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2023, VOL.15(1)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

p.1 - Chloe Dolgin

DoubleBlind Magazine: Identity Politics and the Psychedelic Principle Guiding Alternative News Coverage

p. 11 - Veronica Lira Ortiz

The use of drugs by Mexican women victims and survivors of gender-based violence as coping mechanisms

p.35 - Carolina Mosquera Vera

Transnational Feminist Solidarity in action: Two moments of mobilization in Łódź, Poland

This unique edition draws inspiration from the symposium, "The Woman, Life, Freedom Uprising" held by the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University on March 3, 2023. We welcomed contributions encompassing the broad spectrum of transnational feminism. The aim of this edition was to offer a stage for showcasing works that highlight feminist concerns. We aspire for this edition to be a catalyst for future discussions on related topics. Our heartfelt thanks go out to all the authors and editors who contributed to this issue.



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## ***DoubleBlind Magazine*: Identity Politics and the Psychedelic Principle Guiding Alternative News Coverage**

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### **Abstract:**

In North America, with psychedelic drugs increasingly piquing people's casual interest, there has been a stark and correlated trend of their integration into mainstream corporate structures. Within this contemporary context, this paper explores the possibility of constructing spaces for alternative discourse about these substances by looking at alternative media source *DoubleBlind Magazine*. It argues that an alternative discourse about psychedelics means adopting a feminist approach that adequately accounts for the embodied experiences of marginalized people and their unique experiences of the drugs. Linda Martín Alcoff contends that to achieve freedom, phenomenological identity politics must be included and considered. This paper links Martín Alcoff's ideas to the principle of "interconnectedness" - a value that emerges from 1960s psychedelic counterculture and a major noted effect of many psychedelic drug experiences. This principle is a good way to understand alternative magazine and online news blog *DoubleBlind's* progressive and feminist coverage of today's psychedelic movement. This interconnectedness between oneself and others is an important aspect of the psychedelic experience for many and guides what the magazine's journalism and media coverage of the drugs intends to look like: anti-hierarchical, inclusive, and truly respectful of all people choosing to take psychedelic drugs.

### **Keywords:**

Psychedelic Drugs, Resistance, Alternative Media, Interconnectedness, Identity Politics

In her book *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* (2005), Linda Martín Alcoff considers the importance of accounting for identity politics in order to foster a “free” society. She uses a feminist phenomenological framework to explain her own theoretical understanding of identity politics. She quotes Toni Morrison, asking: “how to be free *and* situated?” (2005, p. 84). For Martín Alcoff, selves are lived experiences of being in the world that exist the way they do *because* of their particular raced and gendered identities. She reminds us that selves are always necessarily relational and contextual. This means that they are always part of a collective of other respectively embodied selves that make up our shared world. In this framework, identity politics require fully accounting for the various ways in which selves are embodied through their specific identities, and how they can be seen as an interconnected totality of these experiences.

This paper argues that Martín Alcoff’s theorization of identity politics as a collective of embodied selves is at the base of what I want to call the “principle of psychedelics:” interconnectedness. This principle is a value that hails from 1960s psychedelic counterculture and persists as a major noted effect of many people’s contemporary psychedelic drug experiences. This paper contends that this specific “interconnectedness,” in relation to Martín Alcoff, is a good way to understand alternative magazine and online news outlet *DoubleBlind*’s approach to covering today’s psychedelic news. Through its engagement with the discourse on psychedelics in popular culture, *DoubleBlind* is able to effectively construct an inherently feminist, alternative media space to mainstream news coverage.

This paper utilizes critical discourse analysis as a way to explore articles published by *DoubleBlind*, as well as some of its peripheral media, such as conference presentations and explanatory website content. This methodology helps to make use of a collection of textual evidence of shifting cultural practices in a contemporary context. It has as its main focus the investigation of the relationship between dominant power and its resistant discourses (Jäger, p.5). This means understanding “discourse” as broader than simply the written word, but rather as circulating through all areas of culture and society. Indeed, Siegfried Jäger reminds us that “discourse as a whole is a regulating body; it forms consciousness” (p. 4).

### **What is *DoubleBlind*?**

*DoubleBlind Magazine* is an alternative publication that focuses on covering psychedelic drugs in the current “psychedelic renaissance.” It is released biannually in print and also maintains an active online news blog of articles related to psychedelics. *DoubleBlind* is explicit about its mission: to account for and include the voices of those

who are otherwise silenced by both mainstream media coverage and the psychedelic community itself. This means paying particular and strategic attention to the specific experiences of women, BIPOC, queer folk and Indigenous peoples. *DoubleBlind*, as an alternative media project responding to the systematically exclusionary power structure in which it operates, seeks to redirect the contemporary discourse about psychedelics in order to ensure that all are truly accounted for.

### **“The Principle of Psychedelics”: Interconnectedness**

The feeling of “interconnectedness” was commonly discussed during first wave psychedelic research in the 1950s and 1960s by people like Timothy Leary, Aldous Huxley, and Terrence McKenna, among many others. It is equivalent to “oneness,” another term frequently used by psychedelic movements. In his popular book *How to Change your Mind*, Michael Pollan quotes a neuroscientist who explains that taking psychedelics can be like “shaking the snow globe” that is one’s brain (2018, p. 15). This shaking up of “regular” consciousness has been found sometimes to support and facilitate a general increase in feelings of relatedness to oneself, to nature, and to others. Ultimately, psychedelics have been credited with creating an embodied and affective sense of egalitarian “oneness” or “interconnectedness” between oneself and the world (Pollan, 2018, p. 271).

In a *DoubleBlind* article about Black Lives Matter (BLM), Madison Margolin (a co-founder of *DoubleBlind*) argues that “the principle of oneness [...] is among the criteria that scientists use to qualify the ‘mystical experience’ that may be occasioned by entheogens [psychedelics]” (Margolin, 2020b, para. 1). This principle of anti-hierarchical interconnectedness between oneself and others seems to be an important aspect of many people’s psychedelic experiences. I contend that this principle is what guides *DoubleBlind*’s view of how journalism and media coverage should be approached with respect to psychedelics today: as anti-hierarchical, inclusive, and respectful of all people impacted by psychedelic drugs. This is in line with the way in which psychedelic drugs themselves can hold the power of showing their users that the world is fundamentally interconnected.

### **Martín Alcoff’s Feminist Phenomenological Argument**

Interconnectedness can be related to Martín Alcoff’s theory of identity politics and what it is to exist as a human with a marginalized, visible identity. Martín Alcoff contends that the only way to forge a societal path towards true freedom is to account for identity politics in a *real* way. She uses a phenomenological framework, based particularly on Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s thought, in order to



understand people's individual identities as embodied and lived. These selves are specific modes of being in the world, to which race and gender are fundamental. She quotes Heidegger to say that "the knower's very embeddedness in the world with its concerns and aims, reveals the world to us" (2005, p. 94). As such, there is no experiencing or understanding the world outside the lens of one's marginalized identity. We are constructed by and actively living through our identities.

She notes that based on this feminist phenomenological account, these identities are always already attached to the world from which they hail. Subjectivity "cannot be theorized apart from its lived, embodied experience" (2005, p. 11) which is then always in relation to others, as a part of a collective. The self depends on others in order to get a sense of itself in the world. This collection of identities both hails from and builds on the world we experience. This totality makes up our shared world, and necessarily includes all these lived, embodied experiences. True individual agency and freedom, then, do not require separation or independence from others, but quite the opposite - the self *needs* interdependence in order to be a full self.

Martín Alcoff highlights pertinently that "the road to freedom comes through a *careful* exploration of identity" (2005, p. 5). The way to incorporate these identity politics in order to begin to forge a free world is to account for different kinds of selves in a thorough and legitimate way. This must be done by paying genuine attention to their embodied and varied experiences, and the ways in which those experiences are interconnected. *DoubleBlind* operates by incorporating this version of interconnectedness to psychedelic drugs and their controversial reputation. In this way, it fully honours different selves and their different experiences. The magazine sees that to fully understand an issue, one must account for all experiences, as society is an interconnected collective of relational selves. Ultimately, *DoubleBlind's* commitment creates a truly feminist alternative space, as it positions the community anew in order to forge a discourse around psychedelics that is "free" in the phenomenological way in which Martín Alcoff contends.

