

METAPHORS USED BY MALE BATTERERS IN CASES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: A LOOK AT CANADIAN AND SPANISH NEWSPAPERS

METÁFORAS USADAS POR MALTRATADORES EN CASOS DE VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO: UNA MIRADA A LOS PERIÓDICOS CANADIENSES Y ESPAÑOLES

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Abstract

This article explores metaphors used by male batterers in cases of gender-based violence reported in Spanish and Canadian newspapers. It analyzes the most common metaphoric representations of female victims in episodes of gender-based violence documented in newspaper articles in Spain and Canada from 2012 to 2022. The research shows how images of objects, garbage, animals, mental impairment, and prostitution articulate discourses of gender-based violence and how the male perpetrator sees the abused woman through these lenses to dehumanize, exert, and even justify his violent actions.

Keywords: metaphors, male batterer, gender-based violence, Spain, Canada, newspapers.

Resumen

Este artículo explora metáforas usadas por maltratadores en casos de violencia de género reportados en periódicos españoles y canadienses. Analiza las representaciones metafóricas más comunes de víctimas femeninas

en episodios de violencia de género documentados en artículos periodísticos en España y Canadá desde 2012 a 2022. La investigación muestra cómo imágenes de objetos, basura, animales, enfermedades mentales y prostitución articulan estos discursos de violencia de género y cómo el maltratador ve a la mujer a través de estas lentes para deshumanizarla, ejercer y justificar sus acciones violentas.

Palabras clave: metáforas, maltratador, violencia de género, España, Canadá, periódicos.

This article is dedicated to my daughter, Helena.
Thanks for being in my life.

1. Introduction

The man responds by yelling at the woman, calling her a “stupid bitch” and an “ignorant cow” before grabbing her by the hair and repeatedly slamming her head on a tabletop (*The Globe and Mail*, May 20, 2006)

La mujer sufrió por parte del acusado vejaciones e insultos como “tarada”, “puta”, “puta de mierda”, “eres una basura”, “chatarra de mierda” [The woman suffered on behalf of the accused man harassment and insults such as “mad”, “slut”, “shitty slut”, “you are garbage”, “scrap of shit”] (*La opinión de Murcia*, January 13, 2022)

In these newspaper articles, the words: “bitch”, “cow”, “mad” (i.e., tarada), “slut” (i.e., puta), “shit” (i.e., mierda), “garbage” (i.e., basura) and “scrap” (i.e., chatarra) are some metaphors used by male abusers when inflicting violence against their female partners. Despite pertaining to different semantic fields, namely, animals, mental impairment, prostitution, fecal matter and garbage, these metaphoric conceptualizations that clearly dehumanize women seem to permeate the language of gender-based violence.

Research in human cognition, culture and communication has shown the pivotal role played by metaphor in shaping people’s thoughts and actions (Lakoff and Johnson *Metaphors*; Lakoff and Turner; Kövecses *Metaphor*). Viewed as “the phenomenon whereby people talk and, potentially, think about something in terms of something else” (Semino 1), metaphor calls forth a likeness between two entities that are essentially different. Metaphor involves a systematic set of correspondences—or mappings—between two conceptual domains of experience, where one of the domains (the source)

enables people to structure and understand another experiential domain (the target) (Lakoff and Turner). Hence, an expression such as “He will fight for her love and conquer her” is analyzed as the linguistic projection of the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS WAR. This conceptual metaphor emerges from the mapping of certain elements of the source (WAR) onto particular elements of the target domain of LOVE. In a conceptual metaphor, some features of the source domain are brought to the forefront while others remain in the background or are hidden (Lakoff and Johnson *Metaphors*). This results in a biased process of conceptualization: the so-called “framing” power of metaphor (Semino, Demjén and Demmen). So, the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS WAR highlights the confrontational, strategic, and violent nature of wars, while it suppresses the potential cooperative side of the activity. This conceptual framework structures the way individuals think of love and it potentially impacts the way they act regarding relationships as well.

Metaphors provide conceptual frameworks to make sense of selves and experiences. As “iconographic references” (Hawkins 29), metaphors may force people to see something through a specific lens, often leading to a distorted vision of reality which may make people believe in and commit to certain actions” (Hawkins 30-31), for, as Fairclough states, “[w]hen we see the world with a particular metaphor, it then forms the basis of our action, our perception of the world and behavior will change according to the use of a particular metaphor” (67).¹

Different metaphorical framings are conducive to different ways of reasoning about and acting towards the subject presented. For example, thinking about conflicts in personal relationships has been proved to be more hurtful when the relationship is framed as a unity rather than as a journey (Lee and Schwarz). Individuals who read about climate change metaphorically framed as a war felt more urgency to act and change behavior than when it was framed as a race (Flusberg et al). Framing crime as a beast

1 Through their theory of metaphorical entailments, Lakoff and Johnson explain how people can follow a certain course of action when presented with certain metaphors: “Metaphors have entailments through which they highlight and make coherent certain aspects of our experience. A given metaphor may be the only way to highlight and coherently organize exactly those aspects of our experience. Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action and such actions would fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense, metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies” (156).

led participants to ask for stricter laws and punishments than when it was framed as a virus (Thibodeau and Boroditsky). It seems clear, then, that metaphors have important, real-life consequences. As a matter of fact, as Lakoff and Johnson state, “metaphors can kill” (77), and nowhere is this more certain than in the field of gender-based violence.

