

**VIOLENCE AND  
HEGEMONIC  
MASCULINITY IN  
*HISTORIAS DEL  
KRONEN, EL BOLA,  
AND TE DOY MIS  
OJOS***

**LA VIOLENCIA Y LA  
MASCULINIDAD  
HEGEMÓNICA EN  
*HISTORIAS DEL  
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DOY MIS OJOS***

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## RESUMEN

Las películas españolas *Historias del Kronen* (1995), *El Bola* (2000) y *Te doy mis ojos* (2003) no sólo disfrutaron de un gran éxito entre el público y la crítica, sino que también desempeñaron un papel crucial a la hora de despertar la conciencia en España sobre los problemas de la violencia juvenil, el abuso juvenil y la violencia de género. Aunque *Te doy mis ojos* es el único film en que la crítica ha examinado la cuestión de violencia en términos de género, en este artículo se argumenta que las tres películas tratan explícitamente la cuestión de la agresión física en los hombres como comportamiento condicionado que es, en realidad, producido por conceptos culturales represivos de la masculinidad. La violencia de los hombres, tanto contra otros hombres como contra las mujeres, es una manifestación de la violencia infligida en ellos por un sistema polarizado de sexo-género que hace que los hombres repriman sus emociones, sobre todo el miedo y la inseguridad, para intentar alcanzar un ideal inaccesible de hombría, muchas veces llamado *masculinidad hegemónica*.

## ABSTRACT

The Spanish films *Historias del Kronen* (1995), *El Bola* (2000), and *Te doy mis ojos* (2003) were not only highly successful with both the public and critics but also played a pivotal role in raising awareness in Spain about the issues of youth violence, child abuse, and wife-battery. While *Te doy mis ojos* is the only film in which critics have chosen to examine the question of violence in terms of gender roles, here all three films are shown to deal explicitly with the issue of physical aggression in men as a conditioned behavior that is actually produced by repressive cultural concepts of masculinity. Men's violence, both against other men and against women, is a manifestation of the violence imposed on men themselves by a polarized sex-gender system that forces men to repress their emotions, particularly feelings of fear and insecurity, in order to try to reach an unobtainable ideal of manhood, often referred to as *hegemonic masculinity*.

### Palabras clave

*Masculinidad hegemónica; Homofobia; Acoso escolar; Violencia juvenil; Abuso infantil; Violencia de género.*

### Key words

*Hegemonic Masculinity; Homophobia; Bullying; Youth Violence; Child Abuse; Gender Violence.*

## 1. Introduction

The Spanish films *Historias del Kronen* (1995), *El Bola* (2000), and *Te doy mis ojos* (2003) were not only highly successful with both the public and critics but also played a pivotal role in raising awareness in Spain about the issues of youth violence, child abuse, and wife-battery. *Te doy mis ojos*, Icíar Bollaín's film has even been credited with helping to bring about new legislation in Spain that imposes stricter penalties on perpetrators of acts of violence against women (Levine, 2007: 231). While *Te doy mis ojos* is the only film in which critics have chosen to examine the question of violence in terms of gender roles, here I propose that all three films explicitly deal with the issue of physical aggression in men as a conditioned behavior that is actually produced by repressive cultural concepts of masculinity. Men's violence, both against other men and against women, is a manifestation of the violence imposed on men themselves by a polarized sex-gender system that forces men to repress their emotions, particularly feelings of fear and insecurity, in order to try to reach an unobtainable ideal of manhood, often referred to as hegemonic masculinity. R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt define hegemonic masculinity as a model of behavior for men who seek positions of power within certain groups in society: "It embodie[s] the currently most honored way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men" (2005: 832). Michael S. Kimmel emphasizes that it involves a complete rejection of feminine traits within oneself, and as seen in other men, as well as in the devaluation of all women in general (2001: 272-75). Hegemonic models of masculinity also require constant demonstrations of manhood enacted by social or physical dominance over other men, thereby creating a hierarchy in which certain males necessarily dominate others (Kimmel, 2001: 272-75).

## 2. Objectives

- I. To explore the dynamic of hegemonic masculinity, as defined above, as well as alternatives to this dominant model of manhood, and the cultural environments that produce them, in the films *Historias del Kronen*, *El Bola*, and *Te doy mis ojos*.
  - a) *Historias del Kronen* displays the workings of hegemonic masculinity in the way in which the young men of the Kronen clan come to fear any revelation of emotion or vulnerability, and especially homosexual feelings, and to use unprovoked aggression as a means of staving off perceived threats to themselves.
  - b) *El Bola* presents us with two clearly distinct visions of masculinity. In the hegemonic model, men and boys suppress all feelings of fear and vulnerability, go to all costs to prove themselves, and use violence to assert their authority. In the alternative model, men and boys express a full range of emotions, making it unnecessary to risk one's safety and integrity in the search for self-validation.
  - c) *Te doy mis ojos* reveals the way in which hegemonic masculinity encourages some men to use violence and aggression against their own wives as a way to convert powerlessness and vulnerability into a sense of power and strength, and how society, by promoting the latter quality in men, and rejecting the former, fosters this behavior.
- II. To show how S. M. Peck's definition of psychological evil as a form of malignant narcissism that requires the scapegoating of others can be related to hegemonic models of masculinity where men are encouraged to use violence against others to hide their inability to reach an unobtainable concept of manhood.

### 3. Methodology

This paper explores the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), and its role in what Michael Kaufman has termed the *triad of men's violence* –violence against women, violence against other men, and violence against oneself (1997). Viewing the various models of masculinity as social constructs, theories of hegemonic masculinity aim to identify dominant forms of masculinity while at the same time avoiding essentialism through insistence on the “pluralized concept of masculinities” (Petersen, 2003: 57). The present study seeks to examine the relation of violence to concepts of hegemonic masculinity in contemporary Spanish culture through the medium of film, specifically through a psychological and sociological analysis of the behavior of principal characters. These films’ subscription to a realist aesthetic, and their engagement with social issues facing contemporary Spain, support this approach. Icíar Bollaín and Alicia Luna, for example, carried out extensive research before producing the script for *Te doy mis ojos*, research that included consulting with psychiatrists and lawyers, and attending battered women’s groups (Wheeler, 2012: 470). While critics of Bollaín’s social issue cinema, such as Marina Harss, criticize its “feel of a tragic case study” (Begin, 2009: 32), it is precisely the film’s basis on real experiences that make it so conducive to examining psychological and sociological dynamics. *El Bola* similarly belongs to the genre of *cine comprometido* and attempts to call attention to a contemporary social issue through a realistic, though fictional, representation of the problem (González del Pozo 50). And while *Historias del Kronen* began as a novel devoid of any explicit social agenda, Montxo Armendariz, in his film adaptation, sought specifically to represent the behavior he saw in Spanish youth of the time (Armendariz, 1995).