### **DoubleBlind's Commitment to Interconnectedness**

Activist and artist Camille Barton is quoted in a *DoubleBlind* article on BLM saying that psychedelic communities' suggestion that "we're all one" has historically allowed these communities to avoid talking about differences between people or acknowledging systemic violence and injustice towards those who are marginalized (Margolin, 2020b, para. 9). The idea of interconnectedness, as mobilized by *DoubleBlind*, is instead a call to action to actually see clearly the embodiment and uniqueness of each person's experience in the world, and to understand that these

embodied experiences are all interconnected. So, they must be properly accounted for if one wants to provide a full picture of society. As such, in the “about” page on the website, Margolin and Hartman (co-founders and editors) make clear that “our stories strive to reach everyone touched by psychedelics, not just the loudest or most influential voices” (para. 13).

### ***Differing Experiences on Drugs***

*DoubleBlind*’s consideration for many embodied selves means that it is interested in accounting for the ways in which people with marginalized identities are excluded from both the psychedelic community and the psychedelic experience itself. The publication strategically foregrounds women’s voices, BIPOC voices, voices of the LGBTQI+ community, and those of North and South American Indigenous communities. *DoubleBlind*’s articles also regularly discuss how systemic racism and violence affect the psychedelic community’s practices. And, the magazine prioritizes speaking about psychedelic experiences that are particular to specific groups. For example, there are *DoubleBlind* articles published about the need to address specific traumas unique to some people’s identities in today’s context, the benefits psychedelics can provide to comfortable identity-formation for trans folk, and the many - often erased - Indigenous wisdoms at the base of the psychedelic movement. Indeed, *DoubleBlind* addresses and criticizes the issues within the psychedelic community with respect to identity politics. At a conference in 2020, Shelby Hartman announced that *DoubleBlind* seeks to expand the psychedelic community “beyond the interest in educated white men and their experiences.”

The magazine also frequently focuses on the experiences of the LGBTQI+ community with respect to psychedelic drugs. It has published many accounts of the specific ways in which psychedelics have helped and/or complicated gender identities. There are three profiles published on trans and nonbinary people who have found the courage to embrace their identities through psychedelics, as well as articles about psychedelics being helpful in the process of accepting one’s gender fluidity. Further, in an article about queer people’s access to psychedelic therapy, author Shelby Hartman explicitly discusses marginalization and exclusion of queer communities in psychedelic research (Hartman, 2019). She highlights the ways in which psychedelic therapy’s structure (especially the genders of the researchers) has been largely unhelpful and has never been tailored to the queer community.

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### ***Differing Experiences with Drugs***

*DoubleBlind* addresses this trend of exclusion within the psychedelic community head-on and seeks to bring its readers' attention towards this issue of erasure. In an article on cacao ceremonies, the author interviews Dr. Jamilah George who notes that "there's this painful, deep-seated legacy of theft, and we don't talk about it. It's uncomfortable. And so we just kind of try to pretend like it hasn't happened" (Wilcox, 2020, para. 38). In fact, *DoubleBlind* has published eleven features about Indigenous communities and sacred plant medicines in their printed magazines so far (there are eight issues), and far more on the online blog.

A specific problem for many North and South American Indigenous communities is that the mainstreaming of psychedelic drugs has also legally impacted Indigenous communities in a concrete way. The criminalization of psychedelic substances has historically created massive roadblocks for these communities' use of their own ancient and sacred medicines. In another *DoubleBlind* article, anthropologist Bia Labate asks: "If psychedelics are to become more mainstream, how can the space remain, or rather become increasingly accessible to, those who have been operating in it from the get-go?" (Margolin, 2020a, para. 2). The article, and the magazine more broadly, regularly demand that the media space take accountability for the ways in which the seizure of these countercultural substances within capitalism affect those with less power.

*DoubleBlind* has also paid special attention to the intersections between the psychedelic community and systemic racism, especially in light of the BLM movement. The "editor's letter" for the third publication focused on how to acknowledge one's internalized racism. The magazine has published many features on particular Black folk who have experienced specific, embodied mental health benefits through the use of psychedelics. *DoubleBlind* routinely notes how psychedelics can help different people in different ways, and repeatedly acknowledges that when a group experiences disproportionate levels of trauma, their psychedelic experiences will necessarily differ. It is also important for the magazine to highlight that visible minorities experience particular stigmatization, marginalization, and incarceration if they choose to use the drugs. As a result of a long history of targeting, drugs in North American society are commonly viewed in a different light when they are associated with people of colour. In fact, *DoubleBlind* has included a number of features on the disproportionate effects of the War on Drugs on people of colour, as well as the specific stigma associated with their use of psychedelics.



Lastly, *DoubleBlind* is explicit about the erasure of women and their experiences in the psychedelic community and media coverage of psychedelics over decades. For example, the magazine has published an account of one woman's specific use of psychedelics to come to terms with her sexual abuse (Thomas, 2020). It also published two articles outlining the many women in the psychedelic movement who have made important strides but are unacknowledged or overshadowed by white men in the subsequent coverage and history (Janikian, 2019, Margolin, 2022). Indeed, psychedelic movements are too often associated only with the white men who champion them. In an effort to include perspectives about women and psychedelics directly from embodied experiences, *DoubleBlind's* contributing writers themselves are also generally people who identify as women, BIPOC people, or members of the LGBTQI+ community. The magazine operates out of a philosophical framework that establishes that all identities are fundamentally embodied, and that their particular lived experiences within a collective of identities change both their experiences of psychedelics and their specific places in the psychedelic community. In a real and full way, *DoubleBlind* seeks to include the embodied experiences of members of the psychedelic community in order to forge a space that is free, inclusive, and interconnected.

### **DoubleBlind as an Alternative Feminist Space of Resistance**

*DoubleBlind's* commitment to interconnected identity politics in the way in which Martín Alcoff describes allows the publication a way to seize control of the reins of some of the contemporary discourse surrounding psychedelics. *DoubleBlind's* ethos draws from the principle of interconnectedness that permeates many accounts of psychedelic experiences, especially those hailing from the psychedelic counterculture of the 1960s. Indeed, inclusivity, respect, and a real account of varied embodied selves can build alternative media spaces of discourse and community for people interested in psychedelics. This interconnectedness guides *DoubleBlind's* ability to construct journalistic coverage of the modern psychedelic context that is a genuinely alternative space - a space of resistance. Of course, the people behind *DoubleBlind* are not quiet or subtle about their hope that psychedelics will eventually become legalized, accessible, safe, and destigmatized. But, they champion this reality on their own terms. In this way, a philosophy of interconnectedness, rooted in the effects of experiences of psychedelic drugs themselves, is mobilized by *DoubleBlind* as a means of feminist, embodied resistance.

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## **The use of drugs by Mexican women victims and survivors of gender-based violence as coping mechanisms**

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### **Abstract:**

This research aims to explore the relationship between gender-based violence (GbV) and the use of drugs, medicines, or other substances as coping mechanisms for traumatic experiences. The author conducted a survey with 70 women and non-binary individuals living in Mexico or Mexicans living abroad who have experienced GbV at least once in their lifetime. The sample was limited to social media users with internet access. The research revealed that GbV is a widespread problem in Mexico, with cismen being the main perpetrators. Participants reported high levels of sexual violence, and that physical and psychological violence has increased over generations. Alcohol was the preferred drug for all age groups, and older age groups reported more non-drug coping mechanisms, such as talking to friends or family. Psychological therapy was most utilized by women aged 26-45. The study suggests that gender violence in Mexico is linked to gender inequality, discrimination, and lack of access to justice and medical care for victims and survivors. The findings may inform Mexican policymakers and institutions to adopt measures to prevent negative consequences arising from drug use in GbV victims and provide accessible coping mechanisms for victims and survivors.