This article looks at the most common metaphors used by male batterers in the conceptualization of their female victims in episodes of gender-based violence reported in Spanish and Canadian newspapers from 2012 to 2022.² The study aims, on the one hand, to analyze the ideological implications conveyed through such metaphoric representations of women, and, on the other hand, to compare the metaphors found in the speech of male batterers in Spain and Canada, two countries that, *a priori*, are distant, both geographically and culturally speaking.³ Hence, the main research questions are as follows:

- a. What are the main metaphors deployed by male abusers to refer to their female victims in episodes of gender-based violence reported in Canadian and Spanish newspapers?
- b. What are the common metaphors, and which of those are the specific ones for each cultural landscape?
- c. What are the ideological implications of these metaphors in discourses of gender-based violence?
- d. How are these metaphors used by the male abuser to legitimize gender-based violence?

The paper begins with an overview of the main metaphors used in discourses of gender-based violence. Then, it focuses on the methodology employed for the compilation of the corpus. After explaining the steps involved in the Metaphor Identification Procedure, the article provides a summary chart of the metaphors—and their frequency—used by male batterers in the representation of their female victims as reported in Canadian and Spanish newspapers. This is followed by a discussion of the ideological implications conveyed through these metaphorical representations of female victims of

2 Note that in this paper gender-based violence is understood as distinct kinds of violent acts against women, whether verbal, physical, psychological, sexual, or socioeconomic (Casique and Ferreira 951).

3 Funding for this project was obtained through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Research grant number 756-2023-0001).

gender-based violence. Finally, some conclusions are drawn regarding the (ab)use of these metaphors in scenarios of gender-based violence.

2. Metaphors in Discourses of Gender-Based Violence

Metaphors have been documented in discourses of gender-based violence (Antunes et al; Bock and Burkley; Klein; López-Rodríguez “An Analysis of Animal Metaphors”; Luke; Santaemilia and Maruenda). Studies have drawn attention to common metaphoric scenarios used by female victims when trying to come to terms with their traumatic experiences (Cobos et al; Nacey; Stewart and LaNae). Images of weapons and wars (Stewart and LaNae), ailments and plagues (Stewart and LaNae), natural catastrophes (Cobos et al), garbage and dirt (Harrelson), monsters (Enander), animals (Klein), tunnels, holes, and dark places (Vaca-Ferrer et al) as well as (broken) objects (Klein) tend to inform the narratives of abused women. These metaphors seem to aptly convey their feelings of fear, destruction, isolation, despair, invisibility, and pain.

Similarly, research has focused on the metaphors employed by male batterers to explain and even justify their heinous actions (Eisikovits and Buchbinder; Buchbinder; Holma et al; Spooner). Images of inner struggles (Eisikovits and Buchbinder), losing control (Eisikovits and Buchbinder) or beasts within (Beiras et al; Bock and Burkley; López-Rodríguez “An Analysis of Animal Metaphors”) have been identified in the language of male perpetrators. These self-representations certainly mirror their explosive, brutal behavior.

Health-care professionals also recur to metaphor in therapies aimed at empowering battered women (Cala et al; Pernicano; Rebollo et al) and treatment of male batterers (Buchbinder; Spooner). Analogies of gaining control (Eisikovits and Buchbinder), breaking free from isolated spaces (Benstead), beginning a new journey (Vaca-Ferrer et al) and opening Pandora’s box (Lavis et al), among others, have been proven to aid female victims of domestic violence. As for male abusers, metaphors of balance and control, regulation of temperatures, containers, building, and driving seem to be helpful in their recovery programs (Buchbinder).

Metaphors, it appears, have become instrumental in discourses of gender-based violence. As carriers of conceptual meanings, cultural values, and ideologies (Lakoff and Johnson; Kövecses *Language*; Deignan; Goatly), metaphors provide conceptual frameworks to apprehend reality. Seeing women as garbage, objects, animals, sex workers or mentally impaired

individuals enables male perpetrators to dehumanize their victims, which facilitates their exercise of violence upon them (Haslam et al).

Research has shown how the use of certain metaphors in the conceptualization of women prompts negative attitudes and violent behaviors towards the target group. The identification of women with objects, for instance, has been shown to reinforce sexist beliefs about the role of women, even leading to physical and sexual abuse (Cikara et al; Gervais and Eagan; Ward and Giacardi). Similarly, the portrayal of women as animals, particularly preys hunted by males, has been associated with sexual harassment and even rape (Bock and Burkley; Goldenberg et al). The understanding of women as mentally impaired individuals has been linked to psychological violence (Moulding et al; Weare). These—and other—metaphors that so often inform the language of male perpetrators appear in articles of abuse against women reported in Canadian and Spanish newspapers.

3. Method: Procedure and Analysis

Data for this study were collected from 45 newspapers—17 from Canada and 28 from Spain— (see table 1). These publications were chosen because of their availability and wide circulation in both countries.

