent who assists him. That is why he decides to leave the police station and not report what happened.

e) Sexual abuse by Kwame (Episode 8):

Kwame sexually abuses a girl by cheating. After being raped and daring to tell her friends Arabella and Terry about it, Kwame confesses that now he doesn't feel safe to have relationships with boys and wants to try girls. He establishes contact with one with whom he feels a strong connection and they speak frequently. They meet one night for dinner and get to know each other. Kwame accompanies her to her house and they have sex without him telling her that he is gay. When they're done, they have a nice chat in bed, but she starts talking a little inappropriately about homosexuals and he rebukes her comments by telling her he's gay. She doesn't believe him at first, but later she gets very angry and reproaches him for using her as a refuge and as a new experience without previously warning her of his true intentions.

3.2. Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this work, an approach to the research corpus is carried out from an analytical-descriptive perspective framed within the analysis of mixed content (Krippendorf, 1990, Piñeiro-Naval, 2020). Based on this methodological design, the qualitative and quantitative contents are collected, analyzed and categorized to establish an interpretation and integration between them. Content analysis is a technique widely used in the field of communication, since it focuses on "reducing large amounts of text (written, audio or audiovisual) to a number of more limited variables in order to establish relationships between them and release meanings" (Peña, 2012, p. 48).

An analysis sheet is used, which has been refined and adapted during the viewing of the episodes which make up the fiction so that it meets the objectives of this paper. For its preparation, studies and reports on sexual violence and its victims are used as a reference (OMS, 2013; Passos, Yela and Gonçalves, 2018; Fundación ANAR, 2020) and it collects the information on the categories and variables of analysis which are structured in the following blocks of content: Characters, Acts of sexual violence and Consequences of sexual violence. The first has a greater breakdown than the rest, since it is the richest and most interesting from the perspective of this research.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the analysis sheet pays special attention to the figure of the victim, since she is the protagonist of two of the content blocks in order to know both her profile and the consequences or reactions she experiences after the act of sexual violence. On the other hand, it should be noted that the first two blocks of content have categories that

are mutually exclusive, while in the last block they are not, thus allowing one or more of them to be selected at the same time. The items registered in the analysis are shown in the following table:

Table 2. Analysis sheet

Characters	Aggressor	Number of aggressors	Individual, Group
		Sex	Male, Female
		Age	Preteen, Teen, Young, Adult, Mature, Elder, Undistinguishable
		Level of disability	Low, Moderate, Serious, Very serious, None shown
		Role	Protagonist, Antagonist, Secondary character, Recurrent, Other
		Relationship with the victim	Known, Unknown
	Victim	Number of victims	Individual, Group
		Sex	Male, Female
		Age	Preteen, Teen, Young, Adult, Mature, Elder, Undistinguishable
		Level of disability	Low, Moderate, Serious, Very serious, None shown
		Role	Protagonist, Antagonist, Secondary character, Recurrent, Other
		Relationship with the aggressor	Known, Unknown

Sexual violence acts	Type	Sexual abuse Sexual harassment Sexual assault
	Location of the assault	Home Street Leisure space Workspace Natural space Other
	Time frame	Diurnal Nocturnal Not observed
	Witnesses	Witnesses No witnesses Not observed
	Use of mobile devices	Observed Not observed
Consequences of sexual violence	Reacción de la víctima	Socially reported Legally reported Not reported
	Damages suffered by the victim	Mental health Reproductive health Physical damages Behavioral damage Fatal damage Others
	Overcoming by the victim	Psychological Support Support from the family environment Work environment support Support from friends Support among victims of sexual violence Others

Source: prepared by the author

The stages followed for the development of this research are the following:

a) Viewing of the 12 episodes that make up the miniseries.

b) Selection of the scenes in which acts of sexual violence take place.

c) Categorization of the selected scenes according to the analysis sheet.

Based on the data record, a quantification of the information is carried out, followed by an inference and qualitative interpretation of them in order to obtain the results and the corresponding conclusions.

4. Results

The results obtained are presented following the established structure of the analysis sheet. Graphs will be used in those cases in which the results are more relevant and, therefore, they need a visual reinforcement to illustrate them:

4.1. Characters

First, the figure of the aggressor of the analyzed acts of sexual violence is characterized by the fact that in all of them there is unanimity in the categories of sex, age and degree of disability: 100% of the scenes have male aggressors, of a young age group and with no degree of disability. Regarding the number of offenders participating in the sexual act, 75% of the scenes have a single offender while 25% have a group offender. This case corresponds to the case of sexual abuse that Terry suffers when she is the victim of a deception by two boys so that the three of them have sexual relations.