### **Keywords:**

gender-based violence, drug use, coping mechanism, calm-inducing mechanism



Media serves as a reflective device, mirroring real-world experiences and creating expectations and perceptions. Sensible topics like gender-based violence and drug consumption are also portrayed on media - whether by dramatizing the lives of people who have been subject to violence, normalizing the consumption of drugs, or creating awareness of specific situations. Gender-based violence (GbV) is a violation of human rights that disproportionately affects women and manifests itself in various forms, including but not limited to physical, psychological, emotional, economic and sexual violence (United Nations Population Fund, n.d.). It can further be defined as “any interpersonal, organizational, or politically oriented violation perpetrated against people due to their gender identity, sexual orientation, or location in the hierarchy of male-dominated social systems such as families, military organizations, or the labour force” (O’Toole et al., 2007, xvii). In Mexico, GbV is defined under the General Law for Women to Access a Life Free of Violence as “any action or omission, based on their gender, that causes psychological, physical, patrimonial, economic, sexual harm or suffering, or death, both in the private and public spheres” (Cámara de Diputados H. Congreso de la Unión, 2021). The Global South is disproportionately affected by GbV, with higher rates of violence against women and LGBTQI+ individuals.

GbV can lead victims, recurring or potential, and survivors to change their behavior, spark specific bodily consequences and usher to the consumption of substances. A growing body of research suggests that drugs may be used as a coping mechanism by individuals who have experienced GbV (Pérez Tarrés et al., 2017). This statement may be especially true for individuals who have experienced trauma, as substance use can temporarily escape the negative emotions and stress associated with trauma. Despite the increased research, most literature on the relationship between substance or drug use and gender violence has focused on specific causes such as post-traumatic disorder (PTSD) or other anxiety disorders (Cortina and Kubiak, 2006). Likewise, research has been chiefly conducted without participants' input and relied on state-computed surveys or publicly gathered data rather than approaching research subjects directly. For example, in their 2015 research, Walsh et al. highlighted the lack of research and information on holistic post-GbV experiences in the US. They state that the reactions and medical disorders of GbV victims have mainly been studied in specific time frames “rather than assessing lifetime sufferings of gender-based violence” (Walsh et al., 2015, p. 7)

This paper aims to understand the relationship between experiences of gender violence and the use of drugs by Mexican women and non-binary people who have experienced GbV. Specifically, I sought to answer the question, *what is the relationship between substance use – including legal and illegal drugs – and trauma*

*coping in women and non-binary victims of gender violence?* Drugs will be understood as any substance, legal or illegal, that has psychological or physical effects when entering the body. Including but not limited to alcohol, tobacco, tranquillizers, analgesics, cannabis, etc.

The subjects of this research were Mexican women and non-binary people living in Mexico and abroad, and foreigners who have lived in Mexico for at least two years. As a Mexican woman, survivor of GbV, and feminist researcher, I chose to work with individuals sharing my context, as gender violence has specific cultural and contextual factors that shape the risks of suffering it and influence its recognition and attention. (Carlson et al., 2019; Orozco et al., 2012; Pick et al., 2006). I chose women and non-binary people as they are disproportionately impacted by violence at times have little agency over the bodily consequences of GbV (Comité para la Eliminación de la Discriminación contra la Mujer, 2017; ONU Mujeres, 2019; Pemberton & Loeb, 2020) Dunn (2005) remarks that victims are presented as trapped and survivors as active decision-makers, whose characterization when suffering from GbV is usually influenced by contextual implications in which voices problematize the so-called “victim identity” (p.2). Thus, they are sometimes not free to independently decide how to cope and what to consume due to these experiences.

## **Methodology and Research Design**

### **Surveys in feminist research**

There is no legitimate form or ‘distinctive feminist method of research’. Feminist research can be done through various methods and approaches (Harding, 1987). Quantitative methods such as online surveys can be an effective tool for conducting feminist research, particularly when exploring sensitive topics such as GbV. When designing an online survey as a feminist research tool, it is essential to prioritize the safety and well-being of participants. In the case of this research, an informed consent procedure was included at the beginning of the questionnaire, which allowed participants to remain anonymous, as well as a note stating that they could stop answering the survey at any time or choose not to send it, due to the trauma-related nature of the topic.

According to Miner et al. (2014), quantitative methods can be helpful in feminist research for understanding specific experiences or behaviours in a population – in this case, women and non-binary individuals – to create social changes that benefit them. Quantitative methods, when applied to social sciences research, have a statistical advantage which allows information easier to report to a

broader public who may or may not be familiar with feminist topics (Miner et al., 2012). The ‘simplicity’ of number-based or statistical research can be translated into policy-making (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991).

Furthermore, according to Harding (1987), any source of feminist research must “locate the researcher in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter” (p.8). By utilizing this quantitative method, as a researcher, I looked back to myself as both an intersectional feminist and a survivor of GbV when creating the questions and analyzing the answers from a feminist perspective. I attempted to do this by using gender-inclusive language, trying to avoid gender bias through language or the research design itself. Moreover, throughout the research, I recognized my power and privilege as a researcher and aimed to conduct the study through feminist ethics and reflexivity, which allow for a transformative view of transnational feminism and highlight the diverse oppressions and intersections depending on our contexts (Burman, 2006; Herr, 2014; Pillow, 2003; Warner 2009). Reflexivity encourages researchers to reflect on their actions, and their effects, contributing to a more effective understanding of research dynamics (Warner, 2009).

### ***Research design***

An online survey was distributed amongst Mexican women (including trans women) and non-binary people who had suffered from GbV at least once. The respondents were women and non-binary people who are Mexicans or foreigners who had lived two years or more in Mexico and who have suffered from any form of GbV. The gender of participants and experiencing some type of violence were the primary requisites for answering the survey.

According to the Mexican National Secretariat for Public Security, until September 2022, at least 500,000 women in Mexico had reported being victims or survivors of gender violence (Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, 2022). Considering this number, a confidence level of 95% and a 5% margin of error, the sample size needed for an accurate representation of the population is 385 respondents. However, this sample size was not considered due to the nature of this paper and other resource constraints. The results and their analysis correspond to 70 respondents from various states in Mexico and abroad.

The survey included 16 questions regarding GbV experience, coping mechanisms, substance consumption, and anonymous demographic details. The survey created for this research was distributed via the researcher’s social media channels (Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp) with a snowballing distribution

method. The survey was open for answers for five days in December 2022 due to time constraints and to have an increased response rate – which is usually heightened by creating a sense of urgency to keep participants focused and motivated rather than allowing them to procrastinate. This distribution method in feminist research can allow for counter-narratives and sensitive experiences to be told as it allows for a comfortable and trusted means of sharing information (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Cohen & Arieli, 2011; Woodley & Lockard, 2016).

The overall research design for this study was based on multiple government- and independent-led studies on gender violence, such as the Methodological manual for the EU survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of interpersonal violence (Paats & Vujackov, 2021).

### **Limitations**

Working with GbV victims or survivors can lead to triggering thoughts or physical responses (Aubert & Flecha, 2021; Navarro et al., 2020). To avoid re-victimization, clarify research intentions, and communicate effectively with the participants, the survey utilized neutral and straightforward language. It included definitions of key concepts including *gender-based violence*, the types of violence, and *drugs and substances*. Additionally, a brief paragraph containing a trigger warning was included at the beginning of the survey and in some of the most sensitive questions. The definition of GbV and examples were included in the survey but not mentioned in the distribution posts to make them easier to share and disseminate. A limitation that this may have caused upon the research is that some social media users may not regard their personal experiences as violent or under the different categorizations of GbV and thus chose not to participate.

Furthermore, another limitation to this methodology and its application, is that GbV experiences are personal and usually traumatic. It may have been the case that only a limited number of people chose to participate in the online study and share their experiences due to its potential consequences on their mental or emotional well-being. The questions may also trigger memories or sensations of fear or trauma but without any other mechanism in place to follow up with people who experienced this, it is difficult to provide better attention and care. This is a key improvement for future research on the topic when using quantitative methods for data collection.

## **Theoretical and Contextual Frameworks**

### ***Feminism, the Body, and Trauma***

The intersection of feminism and trauma is a critical area of exploration in the understanding of women's bodies and their experiences with violence. Feminism acknowledges the diverse experiences of women, considering factors like age, race, class, and sexuality, which can intersect with trauma in unique ways (Creek & Dunn, 2011; Crenshaw, 1991; López, 2013). Longhurst (1997) states, "It is vital to understand bodily experience to understand people's relationships with physical and social environments" (p. 486). The body perceives, mediates, and manifests experiences, causing the self to evolve and develop. Feminist scholarship explores the body and its lived experiences to provide critical insights into social phenomena and challenges the passive portrayal of women and queer bodies. (Buckingham & Degen, 2012; Longhurst & Johnston, 2008; Mansfield, 2008).