Table 1. Corpus of Canadian and Spanish newspapers consulted for this research:

Canadian newspapers	<i>Calgary Herald, Calgary Sun, Edmonton Journal, Edmonton Sun, Montreal Gazette, Ottawa Citizen, Ottawa Sun, Telegram, The Daily Courier, The Globe and Mail, The Hamilton Spectator, The National Post, The Province, The Vancouver Sun, Toronto Star, Toronto Sun, Winnipeg Sun</i>
Spanish newspapers	<i>ABC, Diario de Asturias, Diario de Cádiz, Diario de Córdoba, Diario de Mallorca, Diario de Sevilla, El Comercio, El Confidencial, El correo, El español, El HuffPost, El Mundo, El nacional, El País, El periódico de Aragón, El Periódico Extremadura, El Periódico Mediterráneo, El Plural, Faro de Vigo, La Gaceta, La opinión de Murcia, La Razón, La Tribuna de Albacete, La Vanguardia, La Voz de Galicia, Libertad digital, Nius diario, Voz Pópuli</i>

Data collection and sampling were purposive, guided by the objectives to explore the research questions stated above. The study conducted a qualitative analysis of the metaphors used in newspaper articles reporting on violence against women. Note that only the metaphors used by the male abuser—whether in direct or reported speech—were considered since one of the main goals of this project was to hear the aggressor’s voice when exerting violence upon women.

Due to time constraints to access these journals, a total of 8 newspapers (4 Canadian and 4 Spanish) were consulted on-line each month over the course of ten years (2012-2022). The selection of newspapers was made alphabetically (A-Z), following the order of publications listed in table 1. Then, the key words used for the on-line search to retrieve articles dealing with gender-based violence were “mujer maltratada”/ “battered woman”, “víctima de violencia de género” / “victim of gender violence”, “violencia de género”/ “gender-based violence”, “violencia doméstica” / “domestic violence”; “violación” / “rape”, and “animal”/ “animal”, in both Spanish and English, respectively. These terms were chosen because they seemed to encapsulate the objectives of the research project. A total of 960 newspapers were consulted (96 newspapers per year), with an average of 1 article tackling violence against women. This yielded a final corpus of 960 articles. All these articles were recorded in a word document to facilitate the coding process of the metaphors. Furthermore, although the dates were chosen arbitrarily (2012-2022) and solely reflect the beginning and end of the compilation of the corpus of this research project, this decade provides a panoramic view of the use of metaphors in discourses of male batterers in Canada and Spain.

The metaphors used by male batterers were then manually coded using the metaphor identification procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group). This method, which is the only one, so far, formally tested and found reliable in the discipline of metaphor studies (Steen et al), consists of the application of the following three steps:

1. Read the entire text-discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning.
2. Determine the lexical units in the text-discourse.
3. a) For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Consider what comes before and after the lexical unit.

- b) For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to be
- more concrete; what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste.
 - related to bodily function.
 - more specific (as opposed to vague).
 - historically older.

Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit.

- c) If the lexical unit has a more basic current-contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.

4. If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical (Pragglejaz Group 3).

Having identified and marked all the metaphors used by male abusers in the representation of female victims in the above corpus according to MIP, the next step involved their organization into meaningful clusters. The formulation of the conceptual structures that underline the tokens labeled as metaphorical was carried out considering that the main function of metaphor is the understanding of abstract, complex ideas in terms of more concrete, bodily, or familiar ones (Lakoff and Johnson; Semino). Taking into account this premise of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study examined the main metaphoric scenarios to which male abusers resorted when inflicting violence towards women. The resulting corpus was comprised of 607 metaphorical items (184 belonging to the Canadian corpus and 423 to the Spanish corpus). Note that all these linguistic metaphors were regarded as the surface manifestation in language of conceptual metaphors. Therefore, once retrieved and noted, the former was grouped thematically, so that conceptual metaphors could be put forward to account for them.

In addition, the qualitative analysis of the metaphors used by male abusers in episodes of gender-based violence reported in newspapers in Canada and Spain was framed within a discourse analytic approach, as described by Fairclough, Charteris-Black, Chilton, and Mussolf (“The Study of Metaphor”). This view, which implements cognitive semantics, considers the social influence of ideology, culture, and history to provide a more

reliable account of why particular metaphors are chosen in specific discourse contexts (Charteris-Black 6). The selection of a specific metaphor functions as a “representational strategy” (Fairclough 145), fulfilling what Halliday terms “ideational function” of language. As a matter of fact, the preference of a metaphor over others not only reflects different ways of representing reality, but it can also create social realities that may influence people’s thoughts and actions (Koller 11). In this sense, metaphors are ideal vehicles for the transmission of ideological values and power relations; serving to justify specific world views (Charteris-Black 90-112). These functions of metaphor are relevant in this study whose focus is on how the male abuser metaphorically represents his female victim when inflicting violence against her.

The following section discusses the use(s) and function(s) of the metaphors found in the discourse of the male batterer in cases of gender-based violence reported in Canadian and Spanish newspapers. Attention will be paid to the wider psychological, cultural, and social discourses from which these metaphors are drawn. In the analysis of the corpus, translations of the Spanish excerpts are provided.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section combines the report of the research findings and the discussion of their significance in order to delve into the implications of the metaphors employed by male batterers to refer to their female victims. The tables below reflect the main conceptual metaphors identified in this research along with their frequency. Following typographical conventions, the conceptual metaphors outlined in this study are written in capital letters. Besides, to enhance the input visually, the linguistic metaphors are highlighted in bold and presented in context, that is, with their co-text.

