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# BEYOND CHILDHOOD: SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE IN THE CITY OF ILLUSIONS

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Exploring the Intersection of Digital Manipulation,  
Emotional Violence, and Educational Outcomes

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# **Beyond Childhood: Social Media and Emotional Violence in the City of Illusions**

Exploring the Global Impact of Digital Manipulation, Emotional Violence, and Educational Outcomes

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## **Date:**

July 5, 2024

## **Abstract:**

This study examines the pervasive and often invisible forms of emotional abuse enabled by social media platforms, with a focus on female college students in La Paz, Baja California Sur. Through detailed case studies, qualitative coding, and grounded theory, the research reveals how digital interactions can intensify emotional violence, public humiliation, and diminish the academic and personal well-being of women. In the current discourse highlighting social media's harm to children, this study emphasizes that the detrimental effects of digital manipulation extend to adults globally. The findings provide crucial insights for social media corporations, educators, policymakers, and community leaders to create safer, more supportive environments for individuals of all ages.

## **Pro Bono Initiative**

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This research would not have been possible without the contributions of the women who bravely shared their experiences, the collaboration of key individuals in La Paz, and the guidance of mentors in the field of social sciences.

**Disclosure:**

As anthropologists, we conduct participant-observation research, embedding ourselves intricately within the communities we study to gain deeper and more nuanced insights into the issues at hand. To protect the privacy and, in this case, the safety of all parties involved, it is essential to change names, identifying information, and specific details. Accordingly, I have meticulously constructed the case studies to ensure this protection.

Nevertheless, the stories presented here are both very real and very true.

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# **Beyond Childhood: Social Media and Emotional Violence in the City of Illusions**

*"Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning." — Clifford Geertz*

## **Introduction**

La Paz is known locally as the "City of Illusions."

In winter 2020, I moved to La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico, drawn by the serene isolation for freediving amidst the uncertain times of the Covid-19 pandemic. The tranquil waters of the Sea of Cortez offered a respite from the global chaos, but my anthropological curiosity soon led me to deeper waters of a different kind.

Shortly after settling in, I was struck by the low rates of female college graduation and the alarming statistics on violence against women reported by the World Health Organization (WHO). These observations ignited a burning question in my mind: how might domestic violence be affecting women's opportunities and well-being in La Paz? As an anthropologist, I naturally turned my focus to this critical issue, seeking to unravel the intricate web of social, economic, and cultural factors at play.

By March 2021, I began collaborating with key individuals to explore this complex issue, aiming to deliver insights and recommendations to the Secretaría de Educación Pública de Baja California Sur and Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur (UABCS). Along the way, I was fortunate to meet remarkable individuals who generously shared their stories and expertise, facilitating crucial connections for advocating resources and solutions.

My academic and professional background in researching domestic violence, its economic and cultural impacts, has prepared me for much, but nothing could fully prepare me for the nuances in emotional violence I've encountered in La Paz. This research journey has unveiled the subtle, yet profound ways in which emotional manipulation and abuse are perpetrated, often exacerbated by the pervasive reach of social media.

In this study, I delve into the lives of women in La Paz, examining their interactions on social media platforms and the consequent emotional manipulation and abuse they endure. The findings reveal a disturbing pattern: social media is not just a tool for connection but also a conduit for emotional violence. This research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics and offer actionable insights for social media stakeholders, educators, policymakers, and community leaders.

Through detailed qualitative coding and grounded theory methodology, I analyzed the stories, interactions, and emotional responses of women affected by these issues. The results highlight the urgent need for comprehensive approaches to address and mitigate this modern form of abuse. My hope is that this research will contribute to creating safer, more supportive environments for women in La Paz and beyond, fostering resilience and empowerment in the face of adversity.

In the pages that follow, I present the culmination of this research—a blend of personal narratives, theoretical frameworks, and practical recommendations.

This work is dedicated to the women who bravely shared their experiences, and to all those working tirelessly to combat emotional violence and promote gender equality.

This paper will first review the existing literature on social media and emotional violence, followed by a detailed explanation of the methodology used. The findings and discussions will be presented in subsequent sections, culminating in a comprehensive set of recommendations for stakeholders.

## **Infrastructure, Demographics, and Context of Domestic Violence in Baja California Sur**

### **Overview**

Domestic violence in Baja California Sur (BCS) has increasingly become a significant concern over recent years. Historically, BCS had lower rates of violent crime compared to other Mexican states. However, recent trends show a worrying rise in various forms of violence, including domestic violence, often linked with organized crime and socio-economic issues. Before further discussing domestic violence specific issues, I want to highlight some of La Paz's structural issues to provide more context.

### **La Paz Infrastructure**

La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico suffers multiple infrastructural and environmental challenges that underpin the structural violences in the culture.

The city struggles with a significant water crisis due to overexploitation of its main water source, the La Paz aquifer, which fails to meet the increasing demands of the population. Consequently, many residents rely on cisterns for water storage, and the water delivery to these cisterns is sometimes unreliable (Niparaja, 2010). Moreover, tap water is not potable: everyone relies on bottled water not as a preference, but out of necessity.

The roads in La Paz are notably decayed, contributing to increased traffic congestion as vehicles are forced to navigate the deteriorating infrastructure. In the decade from 2010 to 2020, La Paz saw a 16% population growth (Secretaría de Economía, n.d.), putting further strain on the city's already overstretched utilities and services.

La Paz's electricity system is not well-equipped to handle the stress from extreme heat or hurricanes. Power outages during peak heat times and during hurricanes are common, particularly in rural areas, further endangering residents who rely on air conditioning and cooling systems to stay safe.

Furthermore, the city's sewage system is not designed to handle toilet paper, which must be disposed of separately to prevent blockages, and which creates in-home sanitation concerns.

La Paz's susceptibility to hurricanes adds another layer of vulnerability, often leading to severe damage and exacerbating existing issues.

Beyond these structural factors weighing heavily upon the citizens of La Paz, many buildings, particularly in the city's historical district, are blanketed in graffiti, and the city is plagued by numerous dilapidated, abandoned structures.

Educational concerns are addressed separately below.

### **College Graduation Rates**

According to the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2020), 23% of the population aged 15 and older in Baja California Sur has completed higher education. This percentage includes both men and women, but there is no specific breakdown for women in La Paz. For more details, you can visit the INEGI website.

While it's not an apple-to-apple comparison, consider that in the US state of California just across the border from Baja, approximately 34.1% of the adult population (aged 25 and over) has completed higher education, which includes both bachelor's and advanced degrees. This statistic places California among the top states in terms of educational attainment for adults (California Degrees, 2023; Public Policy Institute of California, 2023; OECD, 2024).