Regarding the role they play in fiction, 20% of the aggressors are framed in the role of secondary character, another 20% of them do it in the role of regular character and 60% do not identify with any role, since they are totally unknown in the weight of the plot. It is striking that the figure of the aggressor does not correspond in any case to the role of protagonist or antagonist, the characters that have the greatest weight in any story.

Finally, in the category of the relationship that the aggressor holds with his victim, in 80% of the cases there is no relationship because the aggressor is completely unknown to the victim (as it occurs in the case of Arabella's sexual assault or the sexual abuse Terry suffers) or partially (as it is the case in the acts of sexual violence in which Kwame is involved, since he exchanges some conversations with the people with whom he has dates through a mobile app). The remaining 20% corresponds to the act of sexual violence that has Arabella and Zain as protagonists, since their work relationship favors the closeness and complicity that exists between them.

Secondly, the figure of the victim of the acts of sexual violence analyzed is characterized by unanimity in the categories of number of victims, age and degree of disability: 100% of the scenes have victims who suffer sexual violence individually (there are no more victims with them), who belong to a young age group and who do not have any degree of disability. Regarding the sex of the victims, 80% are women, while 20% are men, a percentage that corresponds only to the scene in which Kwame is the victim of a sexual assault by one of the boys he knows through a mobile dating app.

On the other hand, the category referring to the role played by the victims in fiction does present differences with that of the aggressors, since, in this case, 40% fall within the role of protagonist, represented by Arabella, another 40% falls within the role of secondary character, represented by Terry and Kwame and the remaining 20% do not identify with any role, since it is represented by the girl with whom Kwame has a sexual relationship through deceit and she does not have a prominent or significant role in the plot of fiction. Finally, it should be noted that in the category corresponding to the relationship between the victim and her aggressor, the results are the same as those presented.

4.2. Sexual violence acts

Acts of sexual violence based on their typology are distributed as follows, as can be seen in the following graph:

Graph 1. Typology of acts of sexual violence
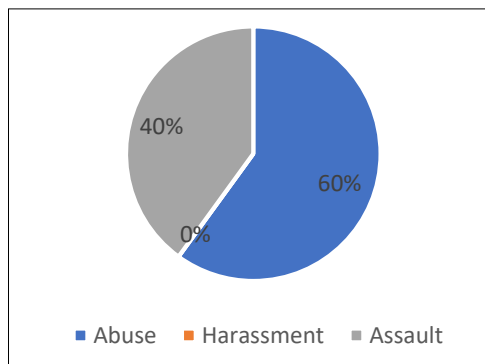
Source: prepared by the author

No act of sexual harassment is seen in this fiction series. The most staged type of sexual violence is sexual abuse, since it has a 60% representation. In all the cases analyzed, it focuses on penetrative sexual abuse in which no type of physical violence or intimidation is applied, but sexual freedom is violated because the aggressor manipulates and deceives the victim to satisfy his interests; hence, the members who participate in the sexual act do not do so from a situation of equality, especially from the point of view of the information available to them to be able to access or not to have sexual relations.

This occurs in the case where Zain decides to remove his condom without telling Arabella; also in Terry's threesome with the two Italian guys, which is not fortuitous, but something planned unbeknownst to her, and in the one in which Kwame has sex with a girl without informing her beforehand that he is gay and that he just wanted to try it out with a woman despite the fact that he is not attracted to them. In all cases, the victim consents to having sexual relations with her aggressor, but it should also be noted that in all of them persuasion, manipulation and deception are present and condition her decision.

The remaining 40% are acts of sexual violence framed within what is considered sexual assault, that is, an attack against the sexual freedom of the victim using physical violence or intimidation. In the series, two acts of sexual assault can be seen: one of them has Arabella as a victim and it is a drug-facilitated sexual assault in which there is penetration and in which she suffers physical violence as can be seen in the gaps, scratches and bruises on her body; the other has Kwame as a victim and it is a sexual assault in which the aggressor uses his physical force to immobilize him and thus be able to penetrate him against his will.

Regarding the place where the acts of sexual violence take place, the majority take place in the home, since this category has an 80% representation. Leisure spaces account for the remaining 20% and correspond to the act in which Arabella suffers a

drug-facilitated rape in a cocktail bar. The rest of the categories do not have any type of representation. On the other hand, in the time slot in which the acts of sexual violence take place there is unanimity, since 100% of them take place at night.