Table 2. Metaphoric conceptualization of female victims of gender violence in the Spanish corpus:

Conceptual Metaphors	Frequency	Percentage
WOMEN AS GARBAGE & WASTE	175	41.37 %
WOMEN AS ANIMALS	108	25.53 %
WOMEN AS SEX WORKERS	71	16.78 %
WOMEN AS MENTALLY IMPAIRED INDIVIDUALS	69	16.31 %
Total	423	100%

Table 3. Metaphoric conceptualization of female victims of gender violence in the Canadian corpus

Conceptual Metaphors	Frequency	Percentage
WOMEN AS ANIMALS	108	58.69 %
WOMEN AS MENTALLY IMPAIRED INDIVIDUALS	42	22.82 %
WOMEN AS SEX WORKERS	26	14.13 %
WOMEN AS GARBAGE & WASTE	8	4.34 %
Total	184	100%

4.1. Women as Garbage and Waste

The rhetoric that uses garbage and waste as a metaphor for women figures prominently in the Spanish corpus—accounting for 41.37 % of all the metaphorical items compiled. Male abusers appear to refer to their female victims as “mierda” [shit] (95), “basura” [garbage] (39), “desecho” [waste] (25), “escoria” [slag] (12) and “chatarra” [scrap metal] (4), in other words, substances and materials that can no longer be used and, therefore, need to be thrown away.⁴

Stemming from the Industrial Revolution, when the middle and upper classes started exploiting the urban poor and working classes, THE WOMAN IS GARBAGE & WASTE metaphor renders the female body as disposable (Brown 143; Wright 90-111). It first transforms it into an exploitable commodity that is discarded when it lacks productivity. When extrapolated to the sphere of gender-based violence, it appears that male perpetrators employ this metaphor when women are of no service to them, either because they do not comply with their wishes and commands (1 and 2) or because they simply want to end the relationship (3 and 4):

1. No sirves ni para chupármela. Eres una **basura**. [You cannot even give me a blow job. You are **garbage**] (*Diario de Cádiz*, June 17, 2014).
2. Juan Ramón llega a su casa de una pequeña localidad de Valladolid pasadas las diez. Bebido. Hace días que ha recaído en el alcohol tras unos meses sin probar gota. No le gusta la cena que ha preparado

⁴ The numbers in brackets refer to the number of times that metaphor has been found in the corpus.

Paulina. “Eres una **mierda**” ... Estos gritos suenan más suave que el primer puñetazo de la noche [Juan Ramón arrives at his house in a small town in Valladolid after 10 o'clock. Drunken. A few days ago, he has fallen back into alcoholism after a few months being sober. He does not like the dinner that Paulina has made for him. “You are **shit**” ...These yells sound softer than the first punch at night time] (*Diario de Navarra*, November 21, 2016).

3. **Eres una mierda, una mierda de tía, voy a estar detrás tuyo hasta que me muera. Ten cuidado que te pego y te arranco la cabeza** [You are shit, you are a shitty gal, I am going to be chasing you till I die. Be careful because I can hit you and pull up your head] (*El periódico Extremadura*, February 16, 2022).
4. **Nadie te va a querer. Eres puta escoria** [Nobody is going to love you. You are fucking slag] (*La Gaceta*, May 11, 2002).

On depicting women as worthless and useless materials the language of trash and waste is often embedded in episodes of psychological violence. Forty-two newspaper articles explicitly tackle this type of abuse that affects a woman's mental well-being and self-esteem:

5. **Quince años de maltrato psicológico: “Me dijo tantas veces que soy una mierda y que no valgo para nada que me lo he creído”** [Fifteen years of psychological abuse: “He told me that I am shit and that I am worth for nothing so many times that I have internalized it”] (*El diario*, November 24, 2019).
6. **el hombre...dirigiéndose a ella de forma despectiva e intimidatoria cuando discutían, con recriminaciones constantes, profiriéndole insultos y expresiones tales como “trozo de mierda”, “gorda”, “falsa de mierda que vas de santita y eres la peor de todas”, “que te den por el culo niña”, “personaje” o “basura”... La mujer “presenta un síndrome ansioso-depresivo compatible con un maltrato habitual,” según el informe forense** [the man...addressing her in a derogatory and intimidating way when they argued, with constant reproaches, uttering insults and expressions such as “piece of shit”, “fat”, “shitty fake woman that pretends to be a little saint but you are the worst of all women”, “fuck off, kid”, “character” or “garbage”...The woman “shows an anxiety-depressive disorder compatible with habitual

abuse,” according to the forensic report] (*Diario de León*, May 30, 2022).