### **Trends in Violence**

Baja California Sur, with a population of approximately 800,000 (40% of which live in La Paz) (INEGI, 2020), has seen a surge in violence over the past decade (Calderón, 2018). For instance, in 2017, the state experienced a significant increase in homicides, with the number jumping to 560 from 192 in the previous year, making it one of the most violent states in Mexico on a per capita basis (Calderón, 2018). This surge is primarily



attributed to conflicts between major drug cartels, particularly the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) (Calderón, 2018); Corcoran, 2018).

## **Domestic Violence Among College Students**

Although specific statistics for domestic violence among college students in Baja California Sur or La Paz are less documented, US studies indicate a high prevalence of such issues among college-aged individuals (AVDA, n.d.; Boyd-Barrett, 2020). For example, in the United States, nearly half of female college students report violent and abusive behaviors in intimate relationships ((Domestic Shelters, 2023; NDVA, n.d.). Similar trends are likely present in Mexico, where socio-cultural dynamics and underreporting further complicate the accurate measurement of such incidents.

Victims of domestic violence often find it difficult to continue their education after experiencing abuse, leading to dropout or decreased academic performance (Youth.gov, 2023). This pattern suggests that female students at institutions like Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur (UABCS) may face similar challenges, impacting their graduation rates.

## **Police Response**

Penalties for domestic violence include imprisonment for six months to four years for first-time offenders, along with mandatory psychological treatment (Baker McKenzie, 2021). In addition to incarceration, perpetrators may face loss of rights related to family bonds such as inheritance, alimony, and custody. Violations of existing protection orders result in further penalties and detention, reinforcing the original orders (Baker McKenzie, 2021). However, there are no provisions in the law to notify victims upon the release of their offenders from custody (Baker McKenzie, 2021).

### **Limitations Implementing Penalties**

Implementing these penalties faces several limitations. One major obstacle is the lack of trust in victims' allegations and the demand for material evidence to corroborate their

statements (Baker McKenzie, 2021). This is compounded by a perception among authorities that domestic violence is a private matter or of low priority, leading to inadequate enforcement of protective orders (Baker McKenzie, 2021). Additionally, there are limitations in law enforcement involvement due to victims' hesitation to report violence, withdrawing their complaint due to complex attachment, dependency, and victimology issues, conflicts of interest, prejudice, and lack of financial resources (Baker McKenzie, 2021; Carlton, 2019). The legal process requires only the victim's statement to request protection measures, but proving allegations remains a challenge (Baker McKenzie, 2021).

In Baja California Sur and in Mexico in general, there is a systemic issue of underreporting and poor police response to cases of domestic violence and other crimes. Victims often face re-victimization when seeking help due to inadequate response, and both the police and judicial system are plagued by inefficiencies and corruption. These challenges are compounded by the fear and retaliation from the perpetrator and/or organized crime groups, making it difficult for victims to come forward (Gracia, 2004; Kloppe-Santamaría & Zulver, 2023). Moreover, the police are often under-trained and poorly equipped to handle the sophisticated nature of domestic violence (Felbab-Brown, 2022).

In summary, despite having comprehensive laws and penalties in place, the effectiveness of these measures is hindered by societal and institutional biases, insufficient support systems, and procedural hurdles. The findings highlight the need for better training for authorities, increased awareness, and more robust support mechanisms for victims. Ensuring victims' safety and enforcing protective orders effectively are critical to addressing domestic violence in Mexico.

### **Mechanisms of Manipulation via Social Media**

Social media platforms allow abusers to create and maintain illusions of safety and trust. According to Tokunaga (2011), social media enables constant surveillance, allowing abusers to monitor and control their victims' activities. The ability to craft

multiple online personas further complicates the detection of abuse (Whitty, 2018). Abusers can manipulate their victims by alternating between affectionate and abusive behavior, creating a cycle of emotional dependence and confusion (Drouin, Ross, & Tobin, 2015).

### **Psychological Impact on Victims**

The psychological impact of emotional abuse via social media is profound. Victims often experience heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2016). The visibility of abuse on public platforms amplifies the humiliation and distress experienced by victims (Cater, 2013). The constant digital presence of the abuser can lead to a pervasive sense of fear and helplessness, undermining the victim's sense of autonomy and self-worth (Southworth, Finn, Dawson, Fraser, & Tucker, 2007).

### **Impact of Social Media Usage on Education**

Recent studies highlight the significant impact of social media usage on educational outcomes, particularly focusing on the relationship between time spent on social media and academic performance. For example, research indicates that extensive use of social media can correlate with lower GPAs among students, suggesting that the time spent on these platforms may detract from academic activities (Bedua et al., 2021). Additionally, another study found that while social media can facilitate collaboration and engagement, excessive use often leads to decreased academic achievement (Alwagait et al., 2015). These findings underscore the importance of balanced social media usage to optimize educational outcomes.

### **Broader Social Implications**

The use of social media in emotional abuse has broader social implications. It challenges traditional notions of privacy and security, as abuse can occur across geographical boundaries and outside the physical presence of the abuser (Woodlock, 2017). This form of abuse also complicates legal responses, as evidence of emotional

manipulation can be more difficult to document and prove compared to physical abuse (Douglas, Harris, & Dragiewicz, 2019). The societal normalization of digital interactions further obscures the recognition of these abusive patterns (Henry & Powell, 2018).

### **Addressing the Urgency of Digital Emotional Abuse**

The literature underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address and mitigate emotional abuse facilitated by social media. This includes the development of educational programs to raise awareness, the implementation of robust reporting mechanisms on social media platforms, and the enhancement of legal frameworks to protect victims. By understanding the dynamics of digital manipulation and its impact, stakeholders can work towards creating safer online environments.

## **Research Methods**

### **Study Commencement and Context**

Research commenced on March 15, 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strict health protocols were in place, and government offices and schools were closed, making it challenging to reach people through traditional means.

### **Language and Communication**

My Spanish skills were (and still are) dismal, adding another layer of difficulty to the research process. I used an official translator and translation apps, such as DeepL and ChatGPT, for much of my work; however, all of the final participants in my study spoke very good if not fluent English. My informants all speak fluent English.

In La Paz, Facebook is the primary social media platform. It cannot be overstated how deeply this community relies on Facebook as a connection and networking tool. For direct communication, WhatsApp is the main communication tool. Direct text messaging, as customary in the United States, is an unused tool. LinkedIn is virtually unknown in the community, where business connections rely heavily on Facebook and Instagram.