Moreover, feminist thinking emphasizes the empowerment, agency, and accompaniment of victims and survivors, striving to create safe spaces, resources, and networks for healing and recovery (Harding, 2020). Trauma healing, however, is not linear and past experiences may have consequences years after the offence occurred (Etherington, 2003; Herman, 1998). The persistent emotions and sensations arising from acts of GbV not only indicate the individual trauma that can affect those involved but point to a broader societal wound that has yet to receive proper healing (Etherington, 2003).

### ***Gender-based Violence in Mexico***

Gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and girls and can take many forms, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. It is often rooted in gender inequality and discrimination and can be used to maintain power imbalances between men and women and gender dissidents. GbV is a severe human rights violation and a public health issue that has far-reaching consequences for individuals, families, and communities (Walsh et al, 2015; United Nations Population Fund, 2013). In the past few years, Mexico has seen a dramatic increase in gender violence (INEGI, 2022; Pérez, 2023). In Mexico, research has shown that young women are particularly vulnerable to gender violence, with studies indicating high rates of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse among this population (Romero Mendoza et al., 2005).

Gender violence in any form is rooted in the power inequalities between men and women and mainly occurs through "direct physical, sexual, and psychological violence against women and girls by men" (Tang, 2021). Gender violence in Mexico is not an isolated problem but is linked to a series of factors, such as gender inequality, gender discrimination, and lack of access to justice services and medical care for victims and survivors (Ramírez Velázquez et al., 2020; Segato, R. 2016; Silva et al.,



2019). Its pervasiveness can also be related to the normalization of harmful attitudes on media and social media productions (Cherry, 202; INCB, 2021).

According to the 2021 National Survey on Home Dynamics (ENDIREH) published by the INEGI, in Mexico, 70% of women aged 15 years and over have experienced gender violence at least once. While 50% of Mexican women over 15 years reported having suffered some type of sexual violence in their lives, 98% of victims or survivors did not immediately report the crimes committed against them (INEGI, 2022; México Evalúa, 2022). Despite GbV being recognized as one of Mexico's most severe social problems, it seems almost impossible to accurately summarise the gender violence situation in Mexico, as the issue has a long and complex history in the country, and there is a lack of reliable and comprehensive data on the topic (García-Manso & Barbosa, 2019; Ramírez Velázquez et al., 2020; Sánchez de los Monteros Arriaga, 2020). Most governmental and academic research on GbV excludes the non-binary and trans population, creating a representation gap that can leave these populations ostracised from any governmental data and policies. For instance, in the glossary and methodology for the ENDIREH surveys, the INEGI (2021) does not define the term "woman", nor includes "non-binary" as part of the gendered divisions. The only definitions for women are dedicated to their civil status.

### ***Drug consumption in women and non-binary in Mexico***

There is an intricate relationship between the use of drugs and media and two of its components are relevant to understand the impact of this research. The first is the portrayal of women consuming drugs. The second is the influence media can directly pose on drug consumption, particularly when utilized as coping mechanisms. On the first component, women consuming or abusing substances are usually portrayed as evil, lost, helpless, or as someone lacking from self-control (Belinky, 2015; Boyd, 2002; Medeiros et al., 2017). These portrayals create social narratives about who are the people driven to substance use and further stigmatize the reasons behind it. Regarding the impact of media on drug consumption, according to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), exposure to social media, especially among young people, is increasingly linked to increased illicit drug consumption (INCB, 2021). The INCB noted that social media platforms glamorize negative behaviors associated with controlled substance use and as such can enable the purchase of illegal drugs.

Drug consumption among women in Mexico is a significant public health concern. A report by the Secretariat of Health and the National Institute of Psychiatry "Ramón de la Fuente" found that the prevalence of illicit drug use among women in Mexico is also high, with about 20% of women reporting lifetime use of illegal

substances (Secretaría de Salud & Instituto Nacional de Psiquiatría "Ramón de la Fuente", 2018). Moreover, although the consumption of legal drugs such as tranquilizers and opioids by women – substances that regularly do not present significant prevalence in studies such as national surveys or reports of the demand for treatment – were respectively the 4th and 5th most used drugs in Mexico, according to the 2021 National Report of Mental Health and Substance Consumption published by the Mexican Observatory of Mental Health and Psychoactive Substances (CONADIC, 2021).

A complex relationship exists between substance or drug use in women and gender violence. Gender violence, including physical and sexual abuse, can lead to substance use as a coping mechanism for the trauma and stress experienced (Liebschutz et al., 2002; Logan et al., 2002; Macy & Goodbourn, 2012). For example, women with a history of physical or sexual abuse were more likely to develop substance use disorders compared to women without such a history (Liebschutz et al., 2002). Women who experience intimate partner violence victimization are more likely to struggle with substance abuse problems than are women who do not share it (Macy & Goodbourn, 2012) and are five times more likely to use drugs than the general population (Logan et al., 2002). A study by Pérez and colleagues (2019) found that substance use was a common coping strategy among Mexican women who had experienced domestic violence, with over half of the sample in their research reporting alcohol use as a means of coping with the traumatic events they had experienced.

It is essential to mention that existent literature on drug use by non-binary victims or survivors of GbV is limited (Montanari, 2023). A 2021 report by the Ibero-American Network of NGOs Working Against Drugs and Addictions (RIOD) calls upon researchers and organizations to shed light on the experiences of non-binary and LGBTQI+ individuals through effective data disaggregation and participant labelling that recognizes gender and sexual diversity. An example of this approach can be found in a study conducted in Chile, which explored the relationship between mental health and drug consumption. This study concluded that non-binary individuals exhibited higher rates of alcohol and marijuana use compared to cisgender men and women participants, and similar rates to those of transgender women (Guzmán-González et al., 2020). These results may suggest that systemic factors, discrimination, and violence influence substance use among non-binary and transgender individuals (Montanari, 2023). However, it is essential to mention that this study does not explicitly demonstrate a causal link between GbV and substance use in non-binary participants. Therefore, this presents an intriguing avenue for

future research in the region, particularly concerning the non-binary population in Mexico.

## Findings and discussion

### *Participant demographics*

Most respondents self-identified as women, while only four identified themselves as non-binary. Around 76% (N= 70) of the participants were born in Mexico and currently live there, while 21.4% are Mexicans living abroad, and only 3% are foreigners living in Mexico. The states with the highest number of participants were Mexico City (40%) and the State of Mexico (24%).



Figure 1: Heatmap locating participants currently living in Mexico.

Regarding the age of participants, 56% of them were aged between 26 and 35 years old, 17% were over 45, 14% were between 15 and 25 years old, and 13% were between 36 and 45 years old. The age group with the most responses also corresponds to the researcher's age group.

Likewise, the fact that most responses came from women and non-binaries in their 20s - 30s may be indicative of their active participation in the 2000s and 2010s feminist movements in Mexico, in which they were highly vocal about issues of gender violence and trickled down their demands to younger generations (Álvarez, 2020; Phillips, 2019).

### *Gender violence*

Results showed that over 70% of participants had suffered from GbV more than three times. Three of the four non-binary respondents stated they had suffered from GbV more than ten times. These answers may indicate the tendency of rising GbV reports in Mexico, as noted by official data (INEGI, 2022). In the following question on prevalent types of GbV, participants were given the option to choose more than one type of violence to understand further not only which had been their most experienced GbV but also to show how individuals may suffer from a myriad of violence throughout their lives.

The most common type of violence was emotional GbV, with 79% (N=70) of participants. All non-binary participants stated they had suffered from emotional violence. Emotional gender violence includes behaviours such as psychological abuse, manipulation, and control, which can have severe consequences for the mental health and well-being of victims, such as suffering from depression and anxiety (Nowotny & Graves, 2013).