#### **4. *Historias del Kronen***

The first film, *Historias del Kronen*, appeared in 1995, a year after the publication of José Mañas's highly successful novel by the same name. In both the novel and the film the story is about a group of twenty-something males who meet nightly at the Kronen bar. They drink heavily, do drugs, engage in dangerous and risky behavior, and seek out sexual partners. Carlos, the group's ringleader, is a 21-year-old, upper-middle class college student on summer vacation. Highly influenced by violent films, such as *Henry, A Portrait of a Serial Killer*, Carlos develops his own nihilistic philosophy of power in which strong people supposedly have no need for friendship or affection, are devoid of compassion, and are unconcerned with the future, only the with the instant adrenaline rush that drugs, sex, violence, and life-threatening behavior produce.

Much of the criticism on the book has focused on the supposed apathy and moral indifference of the 1990s Spanish youth, or what some call the "Spanish Generation X," as well as the ubiquity and influence of a global media culture that inundates its viewers with images of gratuitous sex and violence. However, the connection between Carlos and his friend's behavior and what they watch on screen is downplayed in the film. In an interview, the director Montxo Armendáriz claimed that he intentionally chose not to emphasize media violence in the way the book does because it seemed to him of secondary importance:

*Todo lo que había de violencia, sobre todo de morbosidad y de estancamiento en la novela de violencia, a mí personalmente no me interesaba mucho para los personajes. Creo que es algo que está en los jóvenes, que está en la sociedad de hoy día y que los jóvenes lo reflejaban*

*pero fundamentalmente me interesaba el espíritu transgresor del personaje*  
(Armendáriz, 1995).

Thus, in the film, while the media images may serve as a means of sanctioning the violent behavior the young men engage in, it is not its source. The primary motivating factor is Carlos's attempt to gain dominance within the group, and the other young men's desperate efforts to work their way up the pecking order so as to avoid becoming the group's next victim and scapegoat. In other words, what the film displays is the dynamic of hegemonic masculinity where men learn to fear any revelation of emotion or vulnerability, and more specifically homosexual feelings, and to use unprovoked aggression as a means of staving off perceived threats to themselves.

In such an environment, fear is the fulcrum that turns the machine, that is the fear of being revealed as inadequate or feminine before other men, and therefore having to occupy a lower ring in the hierarchy of males. In D. Leverenz's words: men's real fear "is not fear of women but of being ashamed or humiliated in front of other men, or being dominated by stronger men" (Kimmel, 2001: 277). Michael S. Kimmel calls this fear homophobia: "Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men" (2001: 277). Kimmel adds that homophobia "propels men to enact all manner of exaggerated masculine behaviors and attitudes to make sure that no one could possibly get the wrong idea" (2001: 280). In this environment "women and gay men become the 'other' against which heterosexual men project their identities, against whom they stack the decks so as to compete in a situation in which they will always win, so that by suppressing them, men can stake a claim for their own

manhood” (2001: 280). Thus, in the film adaptation of *Historias del Kronen* it is the enactment of hegemonic masculinity in which Carlos uses homophobia as a means of maintaining his position and keeping the other males’ behavior in check.

The principal figures of the Kronen clique are Carlos, Roberto and Pedro (Fierro in the novel). Pedro is the most marginalized member of the group. Not only is he thin and frail, more reticent about engaging in risky behavior, and less successful with women, but also he has diabetes, which has already resulted in the loss of one kidney, and which prevents him from being able to drink alcohol and prove his manliness in this way. Carlos constantly singles Pedro out, making him the main object of his ridicule. He teases him about his supposed homosexuality and masochism, chides him about not engaging in drinking, reminds him of cruel pranks they played on him as a kid, and exploits his desperate desire to fit in by insisting that he engage in dangerous activities to prove his questionable masculinity. An example of this behavior in the film is when Carlos dares his friends to climb up the scaffolding of a building that is partitioned off because it is in the process of being torn down and refurbished. He frames his taunt in the usual masculinist language: “¡A que no hay cojones para entrar ahí!” (Armendáriz, 1995). This comment alone is enough to make them all comply. Carlos then insists that Pedro go first, all the while egging him on by commenting on how slowly he is going: “Date prisa, ¡joder! Que pareces una nena” (Armendáriz, 1995) and reminding the group about the time in school when they left him hanging from the staircase. Another example occurs later on when Carlos forces Pedro to affirm his masculinity after being insulted by another man at the bar. The man challenges Pedro to a test of courage and strength, and Carlos accepts the challenge on Pedro’s behalf: Pedro engages in a competition in which he must hang by his arms from the overpass, with moving cars below his dangling feet; the man who



gives up first and is asked to be pulled up is the loser and, of course, the lesser man. Fortunately, the police arrive on the scene before either has to face the shame of being perceived as a coward or falling to his death. In this scene it is clear that not only is Carlos able to control Pedro's behavior, but also that he is training Pedro to suppress his fear and mask any feelings of vulnerability, since to reveal them would immediately make him the object of Carlos's attacks. In other words, Pedro is learning that risking one's life is preferable to revealing fear and becoming the object of other men's ridicule. Nevertheless, compliance with these exigencies ultimately does not spare Pedro from being the ultimate scapegoat and victim of the group.

Carlos controls Roberto in much the same way even though Roberto occupies a higher place within the group as Carlos's closest "friend." Roberto's struggle is to maintain his position in the group despite the fact that he is a closeted homosexual who is secretly in love with Carlos. While the viewer is not aware of this fact until the end of the film, in retrospect it is clear that Carlos is able to exercise so much control over Roberto because of the latter's intense fear of being revealed as gay. Carlos's taunts about Roberto's suspect sexuality prove to be an effective means of recruiting Roberto to participate in dangerous and immoral activities that go against his own better judgment. One clear example is the scene in which Carlos tries to get Roberto to floor the gas pedal on the M-30, the freeway that encircles Madrid. Since Roberto will not do it, Carlos ridicules Roberto, calling him a *marica*, and then trying to get him to prove himself now by crossing over the center divider and taking the car onto the wrong side of the road into oncoming traffic:

*CARLOS: No tienes cojones, ¿eh? Eres un marica.*

*ROBERTO: ¡Y una mierda! ¡Eso serás tú!*

*CARLOS: ¡A ver! ¡Demuéstramelo! Haz la pirula aquí. Sáltate eso.*

*ROBERTO: Paso de hacer el suicida.*

*CARLOS: ¿Ves como eres un puto marica?*

*ROBERTO: ¡No me llames marica, Joder!*

*CARLOS: ¡Venga, marica, sáltate eso! ¡Haz la pirula! ¡Venga, marica!*

*(Armendáriz, 1995).*

Roberto, out of a profound need to hide his fear, as well as his homosexuality, finally gives in and risks his life, as well as the lives of the other people on the freeway, in order to win Carlos's approval. Later in the bar the story is retold, winning Roberto the admiration of all his peers.