The population of La Paz is approximately 250,000 people (City Population, 2020), and once a single good connection is established, many other connections become accessible due to the close-knit nature of the community.

### **Research Timeline and Participant Recruitment**

From March 15, 2021, to June 30, 2024, I observed interpersonal interactions in intimate partner relationships. The first participant was referred to me by a neighbor. I used the snowball method for participant recruitment, initially interviewing 12 women. Over the research period, I followed three cases as an interviewer, observer, participant, and investigator collecting and analyzing screenshot records such as, but not limited to,

WhatsApp messages and social media posts. Interviews were often conducted remotely due to Covid-19 concerns and my personal travels.

### **Informed Consent and Ethical Considerations**

All research subjects agreed to participate by signing an informed consent form in Spanish (**Appendix A**). All names and identifying information have been changed to protect participants' privacy.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection relied heavily on interview notes, and digital records, such as WhatsApp messages, text messages, emails, and public social media posts and post comments. Qualitative coding was employed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of findings.

### **Qualitative Coding Methodology**

Note-Taking: Hand-written field notes were taken during or shortly after events using Notability, an iPad application.

Data Collection: Social media profiles, posts, comments, private messages, and relevant digital records were either printed digitally (PDF) or collected by taking screenshots.

Data Organization: Field notes and digital records were transferred manually to Google Sheets, with qualitative codes entered for each entry.

### **Sample Data Coding (See Appendix B: Research Instruments for elaboration):**

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** "On June 26, 2023, Maria WhatsApp'd a raw, unfiltered photo of herself to me. Maria's face reflects profound grief for what she saw on Andreas' Facebook page. Her eyes show a sense of trauma."

## **Assigned Codes:**

- **Platform:** WhatsApp, Facebook
- **Type of Abuse:** Public humiliation, betrayal
- **Emotional Impact:** Grief, Trauma

## **Bias Disclosure**

My interest in the impact of domestic violence on women's productivity stems from previous research on domestic violence and personal experience. To mitigate bias, I took copious notes and was cautious in coding memos and sorting data.

## **Limitations of the Study**

1. **Language Barriers:** The research was conducted in a bilingual environment, which may have introduced translation inaccuracies despite the use of an official and professional translators and translation apps.
2. **Sample Size:** The study's sample size was limited to three detailed case studies, which cannot capture the full spectrum of experiences related to emotional abuse facilitated by social media in La Paz.
3. **Self-Reporting Bias:** The reliance on participants' self-reported experiences may introduce bias, as individuals may underreport or overreport certain aspects of their experiences.

## **Introduction to Case Studies**

In the following sections, you will read the deeply personal and harrowing stories of three female college students in La Paz, Baja California Sur, whose experiences highlight the pervasive and insidious nature of emotional abuse facilitated through social media. Each story is a testament to the strength and resilience of these women, and serves to illuminate the broader patterns of emotional violence facilitated by social media that often go unnoticed. As you embark on this journey through their narratives, keep in mind the complex interplay of cultural norms, technological influence, and individual vulnerability that shapes their experiences.

Women in these cases were profoundly transparent, volunteering sensitive details about their emotions and behaviors in ways unexpected from Americans, which was both refreshing and compelling.

## **Summary of Case Studies**

### **Maria's Story: "Digital Duplicity: Humiliation and Trauma Through Social Media"**

Maria, a 22-year-old student at Instituto Tecnológico de la Paz, experienced profound emotional trauma exacerbated by social media. Initially drawn to Andreas, who she met on Facebook, Maria trusted his reassurances and public displays of affection on Facebook and Instagram.

However, rumors of Andreas's involvement with another woman led Maria to discover his inappropriate Facebook and Instagram interactions, which humiliated her before his large online following. This public betrayal not only shattered Maria's trust but also highlighted the role of social media in facilitating emotional violence.

### **Isabella's Story: "Illusions of Safety: Online Trust, Real-World Betrayal"**

Isabella, a first-year environmental sciences student at Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur (UABCS), was charmed by Mateo's promises of protection communicated through Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp messages and post comments. Despite



early red flags, such as Mateo breaching her apartment's security gate under the guise of chivalry, Isabella fell deeper into dependency on him due to his continuous reassurances of protection, frequently emphasized with strong arm emojis, on Facebook posts and private WhatsApp messages.

This illusion of safety began to unravel when Isabella's home was robbed, and she discovered Mateo's involvement with the perpetrators. Her investigation into his social media connections revealed a network of deceit and manipulation, profoundly impacting her mental health and leading her to leave her studies and return to her family in Peru.

### **Sofia's Story: "False Facades: Projecting Authority & Unmasking Truth"**

Sofia, a junior year marine biology student at Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur (UABCS), was initially charmed by Alejandro's attention on Facebook. Claiming to be a Director at UABCS, Alejandro built a facade of credibility and trust through LinkedIn. Their relationship deepened through constant communication on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, where Alejandro reinforced his false authority and reliability.

However, inconsistencies in his stories and increasing secrecy raised Sofia's suspicions. Her investigation revealed Alejandro's multiple aliases and duplicitous behaviors, including his involvement in predominantly pornographic content on X (previously Twitter) while proclaiming Christian righteousness on Facebook and Instagram. This revelation that "nothing was real" shattered the illusion of trust and safety he had constructed. The emotional manipulation led Sofia to seek lifesaving mental healthcare for suicidality, and ultimately caused her to abandon her studies.

# Maria: Digital Duplicity: Humiliation and Trauma Through Social Media

## **Initial Contact**

On June 26, 2023, Maria WhatsApp'd a raw, unfiltered photo of herself to me. Her face reflected a mix of shock, disbelief, and profound grief. Her eyes showed a sense of trauma. She was pale, and her features were marked by a combination of horror and sadness. Her usually composed demeanor was replaced by a visible struggle to maintain control amidst overwhelming grief. Her raw emotions in those first 24 hours highlighted the human capacity for profound emotion in the face of personal tragedy.

## **Background**

Maria, a 22-year-old student at Instituto Tecnológico de la Paz on her path to becoming a Certified Public Accountant, had experienced significant personal tragedy. Born with a disability, she had lost her closest cousin to a motorcycle accident, her mother had been unwell since she was 10, she had recently lost her father to cancer, and her family was at risk of losing their home due to financial turmoil. Despite these challenges, Maria remained hopeful for a better future.

## **Growing Distance**

Maria and Andreas met on Facebook and had been dating for two years. They made it through the Covid-19 pandemic together without illness and without losing a loved one to the virus. However, over the past few months, Andreas, who was the center of her world, had become unusually distant. He explained that he was busy with work, and she chose to trust his words. Andreas, a 37-year-old hotel manager on the La Paz Malecon, was known in the community for having ample experience with women.

