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# Popular music and intimate relationships: examples from the Top 40 Spanish radio show

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## ABSTRACT

As an aspect of everyday life, music is a privileged cultural expression that reflects social dynamics, including issues related to intimate relationships. The aim of this study was to analyse the construction and evolution of such relationships through musical hits from 1966 to 2017. To this end, we used a qualitative methodology comprising discourse analysis and the identification of interpretative repertoires. The results show that 71.9% of the chosen songs describe intimate relationships and that their themes can be grouped around three repertoires: 1) romantic love, 2) hedonistic love, and 3) toxic love. These discursive axes reveal differences between female and male voices. They also show that intimate relationships are mainly characterized by masculine domination, which positions women as objects subordinated to the desires of men. However, we also observed the recent emergence of new spaces for female expression that increase women's visibility.

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Popular music; intimate relationships; gender stereotypes; radio music; interpretative repertoire

## Introduction

Music has been part of human life since the dawn of civilization and can be considered to be a characteristic behaviour of our species (María F. Faga 2005). Over the course of human history, music has been present in everyday life more than any other art form. With all its particularities, music has developed and evolved in all societies and historical moments as a cultural expression, and has also shaped environments and social events fundamental to coexistence. The most relevant milestones in personal, family, political, or institutional spheres are typically associated with specific songs or genres (Ion A. Del Amo, Arkaitz Letamendia and Jason Diaux 2016; Peter J. Rentfrow and Samuel D. Gosling 2003). In everyday life, music motivates people, helps them relax, makes waiting more bearable, and accompanies driving, working, studying, intimate moments, and so on. The influence of music on daily experience is so extensive that specific songs may form part of personal memories, while groups of songs from the same period can form a type of “soundtrack” for a given generation.

Currently, large music concerts and festivals are common worldwide. They attract massive audiences every year, have marked economic and social impacts, and are associated with

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recreation, tourism, and safety issues. Thus, the sustained and increasing relevance of music is a reflection of an immense global industry that addresses aspects such as creativity, copyright, the production and reproduction of recorded material, and live music and its commercial use. Personal talent and musical training have recently become part of the recurrent content of reality shows, which have been very successful on international television.

During the 20th century, cultural and technical factors introduced fundamental and progressive changes in the field of music. The confluence of the artistic avant-garde in music, as well as technical advances in its composition, storage, and reproduction, have recently led to marked effects, such as dissolving boundaries between “serious” and popular music or giving greater visibility to ever-increasing musical diversity and new genres (María F. Faga 2005; Ángel Ruiz 2015). Listeners have benefited from all these technological advances, which have made music increasingly accessible in their everyday lives. Since the beginning of the first broadcasts, radio has maintained a close relationship with music, and through this alliance it has avoided several crises, such as that caused by the emergence of television. From the beginning of the 1950s, the massive consumption of recorded music served as an incentive for the development of music radio. *The Top 40* type of radio show mainly targets young people, and its format of repeatedly playing the most popular songs has changed the concept of music from being mere content to a way of promoting a very specific offer aimed at distinct segments of the audience. This change has led to significant innovations in how daily programming and radio marketing are understood (Elsa Moreno 1999).

Globalization has stimulated the internationalization of mainstream musical styles such as reggaeton or artists like Maluma or Shakira, which have become hallmarks of a powerful industry. However, it has also facilitated the incipient presence of alternative styles, whose content may diverge from hegemonic ideologies related to relationships. Thus, music is a privileged cultural expression reflecting social dynamics that range from globalized homogenization to the particularities of new sensibilities and styles. It also transcends the merely musical by becoming an element of identity and a path to socializing and belonging. Musical discourse can even be understood as a set of social practices that include artistic, socio-historical, linguistic, or stylistic aspects (Evgeniya Aleshinskaya 2013; Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida 2003).

Music is not simply an artistic expression decontextualized from the environments in which is produced or listened to. As mentioned, music plays specific roles in the construction and recreation of a shared reality. In this sense, intimate relationships are also highly influenced by music. Gender stereotypes are also widely reflected in many musical productions, despite representations of women and relationships between men and women undergoing changes in recent decades. To a large extent, international studies have reported negative images of women in music videos, in which they are presented in a condescending manner, are associated with traditional sex roles (passivity, weakness, dependence, domestic tasks, etc.), and are seen as mere objects of desire or explicitly as targets of male aggression (Ronald Weitzer and Charis E. Kubrin 2009). This type of bias is common in all styles of popular music, although some musical styles are more likely to be labelled as sexist, such as trap or reggaeton (Clotilde Benavides 2007; Dulce A. Martínez 2014; Viviana K. Ramírez-Noreña 2012).