The most revealing and disturbing scene, however, takes place towards the end of the film when Carlos gets Roberto to assist him in Pedro's murder. Pedro invites the Kronen gang over to his house to celebrate his birthday when his parents are out of town. At one point, Carlos and Roberto go outside and engage in sexual play together. Although Carlos initiates the masturbation that brings Roberto to climax, he views it as purely mechanical, and when Roberto leans over to kiss Carlos, Carlos pushes his face away and says: "Eh tío, nada de besos en la boca, coños, son de jalandrones. Lo hemos hecho y ya está. No te pongas raro, ijoder! No pasa nada" (Armendáriz, 1995). Then he kicks him and tells him to go back in the house. Once inside, Carlos enlists Roberto to single out Pedro. Roberto, eager to deflect the attention off of himself and what just happened, follows Carlos's orders and ties Pedro's hands behind

his back so that Carlos can force a bottle of whiskey down Pedro's throat. Pedro quickly goes into shock and dies.

The film, much more so than the novel, implies that Carlos's brutal murder of Pedro has been motivated by Carlos's own feelings of vulnerability produced by a series of recent events: the death of his grandfather (he actually cries in the film when he is alone), his being rejected by his favorite girlfriend, his humiliation at being physically overpowered by two bar bouncers, and his apparent feelings of guilt when he sees that the family maid has been fired for stealing money that he himself actually stole (the novel gives no indication that Carlos feels any true remorse about any of these events). Indeed, Jesús Rodríguez's study (2008) on the film adaptation of the novel focuses primarily on how the character of Carlos is made to evolve in the film in a way he does not in the novel. Yet, regardless of the degree to which Carlos's actions are motivated out of a desire to compensate for his own feelings of weakness, it is clear that in the film Roberto experiences much more profoundly the effects of hegemonic masculinity as it is enacted within the group. Whereas towards the beginning of the film Roberto defends Pedro against Carlos's insistence that Pedro drink ("¡Déjale coño! ¡No insistas! Además lo tiene prohibido" [Armendáriz, 1995]), or against his verbal attacks ("¡Para Carlos, no te pases!" [Armendáriz, 1995]), most likely because he identifies with Pedro in many ways, Roberto ends up actively participating in the aggression that leads to Pedro's murder in order to protect himself now that he has revealed his homosexuality to the group's leader. In other words, he engages in a preemptive strike against another male in the group perceived to be weaker in order to ward off such possible attacks against himself. The revelation of his own homosexuality to Carlos, and Carlos's brutal rejection of him afterwards, lead Roberto

to attempt to recover his favored position within the group by targeting Pedro as a scapegoat. In Robert Spires words:

*The homosexual episode in the garden obviously increased Roberto's insecurity and his emotional dependence on Carlos. Roberto, in addition to being compromised with Carlos, possibly finds it expedient to persecute [Pedro] as a means of keeping the spotlight off himself. He apparently hopes that the group will be satisfied with the presence of only one object being in its constant need to reinforce the center at the expense of someone on the periphery (2005: 493).*

Thus, in the film, Pedro's death demonstrates how unprovoked aggression and the loss of empathy are the consequence of a particular male ethos in which men are constantly made to feel fearful and insecure about their own strength, sexuality, and status vis-à-vis other men. Moreover, as Mathew Marr points out, "Despite the Kronen group's indulgence in homoerotic playfulness—overt homophobia is a core tenet of the clan" (2006: 17). Even if Carlos's character is, as María T. Pao asserts, an aberration (2002: 250), his hold over the group and his ability to lead others down the same path shows how the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity enacted through homophobia allow for people like Carlos to rise to the top and train compassion out of people like Roberto, and even make them accomplices to murder.

#### **4.1. *El Bola***

*El Bola* also deals with the issue of violence and aggression in men as a learned behavior to fend off feelings of vulnerability. The protagonist of the film, the 12-year

old Pablo who is nicknamed El Bola because of the small metal ball he carries around with him at all times, is the victim of brutal physical and psychological abuse by his father. At the same time the peer group to which he belongs has as its leader El Cometa, a bully who controls the others through taunts, teasing, fear, and shame. It is not until a new kid comes to school, Alfredo, that Pablo experiences both genuine friendship and a loving, supportive family environment, and that he finds the courage to see the bullying for what it is and to confront his father, and even denounce him to the police. Thus, like *Historias del Kronen*, *El Bola* shows training in hegemonic masculinity through male peer groups where pecking orders are formed by demonstrations of manliness that require a rejection of all “feminine” traits such as fear, vulnerability, and affectation. It also shows how a subscription to this masculine code can lead to brutal violence in the domestic sphere as well. Yet, in Achero Mañas’s film, this form of violent masculinity is juxtaposed to alternative models that point to more desirable ways of being a man. In this way, the film not only focuses on issues of violence and hegemonic masculinity in two realms—male youth peer groups and the family, thereby making a connection between the two—but also provides an alternative model of being man that allows for the development of an emotional life that provide the psychological defenses needed to stand up to bullies and express emotions rather than turn to aggression as the only “masculine” mode of expression.

The dynamics of Pablo’s peer-group is pivotal to understanding the theme of violence in the film. Just as Carlos is the ringleader of the twenty-something Kronen clan, El Cometa uses intimidation and violent games to control and hierarchize his male peers. Indeed, the film begins with the boys at the train tracks playing a deadly game in order to prove their manliness: two boys must race each other to pick up a bottle placed on the train tracks, shortly before the train passes. If one of the boys

were to trip and fall, or go too slowly, he would be killed by the train. In fact, as we find out later, a year earlier a boy was killed playing the game. In this way both Carlos and El Cometa get their friends to constantly engage in risky behavior out of fear of being revealed as weak. In fact, El Cometa's nickname is an honor bestowed on him for how quickly he races before the trains. This is an example of early training in hegemonic masculinity, a dynamic that Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson call the "culture of cruelty" and which they describe in the following way:

*Beginning around age ten, as a boy approaches puberty, normal cognitive development makes him more aware of himself and his place in the group and raises the stakes in the many diverse competitions that consume boys: who is stronger [...] and who can get the upper hand in teasing verbal combat. A boy's eagerness for autonomy [...] make[s] him a willing recruit into the peer culture. At the same time, the group demands conformity and holds him up to ridicule for any failure to conform. [...] Almost all boys hide their hurt because to admit it appears weak (2000: 73).*

For Kindlon and Thompson (2000), two psychologists who work with adolescent boys, the antidote to this behavior is precisely helping boys develop an emotional awareness that is often squelched by overly oppressive concepts of masculinity. They recommend giving boys "permission to have an internal life, approval for the full range of human emotions, and help in developing an emotional vocabulary so that they may better understand themselves and communicate more effectively with others" (Kindlon and Thompson, 2000: 241). Another important part of this equation is "model[ing] a manhood of emotional attachment" (Kindlon and Thompson, 2000: 254). This is where the figure of the father comes in.