## **The Rumors and Reality**

Maria dismissed rumors that Andreas was engaged in risky communications on Facebook with another woman. She was busy with her studies, helping her mother, and

caring for her baby brother while working at a restaurant. Trusting Andreas completely, she had no reason to believe the rumors until she decided to check his Facebook posts herself. The discovery of his openly flirtatious Facebook interactions with another woman publicly devastated her and placed her in a painful spotlight in front of his 5,000 followers.

### **Public Betrayal**

Despite his reassurances and claims of love, Andreas's public pursuit of another woman inflicted piercing anguish upon Maria. His refusal to remove the public Facebook comments exacerbated her feelings of loss and alienation. The confrontations were met with indefensible excuses. Andreas labeling the other woman “crazy,” further insulted Maria. This experience shattered Maria's trust and sense of security, but with the support of her family and community, she remained in school and is set to graduate in spring 2025.

### **The Role of Social Media in Emotional Violence**

The manner in which Facebook was used to harm Maria is a sobering reflection of its potential for emotional violence. While it is widely acknowledged that children are being harmed by social media, there is another level of harm that pervades our communities, posing a worrisome phenomenon with the power to negatively impact mental health globally.

As we find ways to control intimate partner violence across the globe, new methods emerge using technology. Andreas's public display of emotional violence highlights the need for mental healthcare and societal intervention. This violence affects not only the direct victim but also the broader community, including the ill-informed other woman and the silent voyeurs who only discuss it privately.

# Isabella: Illusions of Safety: Online Trust, Real-World Betrayal

## **Introduction**

Isabella, a first-year environmental sciences student at Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur (UABCS), found herself drawn to Mateo's charm and his pledges of protection. They met on Facebook, and their initial interactions quickly developed into a relationship filled with tender moments and promises of safety in a community always vigilant about real threats of violence and absence of police protection.

## **Early Relationship**

Their first stroll along the La Paz Malecon was filled with captivating conversation and gentlemanly behavior. Despite the initial warmth, Isabella was unsettled when Mateo followed her home and breached her apartment's security gate. He defended his actions as an act of chivalry and concern for her safety, which, combined with his charm, led Isabella to overlook this early red flag.

Mateo's continuous reassurances, both privately and on Facebook, that she could count on him for anything created an illusion of safety and love. His promises of protection pulled Isabella deeper into a dependency on him, as she was a foreigner in La Paz from Peru.

Mateo preferred communication through Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, frequently relying on WhatsApp and Facebook voice messages while avoiding phone calls. He engaged heavily with Isabella on Facebook posts, leaving supportive comments and strong-arm emojis and heart on fire emojis, to emphasize his cultural reassurances of support and protection in a city that has seen a surge in violence in recent times (Calderón, 2018); Corcoran, 2018).

This social media illusion, meticulously constructed by Mateo, became the foundation of their relationship. Each promise of protection, each declaration of his readiness to

rescue her, pulled Isabella deeper into a web of dependency. What began as a seemingly genuine concern soon shifted from care to violence.

### **The Crisis**

One day, Isabella returned home to find her home was broken into and she had been robbed of her most cherished and valued belongings. Her desperate attempts to get help were met with indifference from the authorities. In Isabella's desperation that evening, she turned to Mateo for comfort in every regard.

This home robbery intensified her reliance on Mateo, who continued to reassure her of his love and protection through constant WhatsApp messages and supportive Facebook comments: "Count on me for anything," he wrote to her on her Instagram post with a strong arm emoji.

### **Duality of Love and Betrayal**

Isabella was emotionally vulnerable and attached herself to Mateo for his protection and support. She did not want to be alone.

One weekend, Mateo ghosted her on their plans for the weekend. In the midst of coping with abandonment anxiety, she checked his Instagram profile.

Isabella's meticulous investigation into Mateo's connections revealed his involvement with the men who robbed her. Without confronting Mateo, she began digging deeper, opening a painful Pandora's box.

Despite her crumbling mental health, she was obsessed with learning more truths. She followed as many leads as possible to understand Mateo's relationship with the men who robbed her home, why the police did nothing, and why the district attorney was still "investigating" after two years.

Despite her attachment to him, the evidence of his betrayal was undeniable. Isabella struggled with her conflicting emotions but ultimately decided to leave for the safety of her family in Peru. As a result, Isabella did not complete her degree at UABCS.

## **Reflections on Safety and Trust**

Isabella's journey through Mateo's deception reveals a profound irony: the very man who professed to protect her was orchestrating crimes against her.

Mateo used social media platforms to build an illusion of safety and trust. His charming online persona and continuous reassuring communication via social media were pivotal in establishing and maintaining Isabella's dependence on him as a young foreigner.

By leveraging social media, Mateo was able to present himself as a caring protector while simultaneously orchestrating emotional manipulation and control. Despite the absence of physical assault, Mateo's actions inflicted deep emotional wounds, demonstrating the devastating power of non-physical abuse.

The impact of this abuse extended beyond her emotional and mental well-being, profoundly affecting her academic and personal aspirations. Isabella's decision to drop out of college was not merely an academic withdrawal; it was a retreat from a dream and a testament to the severe toll of sustained emotional manipulation.

In the end, Isabella's escape from the web of lies and her return to her family signify a hard-fought victory over the darkness that threatened to consume her.

## **Hidden Dangers of Digital Deception**

Isabella's story demonstrates the profound impact of emotional manipulation facilitated by social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

Mateo skillfully leveraged these platforms to craft a false persona of authority and trust, using constant online engagement to entrap Isabella in a web of dependence and control.

His abusive actions, which included involvement in the robbery of her home, highlight the darker side of digital interactions where emotional abuse can thrive unnoticed.

## Sophia: False Facades: Projecting Authority & Unmasking Truth

Alejandro initiated contact with Sofia by sending a direct message on Facebook, thanking her for accepting his friend request. Sofia, a junior year marine biology student from Monterrey studying at Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur (UABCS), was flattered by Alejandro's attention. He claimed to be a Director at UABCS, and his LinkedIn profile confirmed this, although it bizarrely listed his location as Sinaloa. This little detail would prove to be but one of his many public discrepancies.

Alejandro seemed to have an insider's knowledge of UABCS. With the campus deserted due to the Covid-19 shutdowns, it made sense that Sofia wouldn't see him around. None of her university friends knew him, but that didn't concern her. They were students, engrossed in their studies and personal lives, indifferent to the administrative hierarchy at UABCS.