Previous studies on this topic (Richard L. Dukes et al. 2003; Dawn R. Hobbs and Gordon G. Gallup 2011; Jayant Sharma and John Harden 2016) have applied content analysis to

investigate the main themes in songs in different periods at the top of the charts specializing in information on the music industry (e.g., Billboard). Some studies have also investigated changes in the percentages of such content over different periods. For example, Billy L. Cooper (1985) published a pioneering study that analysed the themes of popular songs from four decades (1940-1970). This author found that a stereotyped image of women was emerging as objects of possession, fundamentally sexual, associated above all with physical attraction, and oriented toward childcare. Cooper also emphasised that interest in the physical attributes of women had become more pronounced over time. Authors such as (María J. Gallucci 2008, José M. Rivas 2016, Cristopher Yáñez-Urbina, Claudia Calquín Donoso and Rodrigo Guerra-Arrau 2017) took a qualitative approach similar to that used in the present study, and applied discourse analysis techniques to specific musical genres or artists. However, all three studies used a limited document corpus. To overcome this limitation, we analysed the construction of relationships between men and women in the number-one hits from the mid-1960s to the present day. These hits were selected from the Spanish radio show *Los 40 Principales* (*The Top 40*), which has the largest audience in Spanish radio history.

## Material and methods

Given the foregoing, we adopted the premise that music is not only melody and lyrics, but also discourse, with meanings that are related to social and cultural aspects and that have an impact on the listener's assessment of the piece (Lucy Green 2017). Therefore, we chose discourse analysis (DA) as the method to approach the chosen material. In this approach, discourse, and by implication language, is seen as a form of social practice (Norman Fairclough 1999). In its many presentations as reflections of given discourses, social texts are the basic units of human communication and associated practices (Norman Fairclough, Jane Mulderring and Ruth Wodak 2011; Michael Meyer 2001; Teun A. Van Dijk 2011). Discourse is inseparable from power, control, and discriminatory relationships, which are explicit or implicit in language and present in any human community (Michel Foucault 1966; Ruth Wodak 2003).

We conducted DA by identifying interpretative repertoires (IR) (Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell 1987). Interpretative repertoires refer to linguistic units made up of elements that speakers use to construct versions of their actions and phenomena. Therefore, IRs include discursive strategies aimed at constructing representations of reality for specific purposes. Authors such as (Jenny Cubells Serra and Andrea Calsamiglia Marduga 2016) and Alejandro Sánchez-Sicilia and Jenny Cubells Serra (2018) have recently identified and characterized the IR related to romantic love as a potential condition for the emergence and maintenance of male violence or violence in intimate relationships among adolescents. Based on these findings, we analysed specific IRs related to the construction of intimate relationships and observed how the discourse contained in number-one hits differs according to the gender of the singer. We also analysed the evolution of music discourse over time and changes in its characteristics.

## Document corpus and analysis

The initial sample comprised 1838 songs from 1966 to 2017. These songs were extracted from the annual number-one hits broadcast by the Spanish *Los 40 Principales* radio show. This medium was selected because it is the pioneer music radio show in Spain, having around 3 million listeners in 2018 (AIMC, 2018). We conducted a pre-analysis to select songs describing idealized romantic love. However, we note that the analysis of intimate relationships cannot be separated from the masculine/feminine polarity into which gender relationships have traditionally been organized. This system devalues the feminine as an expression of irrationality, uncontrollable affectivity, or passivity, thus facilitating its domination by the masculine (Frances Olsen 2000).

As a result of the pre-analysis, we obtained a final corpus of 1307 songs, all of which were transcribed. We focused on the semantic component, treating the songs as texts within specific social contexts.

We organized, coded, and analysed the transcribed texts using ATLAS.ti 8 software. The discursive analysis was divided into several steps:

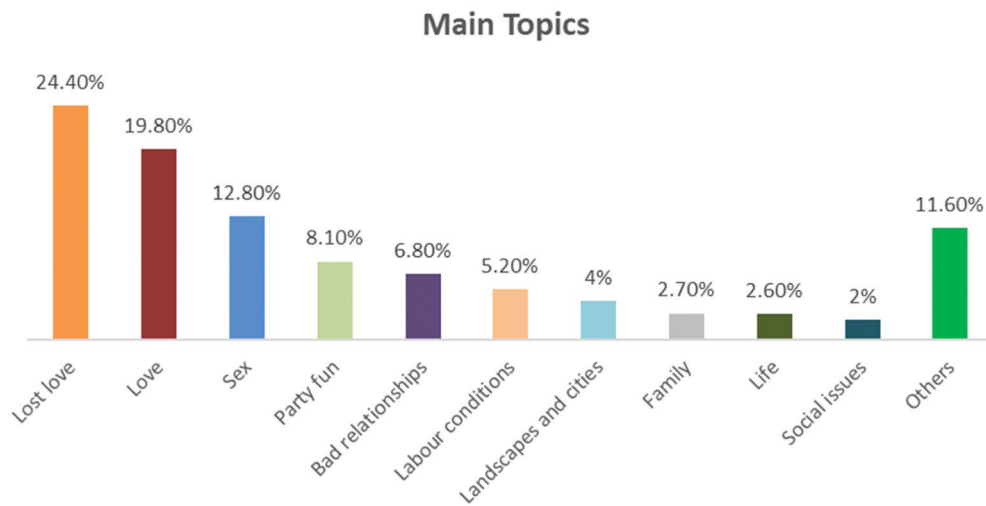
- Initial coding and construction of provisional categories of the topics related to intimate relationships, and possible identification of differences between men's and women's voices.
- Organizing and clustering the codes into "units of meaning" (i.e., IRs), which illustrate the shared patterns men and women have of relationships.
- Interpreting the results using extracts from the coded texts to illustrate the patterns of meanings discussed. An English translation of the Spanish lyrics has been provided.

## Results and discussion

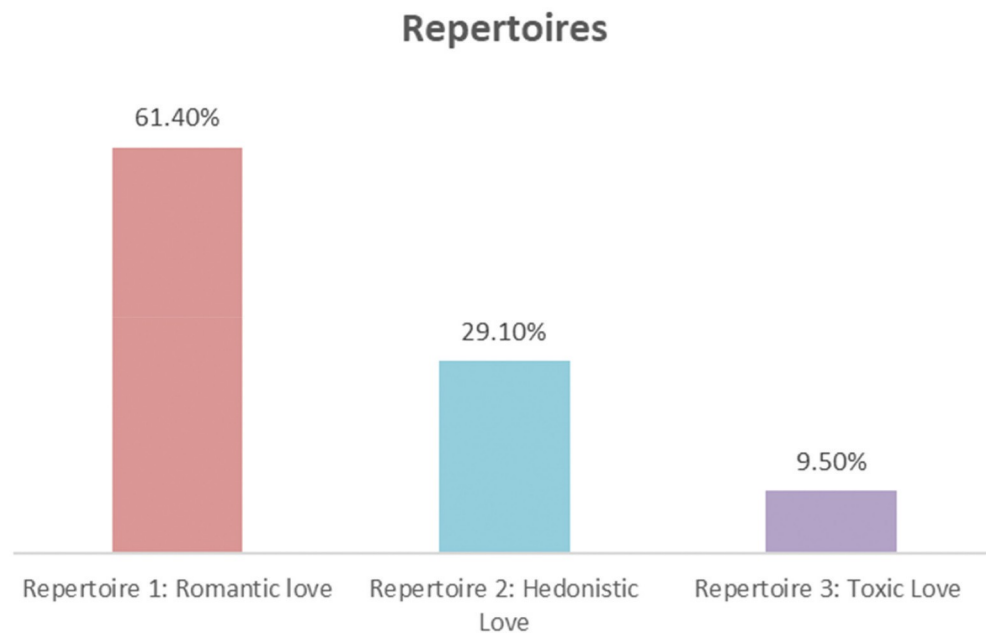
Figure 1 shows the main topics identified in the corpus of 1838 hits extracted from *The Top 40* broadcast from 1966 to 2017.

The first 5 topics are directly related to intimate and affective relationships. These form the central IRs of the study and will be addressed below. The remaining topics are not directly related to the object of study: they appear in low percentages and include labour conditions, descriptions of natural landscapes, the celebration of specific cities, families that express paternal love or glorify the mother figure, life envisaged as stages we go through and the return to childhood, and social subjects that could be called "protest songs" addressing topics such as racism, exclusion, or social pressure. The final item is called "Others" and includes many topics including some related to death, fame, or boasting about material goods. Each topic in this item represents less than 2%.