An important part of the film is the contrast between Pablo and Alfredo's home life, and even more specifically their fathers and their relationships with their fathers. According to Santiago Fouz-Hernández "The fatherhood embodied by Alfredo's dad is a positive, modern, and democratic alternative to the old, repressive ways of Pablo's father, which are reminiscent of fascist Spain" (2007: 228). Indeed, Pablo's father, Mariano, assumes the role of the dominating patriarch within the family, insisting that his son obey him and show him respect at all times, and using psychological and physical violence in order to insure he does just that. Even more important to our analysis here, however, is the way each father deals with his own emotions and the way each interacts with his son. Before the viewer witnesses Pablo's father physically beating his son, Pablo's father's own insecurities and their influence in his treatment of his son are apparent. Pablo's father, Mariano, is of a modest economic position. He owns a hardware store and has a stay-at-home wife who cares for his elderly mother, suggesting that they cannot afford to hire anyone to help take care of the mother who obviously is something of a burden on the family. This alone makes him fit the average profile of violent men who are generally of lower socio-economic status (Messerschmidt, 1997: 105-06). When at work in his shop, Pablo's father is obsequious with customers. He also is overly concerned with keeping up appearances. For example, when Mariano tries to touch Pablo affectionately in public and Pablo instinctively moves away, Mariano threatens him for having embarrassed him in public ("Que no me quites la cara y menos delante de la gente, ¿entendido?" [Mañas, 2000]). Also, while he initially tells Pablo he cannot go to the mountains with Alfredo's family, when Alfredo's father approaches him, he says Pablo can go in order to save face. Dealing with a sense of powerlessness and low standing in society, Mariano uses violence against someone less powerful, his 12-year old son, to affirm

his threatened masculinity, a frequent dynamic in domestic abuse: “[I]n those [men] who harbor great personal doubts or strongly negative self-images, or who cannot cope with a daily feeling of powerlessness, violence [...] can become a means of trying to affirm their personal power” (Kaufmann, 1997: 41).

Mariano’s mistreatment of his son, however, is not only a means of feeling more masculine by dominating someone less powerful, but it also the result of his repression of his true feelings. Ingratiating at work and overly concerned about appearances in public, the only space in which Mariano feels comfortable expressing any kind of emotion is in the home. According to Michael Kaufmann, some men’s fear of “emotions and [...] fear of losing control mean that discharge only takes place in a safe situation” (1997: 44). This makes such men feel comfortable discharging emotions only in “the security of interaction with someone who does not represent a psychic threat, who is less socially powerful, probably less physically powerful” (1997: 45). This is clearly the case with Mariano who only lets his guard down at home and especially with his son. Tragically, the only emotion Mariano ever expresses in Pablo’s presence is anger. This is not surprising since: “The failure to find safe avenues of emotional expression and discharge means that a whole range of emotions are transformed into anger and hostility” (1997: 45). A time bomb of repressed, bottled-up feelings, Mariano communicates with his son by giving him commands. Towards the beginning of the film, Pablo comes in the hardware store after school and says hello to his father. Mariano does not return his son’s greeting (“Hola papa.” [Mañas, 2000]) and replies with a command: “Coge la bolsa que hay allí afuera” (Mañas, 2000). As they leave the store he gives his son yet another command: “Esta tarde te cortas el pelo. Pero que te lo corta. No vengas igual. Le pides el dinero a tu madre. ¿Me has oído?” (Mañas, 2000). And, shortly thereafter, at the dinner table, he orders



his son to stop playing with the ball that serves as his good luck charm: “¿Quieres dejarte ya de darle vueltas a la bola y comerte de una vez?” (Mañas, 2000). Then, in a later scene, Mariano makes a feeble attempt to initiate communication with his son by asking him how his day at school was. When the only response he gets is “Bien” and “¿Qué tenía que pasar?” (Mañas, 2000), his father replies with: “No sé, como nunca dices nada” (Mañas, 2000). Yet, it is clear to the viewer, that the person that never makes any honest attempt to communicate is Mariano. This, however, is not the only example of psychological projection (Mariano here accuses his son of something for which he is the most guilty: not communicating). The abuse itself is a form of attacking the vulnerability that Mariano hates in himself. According to Michael Kaufman “The internalized image of the small, boyish self retains a nagging presence in each man’s unconscious [...] so much so that, as adults, men go to war to prove themselves potent, they risk their lives to show they have balls” (1997: 40). Thus, to a certain extent, Mariano’s hatred of his own internal boyish self is taken out on his son, consequently making the violence inflicted on his son a metaphorical representation of the violence he does to himself by trying, and failing, to conform to a masculine ideal.

Alfredo’s father José serves as a marked contrast to Mariano. Several critics “have commented on the progressive version of adult masculinity embodied in the movie’s quintessentially New Man father-figure, the character José” (Marr, 2013: 36). A tattoo artist by profession, José talks openly with his son, displays affection, tells him that he loves him, and includes him in activities with his own friends. He also displays an open attitude about homosexuality, visiting Alfredo’s godfather in the hospital during his battle with the advanced stages of AIDS, thereby showing himself free of the homophobia that is pivotal in the formation of violent forms of masculinity. Indeed

José's demonstrative nature with other men and his openness about homosexuality have made some film critics assert that the film suggests that José might be homosexual despite the fact that there is no overt indication of this (Marr, 2013: 44).

The differences between José and Mariano can be seen in each man's reactions to his son's mischievousness. When the police arrest Pablo and Alfredo for hanging around the train tracks, José picks them up and inquires about what the boys were doing there. Although clearly upset, and skeptical when Alfredo tells him that he did not participate himself (which is in fact true), José tries to reason with his son telling him how devastated the family would be if he were to be killed playing a stupid game, and ends by saying he is telling his son this because he loves him. He also admits his own powerlessness ("O ya vas tú y haces que te salga de los cojones. Que es lo que hemos hecho todos cuando teníamos tu edad" [Mañas, 2000]) and appeals to his son's emotions and reason, rather than assert his dominance and authority over his son.

Afterwards, Pablo goes to José's tattoo parlor and watches José give Alfredo a tattoo. This causes Pablo to return home late. Mariano does not know that his son has been at the train tracks, or that he was arrested by the police, but knows his son was not at school because he was not there when he went to pick him up. When he asks Pablo where he has been and Pablo says he was at school, he immediately accuses his son of lying and without giving him a chance to explain, slaps him across the face. At one point Pablo tries to tell him the truth by saying he was at the train tracks, but when his father asks him why he was there, Pablo does not answer out of fear, and his father accuses him of lying again even though he was trying to tell the truth, obviously in the hope that he could have a conversation with his father like the one

Alfredo had with his. Mariano continues to berate his son at the dinner table, and starts to become physically aggressive. Pablo finally explodes (“¡Hijo de puta! ¡Ojalá te mueras!” [Mañas, 2000]) and spits in his face. Feeling that his authority has been completely undermined, Pablo’s father flies into a rage and severely beats Pablo. As Pablo flees the house thanks to the intervention of a neighbor, Mariano shouts out “¡A ver si tienes cojones para escupirme ahora! (Mañas, 2000),” thereby displaying a certain pride in supposedly having shown his son who is more the man.