According to data analysis, garbage and waste metaphors applied to women are commonplace in cases where verbal and physical violence go hand in hand. In 98 newspaper articles, women compared with waste and trash suffered corporeal harm:

7. Al año de empezar la relación, sobre marzo de 2016, la mujer sufrió por parte del acusado diferentes actos de violencia física, consistiendo en puñetazos en cara, estómago, espalda, patadas en la cara, así como de forma continua en el tiempo amenazas, vejaciones e insultos como “puta”, “puta de mierda”, “eres una basura”, “chatarra de mierda” [One year after the relationship started, around March 2016, the woman suffered on behalf of the accused man several acts of physical violence, consisting of punches on her face, stomach, back, kicks on her face, as well as constant threats, humiliations and insults such as “whore”, “shitty whore”, “you are garbage”, “shitty scrap metal”] (*La opinión de Murcia*, January 13, 2023).

In the Canadian corpus, however, there are only 8 tokens identifying women with garbage and waste products. Also conveying the notions of uselessness and disposability seen in the Spanish examples, “shit” and “crap” are targeted at women who intend to break up the relationship with their boyfriends. Once again, it seems that going against a man’s will results in the absolute degradation of women to the category of excrements:

8. You’re a **shitty** girlfriend! You won’t leave me, bitch! (*Telegram*, June 19, 2016).
9. He called me “**shit**” and threatened to kill me if I left him (*Ottawa Citizen*, July 28, 2019).

Like in the Spanish corpus, not serving a man often translates into the conceptualization of women as waste products. This patriarchal idea of servitude resurfaces in newspaper articles where male abusers criticize their partners:

10. He used to call me “piece of **crap**” in front of the children when dinner was not ready (*Calgary Herald*, June 11, 2018).

4.2. Women as Animals

The Spanish corpus registered 108 animal tokens applied to female victims: “zorra” [vixen] (142), “perra” [bitch] (31), “cerda” [pig] (11), “loba” [she-wolf] (1) and “coneja” [bunny] (1). Underlying most of these zoomorphic identifications is a strong sexual component due to the associations of animals with instinctual creatures (Kövecses *Metaphor*, 20). As a matter of fact, in most newspaper articles this symbolic fauna is virtually synonymous with promiscuous women and even sex-workers (Fernández and Jiménez); an idea that is reinforced by the co-occurrence of these metaphors with words pertaining to the semantic field of prostitution, such as “puta” [whore], “prostituta” [prostitute] and “prostíbulo” [brothel]:

11. Los hechos sucedieron el 27 de enero de 2014. J.C llegó a la casa de Susana Flores, que compartía con otros compañeros de piso. La declaración y el atestado recogen que ambos bebieron y que, en un momento dado, él, en presencia de los dos menores (de 4 y 13 años entonces), comenzó a ponerse violento. “Eres una **zorra**, una puta, seguro que en Zaragoza has estado en un prostíbulo”, recoge el informe policial. A pesar de que Susana le pidió que se marchara de la vivienda, el hombre no lo hizo, sino que le quitó y rompió su teléfono, así como el de su hijo. [The events took place on January 27, 2014. J.C. arrived at Susana Flores’ house, which she shared with other people. Her testimony and the police report state that both drank and, at one point, he, in front of two minors (4 and 13 years old), became violent. “You are a **vixen**, a whore, I am sure that you have worked in a brothel in Zaragoza”, reads the police report. Although Susana asked him to leave, the man refused to do this and, instead, he snatched and broke her cell phone and her son’s] (*El diario*, January 27, 2020).
12. A principios del mes de octubre, la víctima decidió poner fin a la relación y se lo comunicó a J. Éste no aceptó la ruptura e inició una discusión con ella en la que le profirió expresiones como “**guarra**, eres una prostituta de viejos, te pagan dinero por acostarte con otros”. El procesado, con conocimiento de que tal actitud provocaría en la mujer un sentimiento de culpabilidad, le pidió mantener relaciones sexuales. [At the beginning of October, the victim decided to end the relationship and told J. This did not accept the break-up and started an argument where

he called her “**pig**, you are a whore for old men, you get paid for having sex with other men.” The accused man, knowing that this behavior will make the woman feel guilty, asked her to have sexual relations] (*Diario de Cádiz*, May 12, 2022).

13. “¡Putas, salid de vuestras madrigueras! ¡Vais a follar como **conejas!**”, el grito machista de universitarios del colegio mayor masculino Elías Ahúja en Madrid [“Whores, get out of your **burrows!** You’re gonna fuck like **bunnies!**”, the male chauvinistic chant in the university male dorm Elías Ahúja in Madrid] (*El País*, October 6, 2022).

So strong is the sexual charge attached to animal metaphors in the corpus that these tend to permeate cases of sexual aggression:

14. Mujer víctima de agresión sexual: “Me dijo que era una puta, una **zorra**, una **guarra**” [Woman victim of sexual aggression: “He told me that I was a whore, a **vixen**, a **pig**”] (*Diario de Mallorca*, June 22, 2022).

15. Un sargento de la Guardia Civil que será juzgado en mayo por agredir sexualmente y acosar a una subordinada durante cuatro años en el cuartel de Molina de Segura... Llamadas y mensajes de texto al móvil, con frases como “eres una **marrana**”, “eres una puta” o “estás follando con otro”...En una ocasión le tiró a la mesa un pañuelo con restos de semen al grito de “mira lo que te has perdido, **marrana**” [A sergeant from the Civil Guard that will be judged in May for sexually aggressing and harassing a subordinate during four years in the station of Molina de Segura...Phone calls and text messages, with expressions such as “you are a **pig**”, “you are a whore” or “you are fucking with another guy”...On one occasion he threw a handkerchief with semen rests on the table while yelling “look at what you have missed, **pig**”] (*La opinión de Murcia*, March 12, 2023).