The topic of love and intimate relationships appeared in 1322 songs. The extracted lyrics were grouped into 3 IRs: (1) romantic love, which mainly idealizes the partner, true love, and commitment. The love/lost love dichotomy is also quite frequent in this IR (i.e., between lasting romantic relationships and relationships in which love has faded away); (2) hedonistic love, which refers to having fun and sporadic interpersonal relationships involving seduction games and casual sex in settings such as parties; and (3) toxic love, which includes lyrics addressing negative experiences, pain, and suffering, and the



**Figure 1.** Main topics identified from *The Top 40* (1966 to 2017).



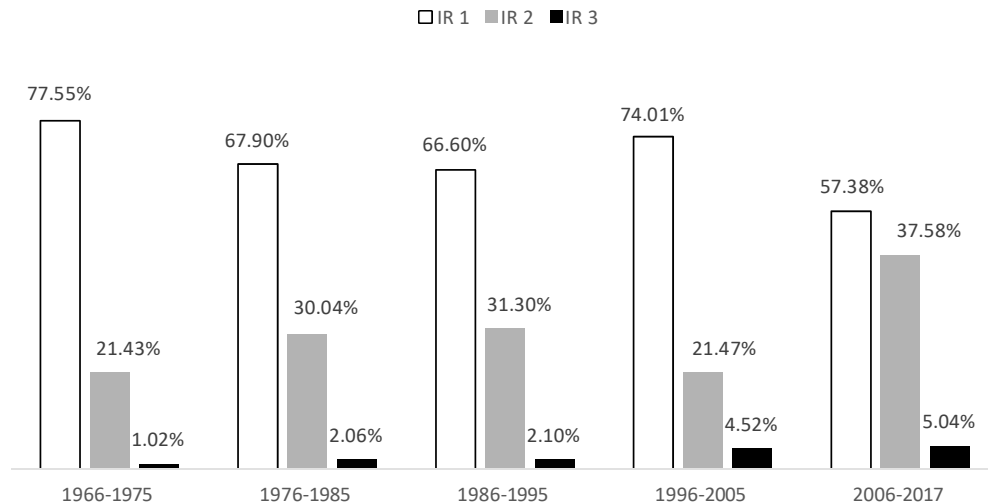
**Figure 2.** Percentages of the 3 interpretative repertoires.

impossibility of finding a constructive solution within the relationship. [Figure 2](#) shows the percentages of each of the 3 IRs.

In general, we addressed the common elements expressed by the male and female voices in each IR, but also paid attention to some of the differences in the discursive strategies used by male and female voices within each IR.

[Figure 3](#) shows that the percentages of the IRs identified remained relatively steady over the study period, with romantic love being the most frequent repertoire. This may be

## Evolution of IRs by 10-year-periods



**Figure 3.** Evolution of each repertoire by 10-year periods.

because romantic love has historically played a fundamental role in establishing an ideal pattern of intimate relationships. Some authors, such as Jonathan Gottschall (2008), have pointed out that romantically falling in love with someone leads to experiencing a strong desire for union with the partner, idealizing this person, constantly thinking about him or her, and realizing that one's priorities in life have changed dramatically. It also involves a tendency to be deeply concerned about the well-being of the loved one, as well as feeling existential emptiness when he or she is absent. Artists have found this feeling to be a strong inspiration in their creations.

However, we found that from 1976 onward, there was a decrease in lyrics about romantic love and an increase in those addressing hedonistic love, and from 1996 onward, there was a relative increase in music referencing toxic love. It is also relevant that in 2004 the Spanish Organic Law on Comprehensive Protection Measures Against Gender Violence came into force, which was accompanied by growing public awareness of the phenomenon in Spain. In the same year, songs against gender violence such as "Y en tu ventana" by Andy & Lucas, and "Malo" or "Ella" by Bebe had entered the Spanish Top 40 charts.

However, awareness is a necessary, but insufficient, step toward eradicating gender violence and the rejection of the feminine. This rejection is shown in social manifestations of inequality and discrimination, as well as physical, psychological, and sexual violence against women.

Although transcultural evidence suggests that romantic love is a widespread emotion in any culture, Victor Karandashev (2015) observed that it "manifests itself in different ways because culture has an impact on people's conceptions of love and the way they feel, think, and behave in romantic relationships." Recent decades have seen increasing changes leading to new social realities, including new social representation of love bonds and gender roles in intimate relationships. Jaime Hormigos-Ruiz, María Gómez-Escarda

and Salvador Perelló-Oliver (2018) analysed several musical styles and found that most of the songs addressing gender violence did so from a critical perspective. In their study, the songs that normalized violence, including physical violence, mainly appeared from 1990 to 1999; however, they were largely absent after this period. We have found that these topics are increasingly addressed from different perspectives in the number-one hits analysed. We also identified some songs that justified or could even perpetuate gender violence based on men's dominance over women. This aspect was mainly observed in the reggaeton genre, in which lyrics have latent or overt content alluding to women being unequal to men. For example, such lyrics encourage expressions of violence in sexual relationships due to jealousy. However, the debate on messages within reggaeton is both heated and complex. It would be difficult to end the debate by simply accusing reggaeton of radical *machismo*, because we found in our sample that female artists are increasingly exploring ways of appropriating reggaeton to denounce gender violence and empower women.