There are scenes, however, where José slips into more authoritarian modes of parenting such as when his son asks him why he cannot visit his Godfather Félix in the hospital and José responds with “Ya te lo he dicho. No hagas que te lo vuelva a repetir, icoño!” (Mañas, 2000) or when Alfredo refuses to tell him where Pablo is hiding and José slaps him. But, in both instances, it is clear that this behavior is motivated out of a sense of powerlessness that, in contrast to Mariano, José acknowledges. He does not want his son to visit Félix because he does not want his son to see him in such an appalling state, and in a similar attempt to protect him, he does not want to tell him the reason. But, once Alfredo defies his father’s orders and visits his godfather anyway, he understands his father’s motives and admits that his father was right. And in the case of the slap, not only is it completely ineffective in getting Alfredo to comply (González del Pozo, 2008: 56), but José almost immediately afterwards recognizes that his son was right, and follows Alfredo’s lead and decides to protect Pablo from his own father, even though he risks being charged with kidnapping for doing so. While the director Achero Mañas claims that what he wanted to show with this scene is that: “hay un padre que es capaz de luchar contra la violencia ejercida sobre un menor, pero que él mismo es capaz también de cruzarle la cara a su hijo. Ésta es la clave de la película; es decir, que cualquiera de nosotros está

siempre al límite de entrar en esa dinámica de la violencia” (Gonzalvo, 2001: 11), Marr’s keen analysis of this scene is also illuminating. Marr argues that in this scene José is committing the very sin of omission that he chastised his son for earlier: standing by and doing nothing when morally one is called upon to act (2013: 44-45). Just as José earlier scolds Alfredo for sitting around watching his friends play a deadly game at the train tracks, Alfredo now refuses to allow his father to return Pablo to his own father, who might very well kill him (45). Not only does Alfredo show that he has assimilated the lesson of the “sermon” his father gave him earlier, but also José shows that he is willing to learn from his son, and relinquish in this instance the traditional power hierarchy of father/son. Thus, the juxtaposition of the two fathers’ reactions to their son’s mischievousness and defiance not only make a clear contrast between the two parenting styles, but also of two different types of men: one who will resort to violence to keep intact a sense of dominance at all costs, and another who is more comfortable expressing emotions, vulnerabilities, and even personal wrongness. For this very reason, José does not need to use aggression to feel like a man, and actually is repentant when he does resort to such means.

The contrast of these two fathers and family environments also explains Alfredo’s superior ability to form a genuine friendship and resist bullying as Alfredo’s “genuinely nurturing familial environment provides a kind of *terra firma* from which his character is able to explore adolescent masculinity with an aplomb inaccessible to Pablo as a victim of abuse” (Marr, 2013: 43). Alfredo’s communicative father whose sense of self worth is not dependent on dominance and control, is able to provide his son with the skills needed to stand up to bullying and to build healthy friendships. Indeed Kindlon and Thompson assert that “Boys fortified by emotional awareness and empathy are less likely to inflict hurt on others and more resilient under the pressure of cruelty that

comes their way (2000: 89). Pablo immediately notices that Alfredo is different when he reacts to El Cometa's taunts by pulling away rather than trying to insinuate himself into the group. This leads Pablo to follow him home. The next day Pablo invites him to go to the Feria. When Pablo tells him that El Cometa will be there, Alfredo suggests going to the amusement park instead. This allows the two boys to talk one on one without the pressure of the group. It is during this time that Alfredo lets Pablo know that it is ok to admit feelings of fear and vulnerability with him. They tell each other how afraid they are before one of the rides starts and Pablo confesses that he carries the metal ball around with him for good luck. Also, in one of the scenes at the picnic bench that are sliced between the scenes of the boys on the rides, Alfredo asks Pablo why he did not tell him that one of the rides was making him sick (which led him to throw up afterwards). Pablo admits that it was because he was embarrassed, and Alfredo repeats that he should have told him, again letting him know that he should feel comfortable expressing such feelings with him, and that there is no reason to suffer in silence. This experience is pivotal in establishing the friendship between Alfredo and Pablo. With the pressure of the male peer group removed, for the first time in his life, Pablo is able to let down his emotional guard, open up, and experience true friendship.

Alfredo's emotional fortitude makes him the only boy able to resist El Cometa's bullying even though it makes him the target of ridicule. We see this most clearly at the boys' last gathering at the train tracks. When Alfredo refuses to participate in the game, El Cometa tries to egg him on with an implied accusation of homosexuality:

*OTRO CHICO: Ese tío es un poco raro, ¿no?*

*EL COMETA: Sí es un poco maricón como su padrino.*

*ALFREDO: ¿Decías algo de mi padrino?*

*EL COMETA: Yo no he dicho nada de tu padrino.*

*ALFREDO: Te he oído perfectamente.*

*EL COMETA: Lo único que he dicho es que no tienes cojones para jugar, nada más.*

*ALFREDO: No es que no tenga cojones, es que me parece una gilipollez. ¿Quieres jugar una vez contra mí?*

*EL COMETA: ¿Tú verás lo que haces?*

*ALFREDO: Tranquilo, no pienso hacer nada (Mañas, 2000).*

Just as Carlos uses homophobia to control the behavior of the members of the Kronen clan, here El Cometa uses taunts of homosexuality and weakness (“es un poco maricón como su padrino,” “no tienes cojones”) to get Alfredo to participate in a deadly game. Yet, unlike the other boys, or even the members of the Kronen group, Alfredo finds the courage to risk his masculine image and do what he knows is right. And, after seeing Alfredo’s valiant behavior, and listening to José’s reasons for not wanting his son to join in such activities, Pablo himself comes around: the game that he once described as “alucinante” is now “una gilipollez,” as Alfredo had asserted all along. And just as Alfredo’s behavior has influenced Pablo, it is possible that the two boys’ behavior could have a positive effect on the other boys as well since “even a few boys [can] change the climate dramatically with their decision to resist joining in the teasing or to stand up for a boy under attack” (Kindlon and Thompson, 2000: 76).

Most importantly, the film suggests that Alfredo may save Pablo from following in his own father's footsteps by giving him the courage and emotional strength to resist this training in a violent and repressive form of masculinity.

Thus, *El Bola* presents us with two clearly distinct visions of masculinity. In one model men and boys suppress all feelings of fear and vulnerability and go to all costs to prove themselves and assert their authority. The connection between peer group dynamics and Pablo's father's violent behavior is reinforced when: "Las vías del tren acechando a Pablo se convierten en la imagen que permanece en el espectador, erigiéndose como la alegoría de la violencia y del peligro constante en que vive Bola" (55). However, more than mere allegory, the connection between the game of chicken on the train tracks and the formation of violent men is explained by how early experiences with the "culture of cruelty" make grown men violent. Or, in Matthew Marr's words: "Pablo's father can be seen as embodying a perversely hyperbolic later life-stage version of the brash culture of masculinity evidently brewing amidst the cadre of lads at the tracks" (2013: 42). The other model of masculinity in the film, embodied by José, allows men to express a full range of emotions and to defy the cultural pressures to unnecessarily risk one's safety and integrity in the search for self-validation. The young boy who grows up observing the latter role model, in this case Alfredo, is not only better equipped to deal with bullying and aggression, but is also able to have a positive influence on another boy who is desperately in need of genuine friendship and compassion. Thus, unlike *Historias del Kronen*, *El Bola* presents a viable, alternative concept of masculinity that serves as an antidote to the culture of cruelty and cycles of male violence.