Regarding the presence of witnesses, it should be noted that, for the most part and with 80% representation, the acts of sexual violence do not have any witnesses, while the remaining 20% correspond to the scene in which Arabella is sexually assaulted, because a friend of the aggressor, despite not being inside the bathroom of the cocktail bar where she is raped, is at the door watching so that no one enters and they discovers what is happening inside. Hence, in addition to being a witness, he is an accomplice of the aggressor, because he helps, facilitates and does not prevent the aggression from taking place.

To end this block, and in reference to the use of mobile devices in acts of sexual violence, it should be noted that in none of the analyzed acts mobile devices are used either to photograph or to record or to disclose the acts in which aggressors and victims are participating.

4.3. Consequences of sexual violence

The category related to the reaction that the victim has to the act of sexual violence that they have suffered reveals that, for the most part, no type of complaint is made against the aggressor; this can happen for two reasons: either because the victim is not aware that they have suffered abuse or aggression, as it occurs, for example, with Terry, who is aware of the deception of which she has been the victim several months after the sexual encounter with the two Italian boys take place; or because the victim considers that it is not worth filing a complaint, as happens with Kwame when he is raped. Kwame takes a few days to realize that he has suffered an assault and decides to turn the case over to the authorities, just as his friend Arabella did. However, despite the fact that he goes to the police station with that intention, given the little empathetic reaction of the officer who assists him, he decides to leave without actually filing any complaint.

Graphic 2. Victim's reaction
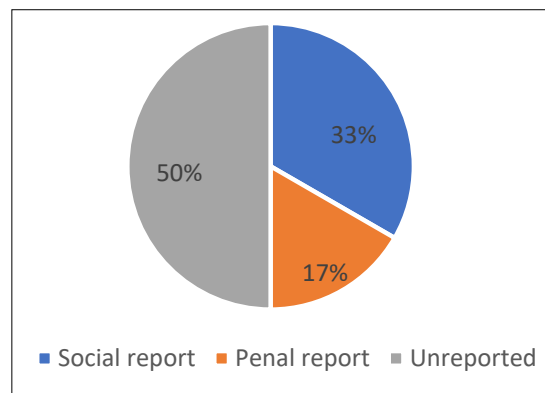
Source: prepared by the author

Meanwhile, in 33% of cases, the victims socially report the sexual violence they have suffered, something that materializes in the figure of Arabella by publicly and socially reporting the two acts of sexual violence of which she has been a victim: the first, the rape facilitated by drugs, she reports through her new book which she is about to be published, while the second is reported at an event organized by her publishing house. In it, instead of doing a reading of her work to the audience, she decides to address them and say that Zain, her co-worker who is also on stage at the moment, is a rapist. Her words have a huge impact among those present, but above all, through social networks, since her friend Terry records her speech and posts it on the Internet, making it go viral and reaching millions of people.

Social networks and the virtual world become great allies for Arabella, since they are very present in her acts of reporting and function not only as a platform to make her experiences public, but also as a space in which to share testimonies from other victims, as well as to support and advise all those who have suffered or experienced a similar situation. On the other hand, the remaining 17% corresponds to those acts that have been reported to the authorities. In this case, it is only identified with the sexual assault suffered by Arabella which she reports at the police station, although the case is eventually closed due to the impossibility of finding the aggressor.

Regarding the damages suffered by the victim after the assault or sexual abuse, the following graph shows that, in the majority of cases (63%), behavioral damages are the ones that have a greater representation, since, to a greater or lesser extent, they are present in all victims: anxiety, emotional insensitivity, changes in the way of relating and interacting with others, low self-esteem, and feelings of guilt and shame are some of the main symptoms that can be classified within this category, all of them suffered by people who have experienced an act of sexual violence.