### **IR 1: Romantic love**

Over the study period, the most frequent IR was romantic love. The main topics in this IR reflect a polarization that fluctuates from being in love to losing love. Romantic love is a recurrent IR in relationship research and some authors have established associations between this IR and violence in erotic-intimate relationships (Ana R. Dias et al. 2012; Cubells Serra and Calsamiglia Marduga 2016). We now illustrate the two poles of the romantic love IR (i.e., being in love and losing love).

#### **Being in love**

We found that the idealization of love embraces a large set of constructions rooted in the sublimated character of love, such as destiny, complementarity, longing to make this state last forever, relationships based on commitment, the existence of true love, or praising the positive traits of the partner. Table 1 shows some examples of these types of construction. Romantic love songs also include other discourses, such as doubts and uncertainties concerning whether love is reciprocal or not: "I need you to tell me if you love me. I'm really in love with you" (Rocío Dúrcal 1978). Likewise, distance is portrayed as hard test of

**Table 1.** Examples of the IR romantic love associated with being in love.

Destiny in relationships	"(...) I feel, I feel, I feel like I've known you from before, for a long time. Destiny has fulfilled its mission and although they want to take my voice away (...)" (Álvaro Soler and Morat 2016).
Complementarity	"(...) Inseparable, inseparable, you and me. Inseparable, like the river and the sea, always together (...)" (Ángela Carrasco 1986).
Enduring love	"(...) Ever and ever, forever and ever, you'll be my dream. My symphony, my own lover's theme. Ever and ever, forever and ever my destiny will follow you eternally (...)" (Demis Roussos 1973).
Commitment	"(...) Darling, just hold my hand. Be my girl, I'll be your man. I see my future in your eyes (...)" (Ed Sheeran 2017).
True love	"(.....) You're all I'm living for, your love I'll keep for evermore, you're the first, you're the last, my everything (...)" (Barry White 1974).
Praising the partner's positive traits	"(...) Poet and dreamer. The best lover and best friend, simply you (...)" (Ana and Johnny 1976).

the strength of ideal love: “I’m leaving, but I swear I’ll be back tomorrow” (Nino Bravo 1972).

### **Losing love**

In contrast, lost love refers to the experience of disillusionment associated with dejection, frustration, and pain. The most frequent causes of lost love in the selected songs are rejection, abandonment, or infidelity. They are associated with a loss of sincerity or hidden motives, which are beyond the understanding of the emotionally neglected person. Table 2 shows some examples of lyrics that illustrate these aspects.

Nostalgia for past times is often employed as a response to lost love (e.g., “Oh, amazing how soon one can forget, you’ve got to be to a fool to remember”; Duncan Dhu 1987). Another discursive strategy in romantic love is to overcome being lovesick by moving on (e.g., “You held me down, but I got up”; Katy Perry 2013). Sometimes the protagonist is the person who leaves, unable to value the measure of true love, but then they understand their mistake, they feel guilt and regret, implore forgiveness, and blame the break-up on a bad decision, which is generally linked to sexual desire (e.g., “I promise it won’t be the last kiss, so hold it on, (.) so I’ll give it to you next time, while we do it the way you like it”; Danny Ocean 2017).

### **Gender differences**

The IR romantic love apparently encourages the right feelings, yet it generates and upholds clearly unequal gender constructions, which typically sexualize and subordinate the feminine to the masculine, while normalizing discriminatory differences between men and women (Sánchez-Sicilia and Cubells Serra 2018). This aspect will be taken up again in the section on the IR hedonic love. Edward Burns’ pioneering work (1999) revealed several discursive strategies that defined romantic love as a gender discourse which imposed the following dichotomy: “women seek love, men seek sex”. Although men and women generally use similar discursive strategies in this IR, there are differences based on how each gender perceives or feels love. Thus, the male voice focuses on how to make women fall in love, how much harm women have inflicted on them, and the use of alcohol to cope with being lovesick (see Table 3).