Data analysis also revealed that male batterers frequently recur to animal metaphors when inflicting physical violence against women. In these instances, the notion of subjugation that usually vertebrates the identification of people with beasts seems to be activated (López-Rodríguez “Of Women”, 89):

16. La mujer recordaba cómo la llamaba **loba** mientras le daba puñetazos en la cara [The woman remembered how he called her **she-wolf** while punching her on the face] (*La tribuna de Albacete*, June 17, 2018).

The WOMAN AS ANIMAL metaphor ranks the first one in the Canadian corpus (58.69%), with **bitch** (61), “cow” (19), “dog” (11), “pig” (11) and “vixen” (6) making up 108 items in total. The study revealed that male abusers usually opt for the canine image to degrade women’s intellectual faculties. In fact, the largely taboo “bitch” tends to collocate with terms that reinforce ignorance, such as “stupid”, “dumb” and “idiot”:

17. Her boyfriend called her “dumb **bitch**” and punched her repeatedly (*Edmonton Sun*, January 27, 2018).
18. The man called his partner “stupid **bitch**” while throwing objects through the window (*The Vancouver Sun*, May 15, 2015).
19. Her husband called her “fucking idiot” and “stupid **bitch**” and kicked her several times (*Ottawa citizen*, April 29, 2022).

Also conveying the senses of belligerent, malicious and domineering, “bitch” is frequently encountered in cases of verbal abuse whose main targets are powerful women (17 and 18), for they are regarded as a threat to the heteropatriarchy. As a matter of fact, research has underscored how “bitch” is the most common label for influential women working in politics, economics, and the media (Kassam; Kleinman et al 530-540):

20. Sandra Jansen, a female Alberta politician, faced offensive online comments such as “dumb broad” or “traitorous **bitch**” after leaving the Tories and joining the governing NDP party (*The Globe and Mail*, November 28, 2016).
21. The long-time president of the Windsor Minor Hockey Association called Canadian women who participated in the Women’s March in Washington “dumb **bitches**” on his social media (*The National Post*, January 24, 2017).

Data analysis similarly revealed that in most cases male perpetrators’ use of “bitch” conveys strong sexual overtones, serving to identify their victims with promiscuous women, cheaters, and even sex-workers (19 and 20). This idea is usually reinforced by the appearance of “bitch” with terms pertaining

to the semantic field of prostitution, such as “slut”, “fucking” or “whore”. As a matter of fact, according to the corpus, “bitch” is the most common metaphor in episodes of sexual aggression. Research, indeed, has brought to the fore how this slur tends to trigger sexual violence (Clarke 264):

22. Greene described Rumbolt telling her she would “never have a life in this town,” calling her degrading names in repeated attempts at contact. On one occasion, he followed her in his police car as she walked to a friend’s house, she wrote, calling her a “slut” and a “f—king **bitch**.” (*Telegram*, August 18, 2021).

23. Her boyfriend called her whore, prostitute, and **bitch** before raping her (*Edmonton Journal*, May 7, 2011).

Applied to an unintelligent, annoying, and, above all, overweight woman, the pejorative “cow” was recorded 19 times in the corpus. This metaphor, which resonates in the obesity discourses that stigmatize females with weight issues (Hardy 11), is often employed by male batterers to fat-shame and ridicule their victims (21 and 22). As a matter of fact, the term usually appears with the adjectives “big” and “fat” to reinforce the idea of obesity. This form of psychological violence has been proven to have detrimental effects not only on women’s psyche, but also physique, for studies have linked animal slurs like cow with the promotion of eating disorders (López-Rodríguez “The Representation”, 35):

24. Her husband was physically abusive and called his wife a “bitch”, a “big fat **cow**” (*Calgary Herald*, November 8, 2011).

25. he was so angry he started yelling, “You fat **cow**! Thanks a lot, you fat **cow**!” (*The Globe and Mail*, February 7, 2021).

The metaphorical “dog” was recorded 11 times in the corpus. Like with most animal names applied to women, the canine metaphor presents a strong sexual charge, being practically synonymous with promiscuous women and even with prostitutes (Eble 43). It usually appears in newspaper articles focused on sexual assaults:

26. What he’d done wasn’t rape, he said—so don’t tell anybody that it was...When I pleaded with him to stop, he called me a **dog** (*Toronto Sun*, July 21, 2016).

27. After calling her **dog**, he raped his partner (*Toronto Star*, May 7, 2018).

Conveying the implications of fatness, dirtiness, shame, despicable behavior, and promiscuity, “pig” is registered 11 times in the Canadian corpus. Presumably the most offensive animal name applied to people according to psychological research (Haslam et al 322), this slur appears in incidents of sexual violence:

28. The woman testified Hoggard raped her repeatedly, choked her, called her a “dirty little **pig**” while he made animal noises and dragged her to the bathroom where he asked her to urinate on him and she said no (*Toronto Star*, October 14, 2022).
29. he called me “fucking **pig**” and raped me (*The Vancouver Sun*, May 18, 2019).