### **The Helper**

Alejandro seemed to have insider knowledge of UABCS, which Sofia found intriguing. They frequently met at Doce Cuarenta Cafe, where Alejandro helped with her homework. His proximity and physical closeness made Sofia uncomfortable in the beginning, but his charm and attention overshadowed her concerns.

### **Building Trust and Dependency**

When Sofia fell ill with Covid-19, Alejandro took care of her, bringing soup and flowers, and even offering to stay overnight. His constant connection with her through Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp—even the silly cat memes—established a sense of security and reliance on his availability. His public comments on her Facebook posts reinforced his role as her lover.

### **Cracks in the Facade**

Sofia's initial admiration for Alejandro turned to suspicion when his stories about why he would not allow her to visit his home due to ongoing renovations became repetitive.

Her family's disapproval of him and her cousin's findings about his odd Facebook activity further fueled her doubts.

Despite this, Sofia's attachment to Alejandro deepened as she depended more on his emotional support, particularly through social media and constant WhatsApp reassurances of relationship security.

### **Fall of Illusions**

Sofia pressed Alejandro to visit his home. He promised he would take her there “soon.” Growing impatient, Sofia demanded, “Now.” Alejandro, a 45-year-old man, was forced to confess he lived with his mother and that is the real reason he could not invite her there. His mother doesn’t appreciate guests, he explained.

One Friday morning, he canceled their weekend plans in Cabo San Lucas, saying someone from UABCS needed to meet with him. He was sorry, he said, adding, “You are absolutely gorgeous and I love you so much, Sofia, more than you think.”

Another time, they made plans to spend an evening watching the supermoon rise over La Ventana bay, but a work party was planned at the last minute, and he couldn’t make it. It was out of his control, he explained, but “I love you more than you know.”

He began not answering her phone calls and he did not read her messages for days, explaining that he was busy.

Yet, in contrast, on the anniversary of their meeting, he wrote, “On January 15 of 2021, I first met you, and with that something never known to me unfolded. Happy anniversary, Sofia. I love you.”

He frequently wrote, “I love you, I will call you tomorrow,” and then disappeared without making any direct contact for days while he continued posting memes on Facebook and Instagram and engaging in comments about those posts. The inconsistent, contradictory messaging across platforms triggered feelings of psychosis, or what she frequently described as a sense of “unreality.”



## Unmasking

Sofia was desperate for truth. She created a fake Facebook profile, which Alejandro quickly engaged with while ignoring Sofia. According to him, he was not even in a relationship with her at all. This revelation shattered Sofia.

## Confrontation

Sofia confronted Alejandro at Exquisito Cafe, where his rapid engagement with the fake profile contrasted starkly with his neglect of her. He broke up with Sophia only after one last intimate encounter, leaving Sofia questioning her sanity.

In the following weeks, Sofia discovered Alejandro had multiple online aliases and she discovered that Alejandro's following on X (previously Twitter) was predominantly pornographic in nature. This revelation further exposed the extent of his false persona, as his Facebook and Instagram posts frequently shouted Christian righteousness, particularly proclaiming the importance of truth.

With permission, I provide you with a list of real emotions Sophia expressed:

Alone	Suicidal	Locked in a cage of chaos
Want to cry	Feel like lashing out	Feel like pushing him further away from me
Disappointed	Knot, tightness in my solar plexus	Never discuss plans with him again
Isolated	Foolish for calling him last week	Urge to leave Baja
Unimportant	Deeply sad. Deeply, deeply sad	Something is really wrong with him
Abandoned	Fear that I will get sick if I don't protect myself	Psychosis, head swimming in confusion
Disenfranchised	Depressed	Losing my mind, losing my sanity

Rejected	Disposable	No sense of reality
Meaningless	Sad to lose him	Mentally unhealthy

Sophia WhatsApp'd me, "*Carisa, am I the abusive one by creating a fake Facebook account and deceiving him?*"

I turned to psychological resources for answers:

1. **Desperate Clarity:** Sophia's extreme actions stem from a need for clarity amidst lies and emotional manipulation. Her investigative actions were survival tactics, not abuse (Psychology Today, 2024).
2. **Common Response:** Feeling like the "crazy, abusive one" is a common reaction to gaslighting. Abusers manipulate victims into questioning their sanity, leading to false guilt and responsibility (Cleveland Clinic, 2024).
3. **Reactive Behavior:** Sophia's actions were reactive and aimed at understanding and protecting herself, unlike Alejandro's systematic lying and manipulation (The Healthy, 2022).

### **Emotional Impact**

The emotional toll of Alejandro's abuse compelled Sofia to seek mental healthcare, and she failed to complete her final semester exams opting to return to her family in Monterrey instead.

## **Insights and Implications**

Alejandro used platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to claim to hold an authoritative position as a Director at UABCS, a lie he reinforced not only on his primary social media profiles but also through 19 additional aliases. Each alias was meticulously crafted to bolster his credibility and seduce women by presenting a consistent image of authority and reliability.

Sofia's investigation, using the same technology Alejandro employed for his deceit, revealed the breadth of his manipulation. By creating a fake Facebook account, she uncovered the multiple aliases and the consistent narrative he projected across all profiles. This discovery shattered the illusion of trust and safety that Alejandro had carefully constructed, revealing the depth of his deception.

## Discussion

My research initially sought to understand the relationship between domestic violence and low female graduation rates in La Paz. However, I uncovered a more insidious issue: the pervasive emotional abuse facilitated by social media. Public discourse often emphasizes the harm social media inflicts on children, but this conversation overlooks its profound impact on adults.

Social media platforms, designed to connect people, frequently become tools for manipulation and abuse. They create false realities and foster harmful attachments.

Sofia's experience with Alejandro is a stark reminder of the dangers lurking behind the digital facade. Alejandro's ability to project and maintain an authoritative image across social media platforms and aliases underscores a broader issue of trust and authenticity in online interactions. Sofia's emotional and academic setbacks, resulting from her entanglement with Alejandro, highlight the profound impact of such deceit.

Similarly, Isabella was lured into a false sense of physical and emotional safety through social media and private messaging, creating a deep emotional attachment to Mateo. The betrayal she experienced when she was robbed by the man who meticulously constructed this illusion of safety compelled her to drop out of college and return to her home country for security.

Maria's story illustrates how social media can be used to court and deceive. She was publicly humiliated and betrayed when Andreas blatantly displayed his affair with another woman. His lack of effort to hide the affair suggests that the infliction of emotional distress was intentional.