On the other hand, the female voice emphasizes the time or resources wasted on relationships (e.g., “I’m not sad for you, but I’m sad for all the time I had to waste”; Anastacia 2004). Likewise, the feeling of being in love is enhanced in women’s voices, perpetuating the idea that women would give up everything to save the relationship:

**Table 2.** Examples of the IR romantic love associated with lost love.

Feelings associated with lost love	“(.) The pain for believing in you stays. What became of the dream and the beauty of life? Why did you heal me when I was wounded. If you’re leaving me again with a broken heart? (.)”. (Alejandro Sanz 1997).
Rejection	“(.) She says I think I’d better go. She says goodbye and I say . . . No! Suzanna, Suzanna, Suzanna, I’m crazy loving you (.)”. (The Art Company 1984).
Abandonment	“(.) He left, his poison was all I had left. He left, and my love was frozen with ice. He left, and my life is gone with him. He left, and since then I’ve only got tears (.)”. (Laura Pausini 1994).
Infidelity	“(.) Almost sure you’re with him. And I’m a fool because I feel terrible for being left out. Nothing, nothing without you (.)”. (Eros Ramazzotti 1989).

**Table 3.** Examples of men's discursive strategies associated with lost love.

Strategies for falling in love	"(...) Hear every thought, see every dream and give her wings, when she wants to fly (...)" (Bryan Adams 1996).
Love and sexual relationships	"(...) Strip me, play with me, like the bad woman every man would like to possess (...)" (Melendi 2005).
Woman as the cause of pain	"(...) She destroyed my life without shedding a tear, like an assassin (...)" (Auryn 2013).
Alcohol as comforter	"(...) The liquor I drink opens my wounds, the more drunk I get, the more I love you. Oh, oh, oh! Where, where are you my gypsy woman? (...)" (Daniel Magal 1978).

"And love comes first. Forever and ever together, we sail into infinity. We're higher and higher and higher (...)"

## **IR 2: Hedonistic love**

We named this IR hedonistic love because it repeatedly revolves around fun, partying, and pleasure linked to sexual relationships, which are often of a sporadic and fleeting nature. Over the period analysed, this IR was mainly expressed by male voices; however, in recent years it has been increasingly found in lyrics expressed by female voices. The lyrics in the IR hedonistic love are grouped around two axes: (1) liquid love: "Let's spend the night together. Let's work the night together" (Azul and Negro 1982); and (2) partying and fun: "I'm going to get so pissed I'll make history. I'll crawl home with a smile on my face. Tomorrow, I'll have a snooze (...)"

### **Liquid love**

We named this first axis liquid love because it refers to sporadic sexual relationships aimed at sexual pleasure and instant satisfaction characterized by fragile bonds (Zygmunt Bauman 2003). These types of relationships are closely associated with social changes in the postmodern period. The ubiquity of capitalism and consumerism have led to a type of mercantilism in romantic relationships that forces people to constantly look for a better romantic partner or to search for satisfaction of their needs. Liquid love is related to superficial sexual relationships, in which partners try to avoid feelings of pain or remorse in the relationship and focus their affective bond on immediate satisfaction and sexual pleasure. Sánchez-Sicilia and Cubells Serra (2018) suggested that the priority given to hedonic practices represents a threat to the hegemony of romantic love and, in many cases, society rejects such practices. Gender differences are also clearly expressed in the IR hedonic love. Women tend to be more critical of hedonistic attitudes and of women who embody these attitudes. However, men may initially reject the implications of liquid love, but they tend to feel more comfortable in the setting of pleasure, lack of commitment, and fun. We found that the IRs romantic love and hedonistic love both position men on a higher level than women and perpetuate control over them. For example, the lyrics "What you wanting, what you may do. Completely sample rated, till my deeply penetrated. Then I take it out and wipe it off"; Jason Derülo (2014) exemplifies the emphasis placed on male satisfaction, his desire for sex, and strong pressure on the other to comply. Yesid Penagos and Miguel Alberto González González (2012) identified discursive strategies in reggaeton that portray the appeal, fascination, and pull of the hedonic world for adolescents. This author also found that this genre conveyed a simple code

with which to understand relationships, the lack of a need for serious commitment, challenges to morality, the use of arrogant language, and emphasis on the cult of the individual. In recent years, reggaeton has had more presence in the top 40 Spanish charts and so this code is becoming normalised (e.g., “Hey babe, don’t be bad, don’t leave me in the lurch”; Maluma and Shakira 2016).

### **Partying and fun**

The second narrative focuses on having fun in party settings in which seduction games and the use of alcohol are present. Most of these songs associate having fun with music and alcohol. These factors serve to elevate mood, raise energy, and offer a sense of identity and closeness via particular musical styles, all of which facilitates sexual contact.

### **Gender differences**

In the lyrics addressing liquid love, men emphasize their sexual abilities while exalting promiscuity and infidelity. Women are seen as just an object for the sexual act. However, women have recently begun to sing about their own sexuality and sexual freedom, using metaphors that are increasingly more explicit. Table 4 shows some examples of IR2 by gender.