#### **4.2. *Te doy mis ojos***

*Te doy mis ojos* differs from both *Historias del Kronen* and *El Bola* in that it places woman center stage as the principal object of male aggression. While the Kronen clan clearly maintain a condescending view towards women, as do the boys and abusive father in *El Bola*, in Bollaín's film the marital relationship becomes the primary arena in which a middle-class man, deprived of recognition and status outside the home, attempts to assert his dominance. It is precisely "Bollaín's balanced treatment of the abuser" that is "one of the film's strongest features" (Begin, 2010: 32). By emphasizing the social, cultural, and psychological factors that contribute to men's violence against women, the film explores it as a conditioned behavior that society fosters. Moreover, by revealing the way in which this violence is fueled by fear and insecurity, it "subverts the idea of masculine dominance as something positive" (Begin, 2010: 36). While other critics have analyzed the character of Antonio and his resemblance to the profile of the typical perpetuator of domestic abuse, most notably Jacqueline Cruz (2005), the focus here is specifically on how his assimilation of traditional concepts of masculinity turns fear into rage and violence.

Studies on domestic abuse have shown that "men with relatively low incomes, less educated men, and men in low-status jobs [are] significantly more likely than their more privileged counterparts to subscribe to an ideology of familial patriarchy [and are] also more likely to have beaten their wives" (Messerschmidt, 1997: 105-106). These men, who feel belittled and put down by the world at large, often find reassurance in displays of their physical superiority over their wives, and in the respect they claim their wives show them afterwards. Thus, often times, violence against women is not provoked by anything the woman herself does, but rather by an



attack on a man's self-worth outside the home (Messerschmidt, 1997: 102-103). Yet, since for such men, their control over their wives is their primary means of asserting their masculine authority, any threat, perceived or real, to their dominance in the relationship provokes in them extreme bouts of jealousy and rage. Such emotions are often evoked when a wife or partner asserts her independence by pursuing interests, friendships or a career outside the home or when she is suspected of infidelity or intentionally attracting other men's attention (Messerschmidt, 1997: 103).<sup>1</sup>

Antonio, the main character of *Te doy mis ojos*, clearly fits this profile. As a manager of a kitchen appliance store owned by his father, Antonio occupies a lower position on the socio-economic ladder (Cruz, 2005: 71). Not only does he appear to get little satisfaction from his work, but he also feels constantly put down by his family, also his employer. In one particularly telling scene, Antonio's brother insults him in front of family and friends, after Antonio has just spent an entire day helping his brother work on his house. Rather than express his anger at his brother, Antonio clams up, only to take out all his rage later in the presence of his wife. This serves as an example of Maureen Tobin Stanley's assertion that Antonio "is not aggressive toward his boss, nor his brother (with whom he has a very conflicted relationship), nor his clients. Instead, he harms only his wife because there is no social or psychological mechanism in place that effectively deters his aggression" (2012: 108). Antonio also seems to feel inadequate next to John, Pilar's soon-to-be brother-in-law. At Antonio's

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<sup>1</sup> M. J. Rosado Millán explains men's possessiveness and psychological dependence on women in terms of the demands of patriarchy and the need to ascertain paternity: "Para disponer de esta información [sobre la paternidad] de manera fiable, el varón necesitaba dos cosas: saber que la mujer con la que copulaba no era promiscua, y limitar su libertad para que no se fuese. Ambas cosas ya se dieron en las primeras civilizaciones: el control de la sexualidad femenina y la limitación de la autonomía de movimientos de las mujeres. La dependencia sexual de la mujer de un solo hombre, fue llevando a una relación poseída-poseedor que conduciría a la consideración de la mujer como una pertenencia, y como tal, a disponer libremente de ella" (2011: 248-249).

son's birthday party, "[Antonio's] present, a football, is underwhelming in comparison with the expensive PlayStation given by John, Pilar's Scottish brother-in-law" (Wheeler, 2012: 471), and when Pilar tells Antonio she would prefer that her sister Ana not know they met at her (Ana's) apartment to make love, Antonio accuses Pilar of wanting a boyfriend like the one her sister has:

*ANTONIO: ¿Qué quieres un novio inglés como tu hermana? ¿Un novio internacional que hable con acento de payaso? A lo mejor ahora que vives en el centro de Toledo te parece poco que tu marido trabaje vendiendo neveras (Bollaín, 2003).*

Another characteristic of men who commit acts of domestic violence is a male chauvinism that corresponds to hegemonic models of masculinity that, as we saw earlier, "require devaluation of all women in general" (Kimmel, 2001: 272-275). These men's "right" and capacity to harm an "inferior" being gives them a sense of power unattainable to them in other realms in their lives. The dialog among the unrepentant men at the wife-beaters group serves as an example. In the first meeting the men give misogynistic justifications for their behavior. The first thinks this behavior is totally normal, especially since his wife "está histérica perdida" (Bollaín, 2003). The second man to speak, an older man, chimes in to suggest that women bring it on themselves by intentionally provoking men. The third man argues that he has a right to his wife's body, and that if she doesn't respond to his sexual advances after a hard day's work, she has it coming. When the therapist tries to take the conversation in a new direction by asking the group if beating their wives actually solves anything, a member of the group implies that it does because: "la met[e] un guantazo y se queda más suave que un guante" (Bollaín, 2003). Afterwards, Julián, the only apparently

repentant man in the group, admits that that he used to like beating his wife because she seemed to respect him more afterwards, in other words, it restored his feeling of powerfulness. This of course is the reward Antonio receives for this behavior, as will be made evident later in the film. And his subscription to conventional gender roles can be seen in his insistence that all he wants is a “normal” family life, which for him means a submissive wife who stays at home.