The second most reported violence was psychological, with 70%. All non-binary respondents stated they had suffered from psychological violence. Until 2021, psychological violence remained the most prevalent among Mexican women (INEGI, 2022). According to the 2021 National Survey on Home Dynamics (ENDIREH) published by the INEGI, 52% of women reported having suffered from psychological violence, followed by sexual violence (50%). Notably these statistics and the results of this research may not reflect the full extent of the problem, as many cases of psychological gender violence may go unreported.

Survey results indicated that the third most common GbV was sexual violence, with 66% (N= 70) of participants. All non-binary participants reported they had suffered from sexual violence. This type of violence in Mexico extends beyond the physical and includes sexual and verbal harassment. Sexual harassment may have similar psychological consequences to other types of violence, such as rape, on victims and survivors (Quinna, 1990; Schiffman, 2007). There is an intricate relationship between sexual violence and trauma (Egan, 2016, 2020; Etherington, 2003; Sigurdardottir & Halldórsdóttir, 2021). According to Jackson et al. (2017), “post-violence development [can provoke] feelings of guilt, impotence, fragility, and immobility” (p. 6)

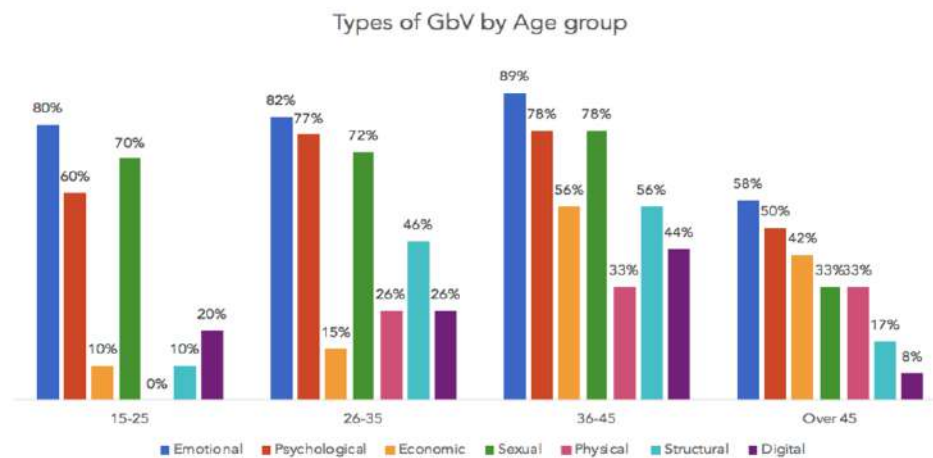


Figure 2: Types of Gender-based Violence by Age Group of survey participants. The graphic shows the percentages for each type of gender-based violence identified by the 70 participants from different age groups.

Other reported types of GbV suffered by the participants included structural (37%), economic, digital, and physical, all with 24.3%, respectively. According to Navarro Góngora (2015), the traumatic effects of physical violence are mostly related to the fact that an individual's life is endangered, "with the state of terror and hyper-alert consequence of the aggression's proximity, the humiliation derived from the submission, and the anger of being treated unjustly" (p. 3).

Regarding the perpetrators of violence, cis men were named as the primary violent enforcers by 63 out of 70 participants. This mirrors data published by the National Survey on Victimization and Perception on Public Security (ENVIPE) 2022, which identifies men as the main offenders of crimes in Mexico, particularly sexual crimes and crimes against women. Furthermore, according to survey data, seven respondents regarded public and private institutions as other perpetrators, while only two identified women as their violators.

### ***Drug consumption and coping mechanisms***

According to the survey, 56% (N= 70) of participants did not use drugs as a coping or calm-inducing mechanism. Of the remaining respondents, most turned to alcohol (38%), followed by tranquilizers (19%) and tobacco or vape (17%). See *Figure 4*. Existing research has shown that survivors and victims of GbV are likely to engage in health-compromising behaviours including substance abuse, alcohol, and smoking (Hawks et al., 2019; Lang et al.; 2003; Pemberton & Loebe, 2020). The prevalence of alcohol use aligns with the findings from the 2021 National Report on Mental Health and Substance Consumption in Mexico, which reported that 28% (N= 10,677) of Mexican women consumed alcohol and 21% used tobacco during the said year (CONADIC, 2021). According to the same source, the main reasons behind increased substance consumption in women were anxiety and stress, and the attempt to avoid problems at home.

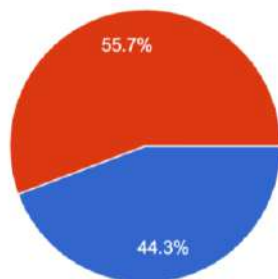


Figure 1: Participants who after suffering GbV used drugs (legal or illegal) as coping mechanisms or calm-inducing techniques.

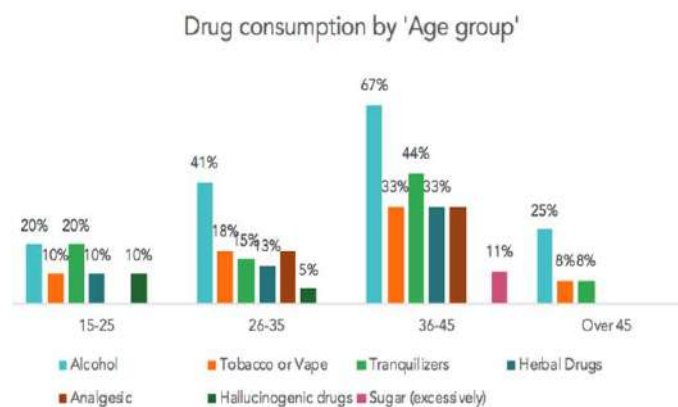


Figure 4: The graphic shows the percentages of participants who reported drug use. It is disaggregated by age groups



Regarding using other coping mechanisms that did not involve drug use, most participants preferred talking to people close to them about their problems (63%) or taking psychological therapy (60%). Fostering a peer support environment is essential for survivors to combat isolation and self-blame, as they often experience shame and guilt (Basile & Smith, 2011; Parsons et al., 1998; Pemberton & Loebe, 2020). Notably, feminist therapy and care focuses on networking for social change and foregrounds the importance of having close connections and support systems to validate victims' and survivors' experiences and promote mutual understanding and assistance (Brown, 2004).

As shown in *Figure 3*, other coping mechanisms included exercising (51%), meditation (36%), changes in diet (33%), digital debugging (17%), medicated psychiatric therapy (10%), cutting (8.6%), pulling hair out and coaching courses (both with 1.4% of the total respondents). while the survey did not include any questions on the reasons behind adopting the different coping mechanisms, that is what specifically encouraged participants to chose one over another, it is interesting to analyze digital debugging as it may be directly linked to the exposure to traumatic or triggering events on social media. The impact of distressing images frequently used in news and social media are often found to be traumatic by survivors (Cherry, 2021). In a project conducted by Cherry (2021) in Canada with survivors of GbV, most participants expressed unfavorable experiences when interacting with media, "despite recognizing the value of survivors sharing their stories publicly".

On the dependence on coping mechanisms by victims or survivors to afront their GbV experiences, 49.6% of participants stated it would be very hard or even impossible to cope with the trauma and consequences of their violence without their utilized methods. Finally, participants were also asked if they had ever faced any problems with substance abuse. Most (81%) said they had not faced problems such as addiction, while only 3.5% of participants stated they had faced difficulties and searched for help to address them.

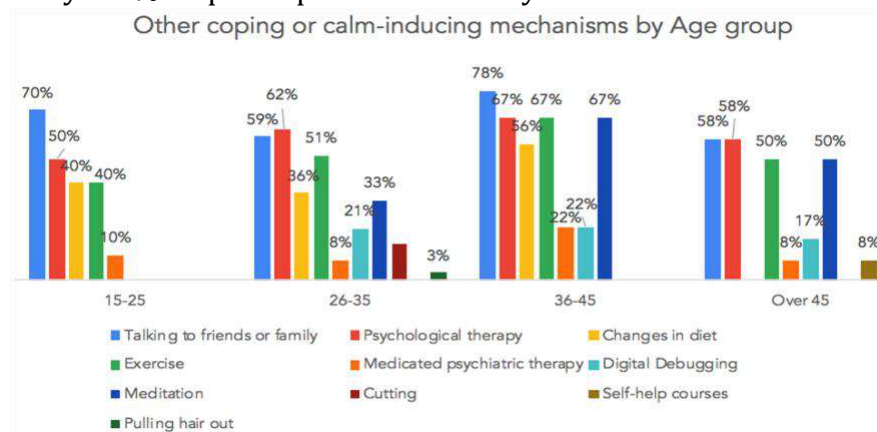


Figure 5: The graphic shows other coping mechanisms that did not involve the use of drugs reported by participants from different age groups

### ***Symptoms during the coping, readaptation or post-traumatic processes***

Mexican women who experienced gender violence are more likely to report mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, compared to those who have not experienced violence (Nowotny & Graves, 2013; Herrera Paredes & Ventura, 2010). In the survey, 84% of participants admitted to having suffered at some point from mental health or physical consequences from their GbV experiences.