4.3. Women as Sex Workers

Seventy-one metaphors equating women with sex workers were identified in this research. The WOMAN AS SEX WORKER metaphor, grounded on folk judgment and scorn based on their perceived sexual behavior (Levine; Stanley), is commonplace in situations of abuse. Implying the idea of promiscuity, this metaphor is usually embedded in articles where women are accused of being unfaithful, as examples 30-32 illustrate:

30. Previo a estos hechos, desde el 24 de septiembre de 2021 y en varias ocasiones, se puso en contacto con ella a través de su teléfono móvil dirigiéndole expresiones como: “Miserable de cojones”, “**puta** ingrata”, “te echaré un mal de ojo, verás te va a ir la vida como un culo”, “**puta** mala” [Prior to these facts, from 24 September 2021 and on several occasions he contacted her with text messages, writing expressions such as “fucking miserable”, “ungrateful **whore**”, “I’ll cast an evil eye on you, you will see your life will go to the dogs”, “bad **whore**”] (*Diario de León*, May 13, 2023).
30. Me decía que era una **puta** barata [He called me cheap **whore**] (*Voz pópuli*, April 9, 1999).
30. La mujer vivía atemorizada. La llamaba “**puta** de mierda” y la golpeó en varias ocasiones. Los celos eran tales que llegaba a olerle los genitales para saber si había estado con otro hombre [The woman was frightened to death. He called her fucking **whore** and hit her on several occasions. He was so jealous that he

even smelled her genitalia to know if she had been with another man] (*El periódico Extremadura*, February 16, 2022).

Due to its carnal charge, the WOMAN AS A SEX WORKER metaphor recurs in cases of sexual harassment and aggression. In fact, research has shown how the conceptualization of women as whores (re)produces rape myths and even leads to rape itself (Anolik; Rennie):

33. Me llamaban “**puta**” continuamente y me tenían aterrorizada. Una joven denuncia que sufrió acoso sexual [They called me “**whore**” constantly and I was scared. A woman denounces that she suffered sexual harassment] (*Público*, March 5, 2017).
34. Acto seguido volvió sobre sus pasos y me dijo: “Qué pasa contigo, **puta**” y acto seguido se abalanzó sobre mí y me propinó un puñetazo en la cara”, explicó. “Me tiró al suelo hacia un lado y me metió la rodilla en las costillas y la mano por debajo del pantalón y las bragas”. [Immediately afterwards, he followed in her footsteps and told me: “What’s going on with you, **whore**” and then he jumped on me and punched me on my face,” she exclaimed. “He threw me onto the floor and put his knee on my ribs and his hand under my pants and underwear] (*Heraldo*, October 9, 2018).

26 items of the WOMAN AS SEX WORKER metaphor were identified in the Canadian corpus. Like in the Spanish data analyzed, the representation of women as whores and sluts is usually encountered in articles where male abusers’ possessive and controlling behavior leads them to accuse their partners of cheating:

35. the pattern for their relationship was set early. Her boyfriend, prone to jealousy, would call her names such as “**slut**” and “**whore**,” and accuse her of sleeping around (*The Globe and Mail*, March 18, 2022).
36. He called me “**whore**” because he thought I was seeing his friend (*Edmonton Journal*, April 25, 2019).

This type of rhetoric known as slut-shaming not only stigmatizes a woman for engaging in behavior judged to be promiscuous or sexually provocative, but it also leads to sexual violence (Bjurling 2). In fact, in the

Canadian corpus, the WOMAN AS SEX WORKER metaphor is found in episodes of sexual aggression (34 and 35):

37. Outside the pub, he spat on the woman and called her a “**whore** and a **slut**” before raping her (*The National Post*, February 3, 2005).

38. A group of male students called her **whore** and assaulted her (*The Vancouver Sun*, September 2, 2018).

4.4. Women as Mentally Impaired Individuals

The stereotype of the emotionally unstable and even mentally impaired woman appears 69 times in the Spanish corpus. Entrenched since the Ancient World, when hysteria was used as a catchall diagnosis that explained females’ illnesses based on their biology (Ali and Adshead; Madison), this pathological view of women is commonplace in episodes of psychological violence (Delgado and Sánchez-Prada; Zaccour). In the articles analyzed, male abusers tend to address their partners as “*loca*” [mad] (48), “*tarada*” [crazy] (3), “*retrasada*” (15) [mentally retarded] and “*subnormal*” (3) [blockhead] to impose their views and belittle their intellectual abilities and emotional balance:

39. Ya desde el comienzo de la relación el hombre dio muestras de un comportamiento violento: se dirigía a ella con expresiones como “hija de puta; eres una puta mierda; no vales para nada; eres una puta; estás **loca**; quién cojones te crees”. [From the very beginning of the relationship the man showed signs of a violent behavior: he referred to her with expressions such as “son of a bitch”; “you are fucking shit; you are worth for nothing; you are a whore; you are **mad**; who the fuck you think you are”] (*La voz de Asturias*, March 2, 2022).