**Graphic 3. Damages suffered by the victim**
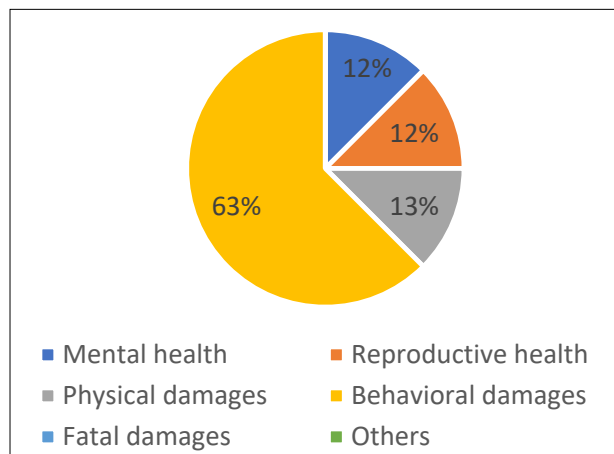
Source: prepared by the author

Physical damage (13%) refers to the explicit sequelae that remain palpable in the victim's body, as occurs in the cases of Arabella or Kwame when they suffer a sexual assault. Damage to mental health (12%) and reproductive health (12%) have the same percentage of representation and have Arabella as the protagonist. The young woman checks how her mental health has been damaged after the drug-facilitated sexual assault she has suffered and requires the help of a specialist to try to overcome the post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety or sleeping difficulties that she presents; her reproductive health is also affected when Zain removes the condom during sex and exposes herself to a possible infection or sexually transmitted disease, as well as an unwanted pregnancy, which causes her to take the contraceptive pill. The two remaining categories (Fatal Damages and Others) do not have any representation.

To finish this block and, with respect to the victim's overcoming of the act/s of sexual violence that they have experienced, the graph presented below shows that the support of friends (72%) has been in this series the greatest bulwark that the victims have had to come out ahead and try to overcome the sexual violence they have suffered. Arabella has Terry's unconditional help, as she becomes her refuge and support to be able to turn the page on the harsh events she has experienced. She also leans on Kwame and Ben, her roommate. The three arm her with strength and courage so that she can continue her bright future as a writer and be able to overcome what she has suffered. The same goes for Terry and Kwame, who find in each other, as well as in Arabella, the understanding and help they need to overcome their fears and pain after being sexually assaulted. The three of them become a great team and their friendship is strengthened as a result of suffering this type of sexual violence.

Graphic 4. Victim's overcoming
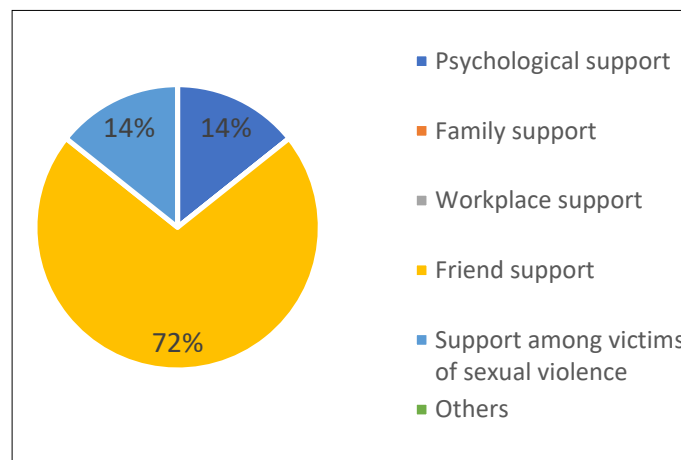
Source: prepared by the author

In addition to this, it should be noted that psychological support (14%) also plays an important role in Arabella's assimilation, acceptance and recovery, as she puts herself in the hands of a psychologist who helps her channel her anger, overcome her fears and not let these facts become an obstacle to carry on with her life. She is the only victim who receives professional psychological help in this series. Arabella is also the only one who receives support from other victims of sexual violence through messages and the community that forms around her on social networks, but, above all, through her support group for Survivors of Sexual Assault and Violence that she attends. This group is run by Theo, an old classmate of Arabella's. There they meet again and manage to establish a bond of friendship based on the support she receives both from her and from the rest of the women who attend the group sessions every week to tell their experience.

With respect to the rest of the categories, despite the fact that they lack representation, they do not cease to have a relevant meaning. This is the case, for example, of the lack of support that Arabella receives at her workplace, something that may seem contradictory because it is her publisher that allows her to publish a book based on her experience as a victim of sexual assault. Her bosses know that she has been raped and drugged, that weeks later she suffers another act of sexual violence and they are only interested in finishing her draft: they pressure her to meet the deadlines, they suspend her payments and she has to find other forms of income to be able to live and pay her expenses, which causes her to delay her work with the publisher. The lack of empathy from their bosses means that they do not understand that Arabella is not going through a good time after the double sexual assault that she has suffered and that is why they are only interested in her meeting the deadline, something she is not going to be able to do until she overcomes her recovery phase.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The results obtained in this work show that the representation of sexual violence in the fiction analyzed is done from a feminist perspective. The woman, despite playing the role of victim for the most part, does not use her suffering to wallow in it, but shows herself to be a woman who is capable of overcoming the painful experience she has experienced and thus resume her sexual life, her working life and become a reference and support for many other people who have been victims of sexual assault or abuse.