Most declared to have experienced anxiety or anguish (76%), 40% of respondents experienced significant mood changes, 39% constantly felt like crying with no apparent motivation, and 33% stated that they felt irritable most of the time. Victims and survivors of GbV, particularly sexual violence face a heightened risk of developing a range of long-term psychological consequences regardless of their age at the time of the assault (Chen et al., 2010; Sarkar & Sarkar, 2005; Zinzow et al., 2012). Some short-term effects include shock, insomnia, feelings of shame and guilt, fear, suicide attempts, and disruptions to daily routines (Basile & Smith, 2011; Koss et al., 1994).

Furthermore, participants were asked if they were still experiencing any of the symptoms due to GbV or for fear of suffering something similar. On this, 59 respondents (N=70) stated they were currently experiencing symptoms, especially anxiety or anguish (76%), mood changes (40%) and crying (39%). Information about the consequences of GbV is usually limited by a “temporal representation - the time of the actual assault rather than the longer-term repercussions of the assault” (Sweet & Ortiz Escalante, 2016, p. 597) A continuous study of the mental health consequences is key to creating better interventions and mechanisms for victims and survivors of violence (Rivero and Algovia, 2020).

## **Conclusions**

This research sought to understand how gender violence was related to using medicines, drugs or other substances to deal with traumatic experiences. To learn about this relationship, I surveyed 70 women and non-binary Mexican or foreign people living in Mexico who came from different states and age ranges. Within feminist research especially when addressing gender-based violence, it is crucial to prioritize the voices and experiences of participants (Potts et al., 2022). Surveys proved to be a simple, clear, and user-friendly tool for GbV survivors to recount their experiences with drug use as a coping mechanism. However, conducting online

surveys, while a quickly disseminated tool, limited answers to a specific population with access to the internet and technological devices. The sample was also limited to social media users who follow the researcher or others who have shared the survey.

This research allows readers to look at a sample of people who have suffered from violence, which highly represents the more significant problem of gender violence in Mexico. Most participants have suffered from GbV over three times, with cis men being their main perpetrators. Some of the more interesting results include that all age groups under 45 reported high levels of sexual violence, over 70% of each group's participants. Other interesting findings noted that physical violence has increased over the generations; all generations have suffered digital violence, and structural violence was least reported by the group ages 15-25 and over 45.

The age groups with the highest drug consumption as a coping mechanism were 26-35 and 36-45 years old. Alcohol was the preferred drug for all generations. One survey participant regarded sugar as a drug, as they utilized it excessively as a coping mechanism. Regarding other coping strategies that do not include drug use, the oldest age group (45 years or older) reported the most, with "talking to friends or family" as the primary coping mechanism. Moreover, psychological therapy was the most used in adult women between 26 and 45 years old.

As a Mexican woman who has experienced several types of GbV on multiple occasions and has been in close contact with other victims or survivors, I have faced the lack of accessible coping mechanisms and the tabooisation of drug use in women. This research showed a real relationship between violence and the consumption of some substance or the use of some post-gender violence technique. Likewise, it remarks on the generational differences depending on the reported violence and the actions taken to deal with the trauma. The power imbalances with their perpetrators, as well as the structural imbalance with institutions responsible for leading recovery processes, the context where the violence takes place, the age of victims and survivors, and the access to resources, must be considered in the healing journey of victims and survivors of GbV (Pemberton & Loeb, 2020; Sigurdardottir & Halldórsdóttir, 2021).

The results indicated that most participants who used substances as coping mechanisms turned to alcohol, followed by tranquillizers. The findings also underscore the significance of coping mechanisms that do not involve any type of substance, such as talking to close acquaintances, psychological therapy, and exercise. Access to these types of coping mechanisms should be ensured so that women or individuals who have experienced violence can engage in their recovery process,

reintegrate into society, and confront the consequences of their experiences in a more manageable way, all while adhering to feminist ethics of care at its core.

These findings can serve as valuable insights for governmental and private institutions and non-governmental organizations to provide better support to victims and survivors of gender-based violence. For instance, survivors may present somatic concerns or other symptoms in places where people are not trained to ask, deal with, or support their past experiences with violence and ongoing trauma (Creed et al., 2012; Loeb et al., 2018; Pemberton & Loebe, 2020). This research and similar research designs can contribute to improving existing guides for assisting GbV survivors in Mexico - mainly carried out by Mexico's Ministry of Health and the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES). As well as create new outputs regarding victims' and survivors' use of substances or drugs and the long-term consequences of their violent experiences.

The dissemination of data and narratives with a gender perspective is essential for the creation of better mechanisms and challenging binarism in the production of mechanisms that seek to shed light on gender-based violence. The influence of media, including social media platforms, can shape public attitudes and behavior (Wakefield et al., 2020). The generation of data with a feminist perspective, where the experiences of the participants are placed at the centre, also allows for enhanced communication and understanding of what happens in our contexts and in those far from our own. If done consciously, media can play a pivotal role in increasing awareness about the issues faced by victims and survivors of violence and the potential consequences of drug use, and it can serve as a platform for advocacy, raising public discussions and supporting change (Wakefield et al., 2020). Communicating this information from a transnational standpoint allows for greater empathy, resilience, and intersectional awareness of issues such as gender violence. As asserted by feminist geographer, Joni Seager, "What gets counted, counts".

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## **Transnational Feminist Solidarity in action: Two moments of mobilization in Łódź, Poland**

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### **Abstract:**

This article depicts two moments of social mobilization that took place in Łódź, Poland, among feminist activists, specifically women and queer students of a master's degree program in gender studies from various nationalities, along with local activists from Poland and members of the Iranian diaspora. These mobilizations happened on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and on December 17, 2022, in support of the 'Women, Life, Freedom' revolution in Iran.

The primary aim of this article is to underscore the potential of feminist movements to create transnational solidarity beyond borders and drive social change. I emphasize the power of small-scale mobilizations and the potential for transnational feminist solidarity, demonstrating how activists from diverse backgrounds and countries can come together to fight for feminist and social justice causes.

The article is framed through a feminist standpoint theory, in a dialogue with four of the activists who participated in the protests. The article concludes by stressing the importance of political action, especially within master's degree programs in gender studies. However, the challenge remains in making these mobilizations sustainable and inclusive, with a focus on increasing participation from marginalized groups. Overall, this article highlights the potential of feminist movements to drive social change and promote international solidarity by demonstrating how small-scale mobilizations can lead to broader impacts while acknowledging the need for sustained activism with an intersectional approach.

### **Keywords:**

Transnational feminism, social mobilization, feminist solidarity, feminist social movements.

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The objective of this article is to narrate, through the description of an embodied experience, two moments of social mobilization carried out in the city of Łódź, Poland, among feminist people, particularly women students of a feminist master's degree<sup>2</sup> from different countries and backgrounds, with local activists from Poland and activists from the Iranian diaspora. These took place on November 25, 2022, and December 17, 2022. The first one consisted of a manifestation in the context of the worldwide mobilization for the rejection of all forms of violence against women, a date commemorated every year on November 25th, and the second was a manifestation in support of the Iranian diaspora in Łódź and in favor of the 'Women, Life, Freedom' mobilizations, rejecting the executions taking place in Iran.