In conclusion, the false sense of safety and love that social media can create is a powerful force capable of devastating lives. Sofia's journey from enchantment to disillusionment serves as a poignant case study of this modern malaise, highlighting the urgent need for greater awareness and comprehensive strategies to address and mitigate the impact of digital emotional abuse

## Conclusion

### Findings

The research conducted in La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico, known as the “City of Illusions,” where Facebook is the predominant community connection tool, reveals significant insights into the role of social media in facilitating emotional abuse and public humiliation among women. The study highlighted the mechanisms through which social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are used to create and sustain illusions of safety and trust. This manipulation leads to severe psychological distress, undermining victims' mental health and academic aspirations.

Importantly, these effects are not limited to personal well-being but also significantly impact the academic achievements and opportunities of the victims. In a global discourse that often focuses on the harms of social media to children, this study broadens the perspective to show the profound and far-reaching consequences on adults as well.

### Impact of Social Media Perpetrated Emotional Abuse on Education

- Psychological Distress and Academic Disengagement:
  - Victims of emotional abuse reported high levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. These psychological issues contributed to decreased focus, lower participation in academic activities, and a general sense of disengagement from their educational pursuits.
  - *Case Study Insight:* Maria, a student at Instituto Tecnológico de la Paz, struggled with maintaining her academic responsibilities due to the public humiliation she faced on social media, which led to heightened anxiety and depression.
- Withdrawal from Academic Institutions:
  - Two victims abandoned their academic programs entirely as a direct consequence of the emotional abuse initiated online and fear for personal safety.

- *Case Study Insight:* Isabella, a first-year marine biology student at Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur (UABCS), dropped out after discovering her boyfriend's betrayal and the subsequent emotional turmoil it caused. Her experience underscores the severe impact of emotional manipulation on educational retention.
- Academic Performance Decline:
  - Emotional abuse online leads to a marked decline in academic performance. Victims reported difficulties in concentrating on studies, leading to poor grades and missed academic opportunities.
  - *Case Study Insight:* Sofia, another student at UABCS, faced significant emotional distress due to the manipulation and deceit from a man posing as a university director. This distress resulted in her failing to complete her final semester exams and eventually returning to her family in Monterrey.
- Interference with Educational Aspirations:
  - Emotional abuse disrupts the victim's ability to pursue and achieve their educational goals. The abuse creates an environment of fear and uncertainty, which hampers academic progress and aspirations.
  - *Case Study Insight:* All participants expressed a loss of motivation and hope regarding their educational futures due to the ongoing emotional abuse they faced.
- Impact on Future Opportunities:
  - The long-term effects of social media related emotional abuse on education also include diminished future opportunities. Victims who withdraw from academic programs or perform poorly are less likely to secure good jobs, further perpetuating the cycle of dependence and vulnerability.
  - The research indicates that emotional abuse not only impacts the immediate educational outcomes but also has a ripple effect on the victims' career prospects and economic stability.

**Also see “Additional Findings” in [Appendix D](#).**

## Theory

The use of technology, particularly social media platforms, has exacerbated emotional manipulation, introducing new and insidious forms of emotional violence through increased visibility and public humiliation.

These platforms allow perpetrators to craft and sustain elaborate illusions of safety, trust, and professional credibility. This heightened visibility intensifies the victim's emotional vulnerability, entrapping them in a relentless cycle of dependence and control that feels impossible to break.

Actions on social media platforms—like fabricating multiple core identities, using deceptive professional titles to create false authority, manipulating relationships through comments, likes, and text messages, maintaining duplicitous relationships, flaunting these relationships publicly, or using WhatsApp for surveillance and co-conspiring in felony activities—become powerful tools of emotional violence. These acts profoundly harm the women in this study, illustrating the dire need for comprehensive and immediate intervention

In La Paz, where police protection is virtually non-existent, academic support is lacking, and victims are often outsiders, there is an urgent, undeniable need for comprehensive strategies to address and mitigate modern forms of abuse. But let's not turn a blind eye to the insidious global use of social media in perpetuating emotional abuse. This is a wake-up call to both the La Paz community and social media platforms: it's time to recognize the deep, pervasive wounds inflicted through digital manipulation and to take decisive, unified action against this hidden epidemic.

## Recommendations

### 1. AI Integration for Identifying False Personas

- A. **Implementation:** Develop AI tools that can analyze user profiles, cross-reference data across multiple platforms, and identify inconsistencies or signs of false personas. This AI feature could be

integrated into social media platforms as an add-on, assisting users in recognizing potential deceitful behavior.

- B. **Role of Experts:** Collaborate with subject matter experts in emotional abuse and digital behavior to refine AI algorithms, ensuring they capture the nuanced signs of emotional manipulation. This collaboration will help in creating more effective tools that can assist victims in identifying red flags.

**Example:** Similar tools are already used in fraud detection and cybersecurity; adapting these for personal safety and emotional abuse detection is a realistic step forward.

## 2. Need for Institutional Support

### A. Inadequate Support Mechanisms:

- a. Educational institutions in La Paz lack adequate support mechanisms for students facing emotional abuse, particularly when the perpetrator of violence is a key figure at the university. There is a pressing need for counseling services, support groups, and awareness programs to help victims cope with their experiences.
- b. Case Study Insight: Participants highlighted the absence of institutional support as a significant barrier to overcoming the challenges posed by emotional abuse. Many felt isolated and unsupported by their schools and universities.

### B. Recommendations for Educational Institutions:

- i. Bolster comprehensive support systems, including mental health counseling and peer support groups, to assist students dealing with emotional abuse by establishing a clear domestic violence center on campus. There are claims that a domestic violence center at UABCS is in the making, however, as of this writing, it's unclear to me where that center is, who is directing it, and what subject matter experts are staffing it.



- ii. Implement educational programs to raise awareness about the signs of social media facilitated emotional abuse and the importance of seeking help.
- iii. Establish robust reporting mechanisms within educational institutions to address and mitigate the effects of social media assisted emotional abuse on students.

### 3. Targeted Educational Programs

- A. **Focus:** Create short, engaging, and accessible online courses or modules that teach users about the signs of digital manipulation and emotional abuse. These programs can be integrated directly into social media platforms, schools, and community centers.
- B. **Collaboration:** Partner with social media companies, educational institutions, and NGOs to deliver these programs. Using influencers and social media campaigns can also help in spreading awareness more effectively.

**Example:** LinkedIn Learning and similar platforms can serve as models for creating and distributing educational content.

### 4. Enhanced but Realistic Reporting Mechanisms

- A. **AI-Driven Reporting:** Develop AI-driven reporting mechanisms that prioritize and filter reports based on severity and patterns of behavior, reducing the burden on social media platforms and ensuring serious cases receive prompt attention.
- B. **User Training:** Educate users on how to effectively report abuse without overwhelming the system. This can include tutorials and prompts that guide users through the reporting process.