This representation is very important, since it shows a female character who is not self-limited or self-controlled due to the fear of suffering an experience similar to the one she has already suffered and, therefore, offers viewers a new way of dealing with these situations, away from clichés that continue to perpetuate social male hegemony. Undoubtedly, the fact that the experience of the victim (woman) and not that of the aggressor (man) has a primary weight in the story contributes to this, since that way the focus is placed on the consequences and experience of her and not in her enjoyment or motivations: the victim is, thus, the absolute protagonist of the plot, while the aggressor is relegated to the background.

In addition to this feminist perspective, it should also be noted that *I May Destroy You* moves away from stereotypes, especially in the representation of the victim, since she is not similar to the one that has traditionally been staged in television fiction (young, white, shy, submissive and vulnerable) nor the one that conforms to the social stereotypes related to acts of sexual violence, where "on the one hand they are seen as a fragile, vulnerable, passive being, dependent on men and their desires and, on the other on the other, it is found seductive and provocative, inciting men" (Janos and Espinosa, 2015, p. 5-6).

In this miniseries, a very diverse victim role is shown: white and black people; employed and unemployed; those who drink and use drugs and those who don't; although if there is something that stands out, it is that a male character is represented as a victim of sexual assault. And it does so precisely because many myths circulate around male rape that manage to stigmatize the men who are victims for not complying with the hegemonic model of masculinity, that is, that men are not raped; that they have failed as men by not physically resisting and defending themselves from the sexual act (Javaid, 2016) or that, if they are raped, their experience is not as traumatic as if it had happened to a woman (Woods, 2017).

The representation of the rape suffered by Kwame in this miniseries is very relevant, since it reflects an act with little visibility and social awareness and also because it does not perpetuate those culturally accepted myths that respond to the maintenance of traditional gender roles. This means that there is no possibility for the roles of aggressors or victims to be reversed, although, in the event that they do, the woman would only become an aggressor if she adopts properly masculine characteristics and the man could become a victim if he denies their traditional masculinity (Janos and Espinosa, 2015, p.13).

Along these lines, and despite the fact that the fiction analyzed does not use stereotypes to represent sexual violence, it must be said that the story reflects situations and events that reflect the social reality in this field, such as, for example, that most of the victims are women, that the majority of the aggressors are men, that acts of sexual violence take place at night and that their participants are young people.

On the other hand, the results obtained in this paper reveal that this fiction not only shows different acts of sexual violence, but that its representation has an educational and transgressive purpose by breaking with the socially and culturally established in the matter of sexual violence. First of all, because it sends an important message: victims are never to blame for suffering an assault or sexual abuse, regardless of their physique, way of being, way of dressing or places they go. Secondly, because it stages a variety of situations and types of sexual violence, some of which become socially accepted or which are not known to be sexual assaults or abuses. And, thirdly, that the victim should always report and not be ashamed or feel guilty for what has happened to them.

Television fiction series can play, as in this case, a relevant role both to make sexual violence visible in all its aspects and to educate the viewers' gaze and raise awareness about such relevant aspects as consent, a fundamental key to conceiving a sexual relationship from freedom. Consent understood as the fact that the participants in a sexual act must have the same initial information and the acceptance of the conditions in which it will be carried out. Only in this way there will be neither victims nor aggressors, but people who, voluntarily, wish to interact sexually without their rights being violated.

Finally, it should be noted that the main limitations of this work are found in the small study sample taken as analysis. The fact of focusing attention only on one miniseries means that the results of this research cannot be extrapolated, but, on the other hand, they do function as a starting point to motivate the development of other studies of these characteristics. Therefore, it would be interesting to continue with this line of research and deepen, through the proposed methodology, the treatment of sexual violence in current fictional stories in order to establish similarities and differences between the series analyzed or to know their evolution or treatment trends. It would also be convenient to broaden the research focus and include film analysis of the construction of audiovisual history to learn how sexual violence is represented from a narrative perspective (characters,

montage, photography, resources, etc.), so that knowledge about this field of study is as complete and comprehensive as possible for the research community.

6. Acknowledgements

7. Bibliographic references

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