Antonio’s adherence to traditional gender roles is also witnessed in his relationship with Pilar. Initially, Pilar stays home and takes care of their son, and Antonio works, serving as the primary provider for the family. Pilar is soft-spoken, submissive, and self-effacing. When the therapist asks Antonio what he likes about Pilar, he says he likes how she moves around the house so quietly and quickly, bringing to mind the movement of a mouse. This repeats a vision of a mousy Pilar that her mother remembers fondly from her wedding day: “tan chica con esa carita de ilusión” (Bollaín, 2003) Antonio, on the other hand, is strong, forceful, and dominating. He is also extremely controlling and jealous. Antonio’s need to dominate, and Pilar’s willingness to submit, leads to an unhealthy lack of personal boundaries in their relationship. Clearly suffering from a degree of narcissism, Antonio “constantly desires to see himself (and his self-worth) reflected in Pilar” (Stanley, 2012: 105). He fails to accept her as her own person with her own needs, a phenomenon made evident in his interpretation of her desire to work at the museum as motivated by her desire to upset him (“Le gusta joderme. Eso es lo que le gusta. Joderme a mí es lo que le gusta” [Bollaín, 2003]). Pilar, on the other hand, initially seems to understand love as a type of surrender. This can be seen in the much commented upon sex scene where Pilar verbally offers Antonio various parts of her body, culminating with her eyes, “te doy mis ojos,” the phrase that serves as the title of the film, and that brings her to

orgasm. As Cruz has observed, Pilar's orgasm is provoked more by her complete surrender to Antonio than by the physical contact (2005: 74) and according to Maureen Tobin Stanley: "[Pilar's] receptiveness must be viewed as a forfeiture of limits, or boundaries. Her reaction is viewed by Antonio as *carte blanche* to do as he pleases, for she is his. It is precisely her unconditional acceptance (hence, lack of limits) that makes possible his dominance over her" (2012: 112-13). As it is Pilar's passive surrender and seeming awe for him that Antonio likes about their relationship, the beginnings of Pilar's attempts to become her own person and assert herself, unsettle the dynamic that was satisfying, although unhealthy, to Antonio.

The film also emphasizes the way society contributes to these problems. The affirmation of hegemonic concepts of masculinity are not only ingrained by the dynamics of the men's group, the patriarchal traditions embraced by Pilar's mother (Thibaudeau, 2008: 241-45), and Western art and history (Beltrán Brotons, 2007; Levine, 2007; Thibaudeau, 2008; Stanley, 2012), but also by archetypal romantic narratives in which the hero is initially mean, selfish, and jealous, and sometimes violent only to be reformed by the heroine at the end of the story. This is in fact the principal plot of most contemporary romance novels, which remains one of the best selling genres on the market even today (Smith, 2010) Women's own subscription to this hackneyed and implausible narrative is seen in Pilar's friends' parody of Lola's reconciliation with her boyfriend. From inside the café the women watch as their friend and her boyfriend make up outside. Although they cannot hear what is being said, they invent the conversation with the clichéd dialog of the apparently reluctant women who is actually eager to accept her partner's promises of reform. After they kiss and make up, one of the women concludes by saying: "Hasta la próxima" (Bollaín, 2003), indicating that this is not really the end, but just part of a continuous

cycle of mistreatment, separation, and reconciliation. It is for this reason that an initially amused Pilar turns serious as she recognizes the similarities with the pattern of her own relationship, and the ways in which she contributes.

As is the case in *El Bola*, the film presents an alternative model of masculinity and heterosexual relationships through John and Ana. John is an example of the new man: he helps with the dishes, accepts Ana's input when making decisions, and is physically affectionate with children.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the relationship between John and Ana is much more egalitarian and, some traditionalists might argue, less romantic. This is made particularly manifest in the contrast between the two couples' marriage proposals and vows. After Juan's birthday party, and Pilar's initial step towards reconciliation with Antonio, Pilar asks Ana how John proposed, Ana replies: "Pues la verdad no me acuerdo así de ningún momento. Pues ha ido saliendo. No sé." Pilar then goes on to talk with great nostalgia about how they gave each other different body parts as gifts: "Y le regalé mi nariz y mis orejas. Decía que eran muy bonitos; y él me regaló sus manos." The viewer later watches this "game" replayed when they meet for a secret rendezvous at her sister's house. The lovemaking scene in which the woman of the "traditional" couple gives her lover her eyes, is followed by the reading of Ana and John's wedding vows which assert that husband and wife "son iguales en deberes y derechos." Also the kilt, or skirt, John sports at his wedding, and Ana's pants, also point to a more egalitarian marriage, as does Ana's earlier refusal to wear the same dress as her mother and sister, who were both physically abused in their marriages.

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<sup>2</sup> The choice to present the liberated man as foreign (Scottish) and the abusive man as Spanish, has been criticized for being simplistic and for erasing the *global* nature of gender violence which cannot simply be explained in terms Spanish men's supposed *machismo* (Begin, 2010; Cruz, 2005; Wheeler, 2012).

Returning to the characteristics of abusive men, studies also point to an emotional self-alienation that inhibits the expression of any other feeling besides anger (Cruz, 2005: 72). Indeed, we see throughout the film how Antonio's feelings remain unacknowledged, and just build up until they explode in fits of rage and violence. Antonio's lack of emotional awareness is best revealed in the group therapy scenes, and the individual sessions Antonio has with his therapist. These scenes are pivotal in understanding how traditional concepts of gender roles contribute to many men's emotional inarticulacy that in turn fuels violent behavior. In the first group therapy scene, it is with great difficulty that the group members try to describe how they feel when they start to get violent, or even a moment when they felt peaceful. When two of the group members try to do the latter, the others immediately ridicule them for these emotional displays, showing how the dynamics within groups of men train men to hide their feelings. In fact, Jungian psychologist James Hollis argues that one of the problems with men's groups is that they can recreate the dynamic that led to their emotional injuries in the first place (1994: 26). When the therapist asks Antonio directly to describe a time in which he felt peaceful, he can say nothing, nor is he able to jot down a single word in his journal on the topic afterwards. Later, when Antonio and Pilar meet at the river for the first time, Antonio tries to win Pilar back by convincing her that he has changed. The proof is the journal he bought to write down his feelings so he can deal with them more effectively. Pilar immediately points out that it is completely empty, a telltale sign that he still remains emotionally unaware. Psychotherapist Robert Hopcke states that: "I find myself often devoting the better part of the first year of therapy with a male patient simply to the development of workable emotional awareness" (1990: 12). Yet, men who commit acts of domestic violence, often hold onto to their emotional alienation from themselves as a form of

self-defense and denial (and it seems unlikely that few such men would seek out a psychologist of their own volition). Antonio's denial is made apparent in his assertion that if he gets back together with Pilar, he will not need to write in this journal at all (which misses the point entirely), and through the projection of his own destructive behavior onto the other men in the group which he refers to as "los tipos esos": "No quiero llegarme a los sesenta y verme con los tipos esos de la terapia, jodidos y amargados, y amargando la vida de sus familias" (Bollaín, 2003).