**Example:** Systems similar to those used in customer service platforms, where AI helps triage and manage incoming reports efficiently.

## 5. Strengthening Community Support Systems

- A. **Virtual Support Groups:** Establish virtual support groups moderated by trained professionals where victims of emotional abuse can share experiences and receive guidance in a safe, supportive environment.
- B. **Resource Hubs:** Create centralized online hubs that provide resources, legal advice, and emotional support specifically tailored to victims of digital emotional abuse.
- C. **Partnerships:** Work with local governments, non-profits, and tech companies to provide funding and infrastructure for these support systems.

**Example:** Online therapy platforms like BetterHelp can serve as models for creating accessible support systems.

## 6. Legal and Policy Advocacy

- A. **Advocacy Campaigns:** Lead advocacy campaigns to educate lawmakers about the unique challenges of digital emotional abuse, pushing for updated laws and policies that reflect the current digital landscape.
- B. **Collaborative Workshops:** Host workshops and seminars with legal professionals, policymakers, and tech experts to develop comprehensive legal frameworks that address digital emotional abuse.

**Example:** Collaborative efforts like the EU's GDPR regulations, which involved multiple stakeholders to create comprehensive data protection laws, can be a model for developing laws on digital emotional abuse.

## Suggestions for Future Research

1. **Broader Sample:** Future research should encompass a large, multinational sample to comprehensively understand the prevalence and impact of emotional abuse facilitated by social media across diverse demographics. This research should employ a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and

qualitative research methods to capture the full scope and nuances of this complex issue.

2. **Comparative Analysis:** Compare the experiences of victims in different cultural and socio-economic contexts to identify commonalities and differences in the patterns of emotional abuse and the effectiveness of intervention measures.
3. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of emotional abuse on victims' mental health, educational outcomes, and overall well-being in target markets.
4. **Intervention Strategies:** Investigate the effectiveness of various intervention strategies, including educational programs, and community support systems, in mitigating the impact of emotional abuse facilitated by social media.

By addressing these recommendations and limitations, future research can build on the findings of this study to develop more effective strategies for combating emotional abuse facilitated by social media, ultimately fostering safer and more supportive online environments.

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## Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

CARLTON RESEARCH, LLC

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO PARA ACTUAR COMO SUJETO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Tema de investigación: "Violencia doméstica"

Se le solicita participar en un estudio de investigación. La participación es completamente voluntaria. Por favor lea la información a continuación y haga preguntas sobre cualquier cosa que no entienda. Los investigador(es) mencionados a continuación estarán disponibles para responder a sus preguntas.

### EQUIPO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Investigador Principal Carisa Carlton  
Representando a CARLTON RESEARCH, LLC  
Email: mscarisa@gmail.com Teléfono: +1 323-999-1376

UBICACIÓN DEL ESTUDIO: Videoconferencia remota vía Zoom y en persona en el Municipio de La Paz, BCS, México.

REQUISITOS PARA PARTICIPAR: Los participantes deben tener más de 18 años y deben ser capaces de asistir a una reunión de forma remota usando el software de videoconferencia Zoom con cámara activados. Los participantes deben poder comunicarse verbalmente con los investigadores.

### ¿POR QUÉ SE REALIZA ESTE ESTUDIO DE INVESTIGACIÓN?

El propósito de este estudio de investigación es comprender la sanación utilizando métodos tradicionales y no tradicionales.

### ¿CUÁNTAS PERSONAS PARTICIPARÁN EN ESTE ESTUDIO?

Indeterminado.

### ¿QUÉ PROCEDIMIENTOS IMPLICA ESTE ESTUDIO Y CUÁNTO TIEMPO TOMARÁN?

1. **Entrevistas:** Los investigadores le harán preguntas sobre su experiencia y tomarán notas. El investigador no solicitará, y usted no debe proporcionar, ninguna información personal sensible en este estudio de investigación.
2. **Grabación de Audio y Video:** Al comienzo de cada sesión de investigación, el investigador solicitará su permiso para grabar en video el estudio. Si no desea ser

grabado, está en su derecho de negar el permiso para grabar. Su decisión no afectará si la investigación puede llevarse a cabo.

3. Si acepta ser grabado, las grabaciones en video se utilizarán para asegurar que se recoja toda la información deseada. Este video es PRIVADO. Ninguna otra persona tendrá acceso al video y el video será destruido sin almacenarlo en ningún dispositivo. Si no desea ser grabado en video, puede declinarlo. Vea el punto # 2 arriba.

### ¿CUÁLES SON LAS POSIBLES MOLESTIAS O RIESGOS RELACIONADOS CON EL ESTUDIO?

No tenemos conocimiento de daños o molestias conocidos asociados con este estudio más allá de los encontrados al operar su computadora personal y al sentarse o estar de pie frente a su computadora.

### ¿HAY BENEFICIOS AL PARTICIPAR EN EL ESTUDIO?

Beneficios para el Participante: Es posible que no obtenga un beneficio directo al participar en este estudio.

Beneficios para Otros o la Sociedad: Su participación en este estudio puede contribuir a la mejora de la información proporcionada al público sobre Violencia doméstica.

### ¿SE ME PAGARÁ POR PARTICIPAR EN ESTE ESTUDIO?

Compensación: No se proporcionarán obsequios, tarifas, reembolsos ni costos para este estudio.

### ¿QUÉ SUCEDE SI DESEO DEJAR DE PARTICIPAR EN ESTE ESTUDIO?

Su participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Es libre de retirarse o declinar participar en este estudio en cualquier momento y por cualquier motivo. Si decide retirarse de este estudio, debe notificar al equipo de investigación inmediatamente. El equipo de investigación también puede finalizar su participación en este estudio si no sigue las instrucciones, si falta a sesiones programadas, si su seguridad y bienestar están en riesgo, si hay comportamientos inapropiados o si se siente angustiado por el estudio.

Si desea retirar su consentimiento en cualquier momento en el futuro, comuníquese con el investigador mencionado al principio de este formulario.



## ¿CÓMO SE MANTENDRÁ MI INFORMACIÓN PERSONAL?

Datos Identificables del Sujeto: Toda la información personalmente identificable sobre usted será cambiada para agregar y anonimizar sus datos para protegerlo. Toda la información identificable recopilada sobre usted se registrará como un código numérico o un nombre ficticio.