40. Su marido la llamaba **tarada** y **subnormal** cuando le llevaba la contraria, gritándole hasta que le daba la razón [Her husband called her “**crazy**” and “**blockhead**” when she contradicted him, yelling at her till she agreed with him] (*Diario de Mallorca*, November 11, 2019).

41. La mujer recuerda cómo su entonces novio se refería a ella constantemente con insultos como “**loca**” y “**retrasada mental**” [The woman recalls how her then boyfriend constantly referred

to her with insults such as “**mad**” and “**mentally retarded**”) (*El nacional*, February 3, 2021).

42. Según fue avanzando la relación se ha tomado la confianza de insultarme, me llama de todo: “estoy **loca**, soy una zorra, una **subnormal...**” [As the relationship advanced, he started insulting me, he calls me all sorts of insults: “I am **crazy**, I am a bitch, I am a **blockhead...**”] (*El mundo*, June 1, 2004).

These derogatory labels have been linked to a specific type of psychological violence known as gaslighting, that is, a specific kind of manipulation where the male abuser plants seeds of uncertainty and constantly questions his partner’s beliefs and opinions as to create constant doubt and uncertainty, particularly by attacking her mental abilities (Abramson; Sweet). In addition, these metaphors have been reported in court cases of gender-based violence where the defense of the male batterer attempts to discredit the testimony of the female victim by insisting on her alleged mental disorders (*WomensLaw*; Zaccour).

In the same fashion, the Canadian corpus registers a wide repertoire of metaphors pertaining to the semantic field of low intellect and mental illness. “Stupid” [22], “retarded” [3], “dumb” [6], “idiot” [2] along with “mad” [3], “nuts” [1] and “crazy” [5] are found in articles tackling psychological violence. As seen in the Spanish newspapers, male perpetrators recur to these stigmatizing labels to gaslight women:

43. Her husband frequently called her “**retarded**” and “**idiot**” (*The Daily Courier*, May 3, 2019).
44. The relationship got worse...he would call her fucking **crazy** (*Edmonton Sun*, August 7, 2015).
45. Mandy recalled being called **dumb** when her husband got angry (*Edmonton Sun*, November 11, 2016).

The Canadian corpus similarly revealed the occurrence of the WOMAN AS MENTALLY IMPAIRED INDIVIDUAL in cases of physical violence, as shown in 46 and 47:

46. Her husband called her “fucking idiot” and “**stupid bitch**” and kicked her several times (*Ottawa citizen*, April 29, 2022).
47. Her boyfriend called her “**dumb bitch**” and punched her repeatedly (*Edmonton Sun*, January 27, 2018).

5. Conclusions

This study has attempted to shed some light onto the main metaphors that articulate the language of male abusers in episodes of gender-based violence reported in Spanish and Canadian newspapers. An analysis of a corpus consisting of 607 metaphorical items (184 belonging to the Canadian corpus and 423 to the Spanish corpus) has shown how male perpetrators often think of women in terms of garbage and waste (*mierda*, shit), animals (*zorra*, bitch), sex workers (*puta*, slut), and mentally impaired individuals (*loca*, dumb). Apart from their dehumanizing effect, these metaphors contribute to the transmission and perpetuation of sexist stereotypes about women, such as their mental inferiority and instability when compared to men, their sexualization and objectification.

Despite the cultural and linguistic differences separating Spain and Canada, the set of metaphors encountered in this research is the same—with variations in terms of frequency. Hence, whereas in the Spanish corpus the WOMAN AS GARBAGE & WASTE metaphors is followed by the WOMAN AS ANIMAL, THE WOMAN AS SEX WORKER, and the WOMAN AS MENTALLY IMPAIRED INDIVIDUAL, in the Canadian corpus the most prolific metaphor compares women with animals. This is followed by the conceptualization of women as mentally impaired individuals, sex workers and, finally, garbage and waste. The fact that male abusers in Spain and Canada tend to see women through similar lenses simply corroborates the universal nature of metaphorical reasoning. In addition, as regards the number of metaphorical items analyzed in this research, it is worth mentioning that more tokens were found in Spanish than in Canadian newspapers. This may be because of the selection of newspapers or that newspaper articles in Spain are more prone to reporting on gender-based violence.

Notwithstanding the numerous shortcomings of this research (i.e., its theoretical nature, its limited use of newspapers, its lack of reliability tests, its comparison of corpora of different sizes), this study has tried to show how the language of the male abuser is rife with metaphors that represent women as garbage, waste, animals, sex workers and mentally impaired individuals. In addition, although falling outside the scope of this paper, the dissemination of these metaphors in mass media might contribute to the entrenchment and normalization of misogynous discourses. At the same time, it could also help in the creation of anchor or referent points to which male abusers may recur to justify their violent actions. Hence, although further empirical research

is needed, the question of whether publicizing these sorts of metaphors in newspapers might be beneficial or, on the contrary, detrimental to women is relevant because, instead of raising awareness of violence against women, it could become part of the problematic vicious circle of gender-based violence.

Finally, because, in Dwight Bolinger's words, language is a loaded weapon, the study of the metaphors articulating the discourse of gender-based violence as reported in Spanish and Canadian newspapers deserves further examination in light of the statistics that show that 1 out of 3 women in the world will suffer this kind of violence ("Violence" 23).

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