Regarding partying and diversity, men seek contact at parties to obtain sexual contact (e.g., “And the girl in the corner is everyone’s mourner, she could kill you with a wink of her eye”; Sweet 1973). Thus, another noteworthy characteristic of the male voice is to blame women for not being able to have sexual relationships, for their indecision, or because they do not want to go sexually further with that man (e.g.,: “C’mon decide, don’t hesitate any longer. Make up your mind, I can’t hold back any more without having you”; Luís Miguel 1983). However, women reject these sexual attempts (e.g., “And the boys chase the girls”; Amy MacDonald 2009). Above all, women focus on having fun and freeing themselves from the social norms imposed by their environment rather than on securing a sexual encounter (e.g., “We ain’t stopping, keep on dancing til the world ends”; Britney Spears 2011). There are also some expressions of feminine liberation within party settings that even justify crossing specific boundaries (e.g., “We can kiss who we want, we can screw who we want”; Miley Cyrus 2013) or experimenting with homosexual experiences (e.g., “I kissed a girl and I liked it”; Katy Perry 2008).

**Table 4.** Examples of IR 2 by gender.

Infidelity	“( . . . ) I don’t mind you sleeping with him because I know you dream of being able to see me. With him your heart hurts and with me your feet hurt ( . . . )”. (Enrique Iglesias and Wisin 2016).
Female empowerment	“( . . . ) Let me be your ruler (ruler). You can call me queen Bee and baby I’ll rule, I’ll rule, I’ll rule, I’ll rule. Let me live that fantasy ( . . . )”. (Lorde 2013).
Female objectification	“( . . . ) I like your wife, ( . . . ) I’ll take her away, ( . . . ) we’ll get it together ( . . . ), ( . . . ) exchange her for two of 20 ( . . . )”. (Luis E. Aute 1984).
Male sexual prowess	“( . . . ) Today you won’t escape. I slept 12 hours, I’m better than fine. It’s my night, don’t hesitate, you’ll be surprised ( . . . )”. (G. Hombres 2003).

**Table 5.** Examples of the discursive strategies used in the IR toxic love.

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Madness of love	“( . . . ) And I'll die with you if you kill yourself and I kill myself with you if you die, because the love that doesn't die away kills you, because the love that kills never dies ( . . . )”. (Joaquín Sabina 1996).
Obsessions	“( . . . ) Just gonna stand there and watch me burn. Well, that's alright because I like the way it hurts. Just gonna stand there and hear me cry ( . . . )”. (Eminem 2010).
Dependence	“( . . . ) So go on, go on, come on leave me breathless. Tempt me, tease me, until I can't deny ( . . . )”. (The Corrs 2000).

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### ***IR 3: Toxic love***

We call the third IR toxic love because it includes discourses about what people would be willing to do for love, even at the expense of being harmful to them or their environment. Over the study period, we found that the IR toxic love was expressed less frequently than the other IRs; nevertheless, it began to increase toward the end of the period. This IR typically refers to self-destructive feelings and the secret or dark side of intimate relationships. As expected, we found some connections between toxic love and romantic love. Indeed, the violence or extreme control found in the discursive strategies used in this IR are justified by the discourse of romantic love. This IR typically comprises 2 main versions: “the dark side of love” and “the practice of domination”.

#### ***The dark side of love***

The topic of “dark side of love” includes lyrics about the madness of love, obsessions, and pathological dependence, which are recognized by the singer, but from which one cannot easily escape despite making efforts (see Table 5).

Authors such as Dias et al. (2012) have found these types of expressions in discursive repertoires referring to passionate uncontrollable love. This kind of love possesses the lovers and often justifies situations of violence against women “Tie me up or free me from this sweet sentence of flesh and skin (Mónica Naranjo 1997).”

#### ***Domination***

We identified lyrics that addressed the practice of structurally masculine domination over the partner, showing her the correct “path” on how to love him and behave. Previous studies have described other discursive strategies, such as the metaphor of love as a hunt, which refers to power inequalities in romantic relationships based on the objectification of the female partner and the construction of an unequal masculine-feminine dyad (Cubells and Calsamiglia 2016; María L. Esteban and Ana Távora 2008; Eva P. Gil and Imma Lloret 2007; Jonel Thaller and Jill T. Messing 2013). The use of this type of metaphor contributes to the normalization of violence as something implicit in relationships.

Since 2004, we identified more explicit references against gender violence as currently understood by female voices (e.g., “Don't you think you're better than women. You're bad, bad, bad. You don't harm those you love, no”; Bebe 2004).