This short reconstruction of these two manifestations does not aim to be an exhaustive research on social movements. It seeks, especially, to testify to what we could characterize as two experiences of feminist transnational solidarity. It is carried out from the feminist standpoint theory, in my case as one of the participants in the two gatherings, situating myself politically (Steinberg, 1994) as a young Colombian feminist who was doing her Master's degree in Poland, and through a dialogue with four of the activists who participated in the protests. The activists who spoke with me for this article are from Kosovo, Poland, and Spain, and are between 21 and 37 years old.

In general, these experiences of mobilization, while not indicative of massive participation, facilitated the development of political practices of solidarity among activists from different countries, enabling them to raise their voices in support of various social justice causes. This becomes even more relevant because none of us were experts in the context of the country we were in at that time, Poland. However, we felt that this context defined the nature of the social resistance we could undertake differently, given that in recent years, the restrictions on fundamental freedoms and rights imposed by the current government of PIS in Poland had become common knowledge among us (Hall, 2019).

These rights restrictions especially in abortion rights coexisted with a significant gender disadvantage, as official statistics indicate that over 60% of women in Poland have experienced domestic violence (Notes from Poland, 2020). According to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, as stated in her 2023 report, Polish legislation and policies lack gender sensitivity, failing to address specific causes of discrimination and violence, including femicides,

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which are recorded solely as homicides (UN, 2023, p. 3). While the most prominent issue has been the restriction of abortion rights, Polish social movements continue to protest many other concerns. Regarding this specific issue, studies have shown that Polish people, especially women, have been actively mobilizing to reject these decisions. From October to December 2020, there were 985 protests where women played a central role as the main protesters (Zakrzewska and Dubrow, 2021, p. 30). This is the context in which we created a space for international feminist solidarity with two main causes, as I'll explore in the next sections.

## **25 of November in Łódź, Poland**

The first experience took place on November 25, 2022, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. For Latin American women, this commemoration has a deep significance anchored in the strength of Latin American and Caribbean feminisms, which determined that this date would be recognized in memory of the femicide of the Mirabal sisters at the hands of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. There are also other important dates in Latin American feminisms that we commemorate by marching in the streets: March 8th, September 28th (Global Day of Action for Access to Safe and Legal Abortion), and November 25th.

Considering that many of the students in the Master's in Gender Studies program who arrived at the various universities where the program is offered come with trajectories of struggle anchored in the feminisms of the global South, it was very important for us to be able to articulate ourselves in a feminist mobilization on November 25. Although we were not in our countries, we had the deep conviction that feminism has an internationalist vocation and that we were going to participate in a feminist mobilization demanding an end to patriarchal violence, as we had been doing for several years in our respective countries of origin.

With this political conviction in mind, and in the company of other Latin American activists living in Łódź, as well as Spanish companions where feminist strength also has a great impact on November 25th, we began to search for mobilization calls for that day in the weeks leading up to it. After searching for some time and not finding a call, we decided to organize ourselves to hold a protest or rally on that day at a central point in the city of Łódź.

We couldn't make a broad call because, after talking to Polish activists, they told us that we had to ask permission from the city council to hold a mobilization call for that day. However, being a call that we organized so close to the date, we were no

longer within the deadline to request permission. Finally, we self-convened through the master's WhatsApp group and collected slogans and messages that we could use on the day of the concentration.

We met at 3 p.m. on a winter day and we managed to occupy a public space that is traditionally marked by sexist violence against women with our bodies. We gathered at the unicorn sculpture, a central point in the city. In addition to the feminist master's students, Polish activists from the Manifa Łódź collective arrived at the agreed-upon time to protect and join the concentration in the rejection of patriarchal violence.

This element was fundamental because it meant that when people arrived who may have had questions about why we were mobilizing or who wanted to sabotage our mobilization, the Polish activists could protect the mobilization in their language, defend those who were protesting, and ensure that the space was safe for everyone, which is a demonstration of the feminist “acuerpamiento” or collective support spoken about by Communitarian Latin American Feminists. This resonates with some practices of indigenous feminists from Abya Yala, in the words of the Lorena Cabnal “That's why we nos acuerpamos (support each other with our bodies), that is, we stand with and feel the injustices and indignations that other bodies and nature experience because of patriarchy; we come together and act with full consciousness to collectively defend our body” (Cabnal, 2017, p. 100).

During the actions carried out that day, public expression of messages in different languages were made, through the creation of posters that were spread at the meeting point (Fig 1 and 2), including some translations into Polish, rejecting street harassment on the main street of the city, a situation that several of us have experienced. This concentration also used symbols of transnational feminisms as the green scarf that it's used by Latin American feminists (Quintana & Barros, 2020) as a way to reclaim our bodily autonomy, abortion rights, and reproductive justice, which is also important, taking into account that the protest was made in Poland, a country that has cut abortion right to its minimum, but that also has meant a strong mobilization from polish society lidded by polish women (Hall, 2019).

In this concentration, Polish activists included a support number for victims of patriarchal violence in Poland on the posters, which pedestrians could read, as shown in Figure 3. In addition, music that represented each of us in different languages was selected, and we sang various chants in favor of social and feminist justice. The chants that we sang were in Persian, Polish, Albanian, Italian, Spanish, and German. This demonstration showed that feminism has an internationalist vocation and knows no borders, as mentioned by one of the activists.



The 25 N was actually the highlight of my stay in Łódź; it was very powerful. Chanting words in each other's languages was liberating. It made me feel good and supported. Knowing that there is a community out there that transcends borders, cultural differences, and historical backgrounds, and that it's just there for the shared experience of oppression. Although we may be different based on cultures and context, we can still empathize with one another. And I think that's very powerful.

Diona Hoxha - Feminist activist from Kosovo

Finally, the mobilization was a very interesting experience as it allowed us to recognize the common struggles. Although our struggles took place in different languages and situations, we were all united in our presence in Łódź, a city in Poland, to convey this message to the local community and resonate with the international feminist movement that mobilized that day from different parts of the world, also recognizing different feminisms, instances, and subjectivities involved in feminist relations (Martínez-Cairo & Buscemi, 2021). The potentiality of this cooperation could be found in Anzaldúas's words: "As an identity narrative, *nos/otras* has the potential to overturn definitions of otherness. When we examine the *us/them* binary deeply, we find that *otra-ness* may be deceptive, merely a cage we assign to others... There are no "*otras*"—we all emerge from humanity's basic shared, communal ground, an emotional-spiritual ground of being. *Nos/otras* (as the slash becomes increasingly permeable) *puede ser el nuevo nombre de seres que escapan de jaulas*" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 81).

For me, it was very important to have a voice in a country where I had never been before, one with which I was unfamiliar both socially and culturally. It was important for me to express myself, to lend my voice on such an important day as November 25th. The fact that I was able to do this surrounded by women from other nationalities who share the same struggle and values as I do was significant. It felt like crossing borders because, at that moment, regardless of our socio-cultural backgrounds or beliefs, we all gathered and were able to speak out as a group. It was something quite meaningful for me, and it was a very important day that we should remember and carry with us.

Beatriz Almeida - Feminist activist from Spain.

The notion of breaking borders appears in both reflections of the activists. They also refer to the idea of voices, which reminds us of "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

(Chakravorty Spivak, 1988). Even though we, as students in the Master's program, don't speak Polish and our daily life in Poland is conducted in English, which supposes a barrier to 'being heard'. Despite this, we spoke out through political signs, chants, and with our voices in different languages, including Polish, thanks to the commitment of Polish activists who taught us their chants and corrected the translations of the signs we prepared before the protest: 25 November - International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women – 25 listopada Międzynarodowym Dniem Eliminacji Przemocy wobec Kobiet, and Molestowanie to nie komplement. Koniec z molestowaniem na Piotrkowskiej! ('Catcalling is not a compliment. Stop sexual harassment on Piotrkowska Street - the main street in Łódź-).

This type of "juntanza" or political feminist meeting also brings to light the idea of feminist solidarity. In Mohanty's words, solidarity is understood "in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities". Being part of a broader movement, which she calls anti-racist and internationalist feminism without borders, "feminist solidarity constitutes the most principled way to cross borders, decolonize knowledge, and practice anti-capitalist critique" (Talpade Mohanty, 2003, p. 7).



Figure 1. November 25th, 2022 - Łódź, Poland - Photograph taken by the author.



Figure 2. November 25th, 2022 - Łódź, Poland - Photograph taken by the author.