There is a point where Antonio seems to be making some progress in the one-on-one sessions with his therapist. After not being able to reach Pilar by phone, he goes to the museum only to spy her talking about Titian's *Danäe and the Shower of Gold* and the sexual message and history behind it to a group. Not only is he threatened by his wife's ability to talk articulately and engagingly about art, a form of "high culture" that he knows little to nothing about, but he is thrown into a jealous rage when he sees her openly discussing themes related to sexuality with a group. The fact that other men are looking at his wife and speaking to her about sexual matters and topics that he feels too uneducated to discuss, leaves Antonio feeling threatened, helpless, angry, and violent. But, this time, Antonio recognizes the rage building up. Instead of getting violent with Pilar when she returns home, he calls his therapist. During this session the therapist tells Antonio to write down what goes through his mind when he calls Pilar and she does not answer. He tells him that what really makes him angry are his thoughts, and tries to help him reconstruct them. This makes Antonio aware of his fear that Pilar may be cheating on him, or will do so in the future. Antonio is also made to see that he hates her volunteering at the museum because her intellectual and personal growth make him wonder why she would stay with a guy like him:

*ANTONIO: Algún día se va a encontrar con un gilipollas de esos que van a los museos, icoño! Se van a poner a hablar de sus chorradas y si se enamora de ese, ¿qué? ¿A mí qué cojones me queda?*

*THERAPIST: Antonio, Pilar ha vuelto contigo a casa. ¿Por qué va a querer irse si tratas de cambiar?*

*ANTONIO: Y, ¿por qué cojones va a quedarse? ¿Para qué cojones va a quedarse conmigo? ¿De qué coño puedo hablar con ella? ¿De pedidos? ¿De albaranes? ¿Hablo de eso con ella? ¿Qué cojones le ofrezco yo? Un sueldo de mierda, un piso de mierda, vacaciones con mis padres, eso es lo que le ofrezco, ¿eh? ¿Por qué cojones se va a quedar con un tío como yo? ¿Por qué? (Bollaín, 2003).*

Antonio eyes water up as he holds back the tears.

It is precisely at this point in the film that it becomes clear that Antonio's emotional inarticulacy and violence is a defense against the fear of not measuring up and of being revealed as inadequate. After this session with his counselor Antonio goes home and writes fervently in his journal for the first time, a noteworthy step since he is trying to deal with his feelings rather than lash out. The next morning, Pilar stumbles across his notebook and reads it. This scene then cuts to Pilar's presentation of one of Kadinsky's paintings where she explains the feelings associated with each of the colors on the canvas, finishing by saying purple is fear. The camera then zooms in on the purple/fear, just as in the therapist was able to zoom in on Antonio's fear. And fear becomes the central theme of the very next scene where Pilar tells Antonio when they meet for lunch by the river that she has the possibility of working in Madrid. Antonio,



overwhelmed, starts yelling and asking her: “¿Para qué coño estoy haciendo el gilipollas con un psicólogo, Pilar? ¿Para qué? ¿Para qué? ¿Para que te marches y te busques un trabajo y me dejes aquí tirao escribiendo gilipolleces en un cuaderno como un puto pringao?” (Bollaín, 2003).

At this point Pilar tells Antonio that what he has written in his notebook is not stupid and proceeds to pull the notebook out of her bag and read it out loud. She points out that what he is feeling is fear, a feeling she herself knows well. In fact, this scene is moving in that we see, as Duncan Wheeler has noted, “Their shared feelings of inferiority is partly what binds them” (Wheeler, 2012: 474). Just as Pilar’s identity has been erased by her dysfunctional family and abusive marriage, so have Antonio’s own desires by a family who chose his life’s direction for him, as his psychologist pointed out to him earlier. Pilar then tells Antonio several times “no tengas miedo” (Bollaín, 2003). Paradoxically, while her frail little voice saying “no tengas miedo” contrasts markedly with Antonio’s strong, loud voice, Pilar is the one who is actually brave enough to confront her fears. Antonio, on the other hand, is unable to hear Pilar’s message and violently throws his journal into the river, showing that he has given up on trying to change.

Despite Antonio’s objections, Pilar decides to go to the job interview anyway. As she gets ready a threatened Antonio once again chooses to make his wife the scapegoat for his own fears. He starts to get aggressive by insulting her – he tells her that going to the museum and having people look at her is a type of sexual turn-on for her, indirectly calling her a slut—and he assumes an authoritarian tone (“mírame cuando te hablo” [Bollaín, 2003]). He then proceeds to rip off her dress, pantyhose, and underwear, and lock her outside on the balcony so everyone can see her half

naked. When he lets her back inside the house, he grabs her by the neck in such a way that she is so terrified that she urinates on the floor. While this stops his aggression, he is clearly unrepentant, coldly telling her “Anda. Lávate” (Bollaín, 2003). The type of torture he uses on Pilar in this scene is symbolic in that he seeks to humiliate her precisely through exposure, what he himself fears most, and what Pilar did to him, although in a different way and with good intentions, by reading his diary out loud and identifying his feelings as fear. According to Hollis, men are often awed by women’s willingness to open up about their fear since “For a man to so acknowledge the place of fear in his life is to risk feeling unmanly and to expect shaming by others” (1994: 24). He also argues that men’s own belief that they should not be afraid, makes the revelation of their fears even more threatening (1994: 102). This scene is also important in that it clearly shows how violence is a way to convert his powerlessness and vulnerability (Antonio’s fear that his wife will find him inadequate) into a sense of powerfulness and strength (Antonio’s ability to make his wife cower in his presence), and how society, by promoting the latter quality in men, and rejecting the former, fosters this behavior.

This choice, however, is a choice of evil over personal growth. According to M. Scott Peck evil people “attack others instead of facing their own failures. Spiritual growth requires the acknowledgment of one’s need to grow. If we cannot make that acknowledgement, we have no option except to attempt to eradicate the evidence of our imperfection” (1983: 74). Pilar’s growth exposes Antonio’s failure to do the same. Yet, rather than following her lead by facing his own fears, as she invites him to do, or even simply admitting his own inability to do so, Antonio chooses to scapegoat Pilar. He tries to instill fear in her both to influence her perception of him as strong and powerful, and to dissuade her from pursuing her dreams and inadvertently exposing

his failures. Thus, Antonio's violent attack is intended to prevent both Pilar's growth and his own. Whatever sympathy Antonio's character had evoked in the viewer is lost in this scene where the evil nature of his act erases anything redeeming that he may have done before. It also deconstructs traditional concepts of masculinity by showing that they are really fueled by weakness and enacted by a narcissistic personality willing to maliciously sacrifice others in order to dominate and avoid having to admit to shortcomings.

## 5. Conclusion

It is not only Antonio, however, but all the violent male characters in the films discussed above that fit Peck's psychological definition of "evil." Peck, in fact, cites scapegoating as one of its defining characteristics (1983: 73). Just as Antonio scapegoats Pilar in order to maintain a position of power and to avoid seeing himself and his behavior for what they really are, so too do Roberto in *Historias del*

*Kronen*, and Mariano in *El Bola*. Roberto participates in singling out Pedro for a sacrificial murder in order to deflect attention off himself after having revealed his homosexuality to Carlos. Mariano physically and psychologically abuses his son rather than acknowledge the fears and insecurities that lead him to terrorize a prepubescent boy in order to feel like more of a man. These three Spanish films serve as a reflection of contemporary Western culture and show how S. M. Peck's definition of psychological evil can be related to hegemonic models of masculinity where men are encouraged to use violence against others to hide their fears about not measuring up to an unobtainable concept of masculinity. The ugliness and brutality of the violent

acts perpetuated in these films makes the term “evil” especially apropos and supports Luis Bonino’s assertion that it is precisely concepts of masculinity themselves that are problematic and destructive since they require an affirmation of the self at the expense of the Other (2000: 9).

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