#### ***Gender differences***

Inequalities between gender are intrinsic to the IR toxic love. Thus, in this repertoire, we found that men tend to refer to control and domination, whereas women tend to speak of submissive situations in which they find themselves trapped in a “toxic idyll” of which they

**Table 6.** Examples of toxic love by gender.

Men	Women
I am like the air sticking to you, you can't escape, don't ever resist (. . .)". (Pedro Marín 1980).	"(. . .) The whole of me, from top to bottom. The whole of me, fully yours. The whole of me, even if my life is in danger (. . .)". (Malú 2001).
"(. . .) And if I ever see you draw a chalk heart on the wall again, I'll beat you up for writing my name inside it (. . .)". (Radio Futura 1990).	But kill me, kill me . . . I don't want your life anymore, but kill me and I'll cry. I'll only cry for you (. . .)". (Arena Caliente 1972).
	"(. . .) What doesn't kill you makes you stronger (. . .)". (Kelly Clarkson 2011).

are not fully aware, and are unable to change the direction of a relationship that is emotionally toxic to them (Table 6).

## Conclusions

It is beyond question that there is a close relationship between music and society. Music discourse arises from life situations, changes, and issues, and in this sense music is a relevant measure of social beliefs and discourses (Rivas 2016). However, music also acts as an incentive to social change by envisaging and consolidating new paradigms. Thus, the connection between music and society is bidirectional and can be understood in terms of feedback (Eduardo Viñuela 2011). Music is a substantial and constructive element that affects our everyday life.

Popular music is an art form which is listened to, marketed, and globalized on a massive scale. We analysed how it describes and helps shape the way men and women interact and understand intimate relationships. Until relatively recently, popular music was consumed through radio shows. Thus, we chose *Los 40 Principales (The Top 40)*, which is the most popular radio show in Spain, and analysed 1838 songs broadcast from 1966 to 2017 in Spain. From these, we selected songs that described intimate relationships between men and women and analysed these descriptions and their development over the study period.

The results show that in most of these songs the main topics were love, lost love, and sexual interactions. These topics were classified into a set of IRs that formed the main discursive axes by which these relationships can be characterized (i.e., IR1: romantic love, IR2: hedonistic love; and IR3: toxic love).

Most of the songs analysed addressed romantic love, followed by hedonistic love. Fewer songs addressed toxic love, although they began to increase toward the end of the study period. When the study period was decomposed into 10-year blocks (See Figure 3), we also observed that the historical period clearly influenced the discursive strategies that shaped the IRs. For example, from 1976 onward, we found marked changes in the concept of love and intimate relationships. At that time, Spain regained democracy. This was accompanied by the progressive liberation of women-which remains incomplete-as well as by marked changes in habits, values, and leisure pursuits, which reframed how hedonism was perceived (Héctor Fouce 2006). In the words of Karandashev (2015), new realities are created in response to changes in the ways of feeling, thinking, and behaving in social relationships. The outcome of these new realities is that some social issues, which until then had remained hidden in the private sphere, have emerged to become

normalized in the public arena. Between 1990 and 2000, specific issues affecting the female population, such as inequality, work-life reconciliation, and particularly male violence, were increasingly addressed in global, European, and Spanish political agendas. In the last decade, there have been some changes in the relative percentages of the three IRs. New hedonistic trends have emerged in songs addressing sexual and romantic relationships. Although these trends are still in a minority, both genders are becoming increasingly identified with them. In some cases, even toxic behaviour is becoming normalized as the basis for intimate relationships. The combination of hedonistic and toxic IRs sustains unequal constructions of gender, in which the feminine is assimilated as sexualized and subordinated to “male” logic and men’s feelings are prioritized over women’s. This could lead to discriminatory differences becoming normalized between men and women (Sánchez-Sicilia and Cubells Serra 2018). Depending on the gender of the voice, such differentiation preferentially emphasizes male dominance in prioritizing the search for sex as well as justifying great frustration when this desire is delayed or rejected, whereas the female voice places greater emphasis on romantic attitudes and the search for faithful and reciprocal love, while expressing a certain level of guilt in the face of hedonic desires. Anthony Giddens 1992 suggested that modern societies are founded on a clandestine emotional narrative, which is based on men being permitted to have double standards and sexually control women. Acquiescence to these double standards also underlies the current intensification of male violence against women.

However, the hedonistic and toxic love discourse also offers female singers a novel expressive space. This development is associated with the recent entrance of women singers in styles such as reggaeton and trap, which are typically seen as bastions of male privilege. We consider that this issue could be of great interest to future studies. These new musical trends are gaining ground via the feminine appropriation of these styles, in which they denounce toxic relationships and demand greater freedom in voicing sexual desires and free choice (Núria Araüna, Iolanda Tortajada and Mònica Figueras-Maz 2019; Sherri Williams 2017).

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