Figure 3. November 25th, 2022 - Łódź, Poland - Photograph taken by the author



## Stop Executions in Iran Protest – Łódź

On December 17, a second mobilization took place, which was attended by Iranian activists in the diaspora, local activists from the city of Łódź and students from the feminist and gender studies program, as well as Erasmus students, around 12 people participated through the day. This mobilization was convened worldwide to demand an end to executions in Iran, in the midst of a regime that violates human rights and has led to the feminist awakening and Women's Revolution led by women who defend the message "Woman, Life, Freedom". During the month of December, state repression manifested in executions of Iranian citizens, including the case of Mohsen Shekari, which generated a strong political rejection worldwide. In this context, Iranian human rights defenders made a worldwide call to organize a protest against executions and violations of the right to life committed by the current government in Iran.

In the city of Łódź, since the beginning of the Iranian resistance in September 2022, the Iranian diaspora has been organizing permanent rallies in support of the defense of human rights in their country, including women's rights<sup>3</sup>. Some of the students who participated in the 25th of November protest have already participated in more concentrations in support of the Iranian revolution. On December 17th, a rally was called to express our support for the worldwide mobilization taking place that day. Since we were able to request permission from the municipal administration, granted to a student from the Master, it was possible to create a flyer and expand the call on social media. During the protest, songs were sung in support of the feminist revolution in Iran, demanding an end to violence against activists and respect for human rights in the country. When asked about the reasons for joining this protest, one of the activists affirmed:

I participated in the rally primarily because I am a woman and because I am a person who fights for human rights. The violations that women in Iran are currently experiencing and continue to endure seemed like a reason to take to the streets and express our dissatisfaction. I believe it's important to show our rejection of such behaviors and human rights violations in any country. Even though we may observe these

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<sup>3</sup> Noizz. "Iranka w Polsce: w moim kraju życie kobiety jest warte dosłownie połowę życia mężczyzny". 13/12/2022. Available at: <https://noizz.pl/wywiady/jesli-kobieta-w-iranie-nie-chce-zaspokoic-meza-jest-uwazana-za-nieposluszna/sqwv4rz?fbclid=PAAaaQIUd2g0KoWTufsiIYyo3Gkd8sJy90mv782P49mQinMgamZfP7-gyoZZ4>.

situations from afar, I believe it is a civic responsibility to condemn this violence and these violations and take action against them.

Cristina Corcho, feminist activist from Spain

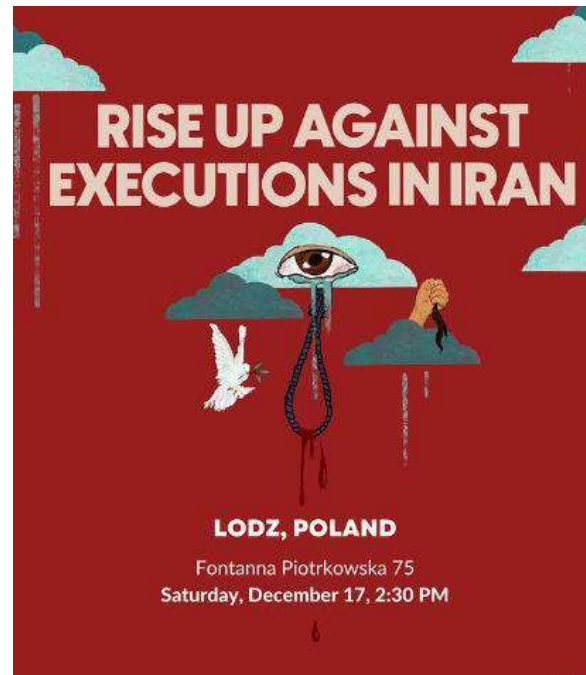


Fig. 4. Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CmNBEFiS5KM/> - middleeastmatters.info IG profile

There was a particular aspect that marked the intersectional perspective of the motivations that mobilized us. Despite the fact that the majority of us were foreign activists who were supporting the Iranian cause, the leadership and main voice when chanting slogans belonged to an Iranian activist from the diaspora who was able to participate in the demonstration that day<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, there was no hierarchy in terms of political identities related to gender, ethnicity, or nationality. Instead, we collectively understood that the voice on the defense of human rights in Iran should be held by Iranian people in the diaspora, and the role of those of us who could accompany this process was to support with our bodies and voices in the public space, from Łódź, Poland, the global demand for respect for the lives of people in Iran, and

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<sup>4</sup> Video filmed by one of the Iranian activists, available at: <https://bit.ly/3MqghND>.



for the construction of a democratic society that puts an end to the persecution and violence that the country is currently facing.

When I asked one of the activists who participated in that demonstration about her motives for participating, she gave various reasons that resonated with the concept of sisterhood in black feminism as described by bell hooks, and also the notion developed by Audre Lorde,

First, just empathy, because it is so painful to imagine what it is like to live in a country where everything is forbidden or even killed. Secondly, as a feminist, I know that I'm not truly free until each of my sisters is free, even in the Middle East. The final reason is that this regime is not only destroying a beautiful country and posing a danger to Iranian people but also represents a threat to everyone.

Anna Paszyn, feminist activist from Poland

## Conclusions

This article underscores the potential of feminist movements to foster international solidarity transcending borders and promoting social transformation. It highlights the relevance of grassroots mobilizations and the capacity for transnational feminist solidarity, illustrating how activists hailing from diverse backgrounds and countries can unite in advocacy for feminist causes. Furthermore, there is a promising avenue for mobilization among students, particularly within Master's degree programs in gender studies. This academic discipline remains intimately entwined with political struggle, and the vitality of feminist academia hinges on concurrent feminist political engagement.

There are also various layers of solidarity, ranging from transnational feminist solidarity that ignites the imperative to mobilize collectively for common causes, to the solidarity manifest in the care extended by Polish activists who shielded us during our initial march and provided support as we protested in the public sphere in Poland. There exists a question regarding the impact of these smaller-scale mobilizations. One might perceive them as relatively weak due to their lack of mass participation. However, their significance transcends mere numerical representation. It resides in their capacity to engender a space where diverse voices, articulated in various languages, can coalesce around broader causes. The relevance of these mobilizations

also hinges on their ability to draw more individuals into their fold, extending beyond the 'bubble' of feminist activists to mobilize people from different backgrounds.

Regarding the challenges, it is essential to address the temporary nature of these movements, as international Master's programs typically entail participants returning to their home countries upon program completion. In this regard, there is an opportunity for the transmission and co-creation of knowledge between former and new students, fostering a collective memory of these manifestations and continuing processes that extend beyond specific protests. This continuity can engender a sense of movement and progression.

The challenge also lies in sustaining these mobilizations while establishing connections with local activist movements, with a deliberate emphasis on enhancing the participation of marginalized groups, including migrant people, workers, non-binary and trans individuals, as well as a broader spectrum of activists. Theoretically, it raises questions about the factors that possess the potential to generate worldwide movements and the concept of feminist solidarity, as articulated by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, as a means to transcend borders, decolonize knowledge, and engage in anti-capitalist critique. Furthermore, there is an inquiry into the common ground of this feminist solidarity and the conditions that facilitate its occurrence in some contexts while hindering it in others. An examination of the significance of symbols within feminist solidarity reveals that, in some cases, the green scarf may hold particular significance, while in others, alternative symbols may carry greater relevance.

I draw inspiration from the words of "La Potencia Feminista/Feminist International" which serves as a poignant reminder of the driving force behind our collaborative efforts on a global scale. As Verónica Gago emphasized:

Ours is an internationalism based on territories in struggle. That is what makes its construction more complex and polyphonic: it incorporates ever more territories and languages. It does not adhere to the framework of the nation-state; therefore, it already overflows the name "internationalism". Rather than international, it is transnational and plurinational. This is because it recognizes other geographies and draws other maps of alliance, encounter, and convergence than those between nations-states; and because it entails a radical critique of the national enclosure that seeks to limit our struggles. Its connections are based on migrant trajectories, and it approaches landscapes that recombine urban, suburban, campesino, Indigenous, slum, and community elements. Thus, multiple temporalities are folded into it (Gago, 2020, p. 212).

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