Almacenamiento de Datos: Los datos de investigación se almacenarán electrónicamente en una computadora o red segura en un archivo cifrado con protección por contraseña. Almacenaremos y procesaremos estos datos de investigación y datos de sesión hasta que consideremos que el contenido ya no es necesario para los fines de investigación mencionados anteriormente. Si desea retirar su consentimiento en el futuro, comuníquese con el equipo de investigación mencionado al principio de este formulario, quienes destruirán cualquier dato relacionado recopilado como parte de esta investigación.

## ¿QUIÉN TENDRÁ ACCESO A MIS DATOS DEL ESTUDIO?

Solo el investigador tendrá acceso a los datos recopilados durante su sesión de investigación. Los registros de su participación en este estudio se mantendrán confidenciales.

Este formulario solicita su consentimiento para participar. El investigador principal será la única parte con acceso a su información de identificación personal, a menos que se requiera por ley presentarla o a menos que las circunstancias causen preocupación al investigador por la seguridad de cualquier persona.

## DIVULGACIÓN DE CONFLICTO DE INTERÉS FINANCIERO DEL INVESTIGADOR

El investigador podría ser compensado por realizar este estudio en el futuro.

## ¿QUIÉN PUEDE RESPONDER A MIS PREGUNTAS SOBRE EL ESTUDIO?

Si tiene algún comentario, inquietud o pregunta sobre la conducta de esta investigación, comuníquese con el investigador mencionado al principio de este formulario.

## ROL DEL INVESTIGADOR

El papel del investigador es proteger los derechos y el bienestar de los sujetos humanos, incluyéndose a sí misma, involucrados en la investigación. La investigadora principal también asegura que la investigación cumple con las regulaciones, leyes, ética y políticas institucionales estadounidenses aplicables. La investigadora principal es una antropóloga y científica social y está certificada en Human Subject Research for Social and Behavioral Investigators para la protección de todos los participantes en su investigación.

### ¿CÓMO DOY MI CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN ESTE ESTUDIO?

No debe firmar este formulario de consentimiento hasta que todas sus preguntas sobre este estudio hayan sido respondidas por un miembro del equipo de investigación mencionado al principio de este formulario. Se le entregará una copia de este formulario de consentimiento firmado y fechado para que lo conserve. La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Puede negarse a responder cualquier pregunta o interrumpir su participación en cualquier momento sin penalización ni pérdida de cualquier beneficio al que de otra manera tendría derecho. Su decisión no afectará su futura relación con Carlton Research o el equipo de investigación.

Su firma a continuación indica que ha leído la información en este formulario de consentimiento y ha tenido la oportunidad de hacer cualquier pregunta que tenga sobre este estudio.

He leído detenidamente y comprendido este consentimiento informado y por la presente (i) acepto plenamente los términos y condiciones de este estudio, (ii) reconozco y acepto que he tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas completas sobre esta investigación antes de aceptar participar y (iii) doy mi consentimiento para participar en este estudio y para que el equipo de investigación recoja y utilice mis datos de investigación según lo acordado por mí y como se describe anteriormente. Acepto plenamente y doy mi consentimiento para el almacenamiento relacionado de mis datos personales de forma anónima y agregada, y soy consciente de que puedo retirar mi consentimiento en cualquier momento y por cualquier motivo.

_____	_____
Firma del Sujeto	Fecha
_____	
Nombre Impreso del Sujeto	
_____	_____
Firma del Investigador Principal	Fecha
_____	
Nombre Impreso del Investigador Principal	

## **Appendix B: Research Instruments**

### **Interview Guide**

The interview guide was designed to explore the experiences of participants with domestic violence. Interviews were predominantly unstructured. In the beginning of meeting a participant, I created a semi-structured guide, allowing for flexibility in probing deeper into participant responses. Below are the main sections and sample questions used:

#### **Section 1: Background Information**

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself (age, origins, year of school, university attending, where you live)?

#### **Section 2: Relationship Dynamics**

1. Describe your relationship with [intimate partner].
2. How did you initially connect with [intimate partner]?

#### **Section 3: Experience of Emotional Abuse**

1. Can you describe your emotions, how you feel in your relationship?
2. How do your emotions change, if at all, during the week?

#### **Section 4: Coping and Education Stress**

1. How do you cope with the stresses of school?
2. Did you seek any support from friends, family, or professionals?
3. What kind of support or resources would have helped you during your studies?

## **Coding Framework**

The coding framework used for analyzing the interview data included predefined codes derived from the literature and open codes that emerged during my analysis. Below is an outline of the primary and secondary codes:

### **Primary Codes:**

#### **1. Type of Abuse:**

- Emotional Abuse
- Public Humiliation
- Control and Surveillance

#### **2. Social Media Platforms:**

- Facebook
- Instagram
- WhatsApp

#### **3. Tactics Used:**

- False Authority
- Charming Persona
- Continuous Engagement
- Deceptive Professional Titles
- Falsely Reinforced Relationships
- Duplicitous Relationships

#### **4. Emotional Impact:**

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Fear
- Confusion
- Trust Issues

#### **5. Coping Mechanisms:**

- Seeking Support
- Self-Isolation

- Confrontation
- Technology Use (e.g., creating fake profiles)

### **Secondary Codes:**

#### **1. Support Systems:**

- Friends and Family
- Professional Help
- Community Resources

### **Sample Data Coding**

An example of how the interview data was coded is provided below. Each segment of the interview transcript was analyzed and assigned one or more codes based on its content.

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** "On June 26, 2023, Maria WhatsApp'd a raw, unfiltered photo of herself to me. Maria's face reflects profound grief for what she saw on Andreas' Facebook page. Her eyes show a sense of trauma."

### **Assigned Codes:**

- **Platform:** WhatsApp, Facebook
- **Type of Abuse:** Public humiliation, betrayal
- **Emotional Impact:** Grief, Trauma

### **Social Media Profile Analysis Guide**

To analyze the social media profiles of the abusers, the following criteria were used:

#### **1. Profile Authenticity:**

- Verification of professional titles and affiliations.
- Consistency of information across multiple profiles.

#### **2. Behavioral Patterns:**

- Frequency and nature of posts.

- Types of interactions (e.g., comments, likes, direct messages).

### **3. Network Analysis:**

- Analysis of friend/follower lists to identify patterns.
- Examination of interactions with other users.

This appendix provides a comprehensive overview of the research instruments used in this study, ensuring transparency and replicability of the research process.

## **Appendix C: Ethical Considerations**

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, all names and identifying details were changed. Pseudonyms were used in all notes, transcripts, and reports. Personal data were stored securely and were accessible only to the primary researcher. Any information that could potentially identify participants was removed or anonymized before data analysis and publication.

### **Data Security**

All data, including interview recordings, notes, and digital communications, were stored securely. Access to the data was restricted to the primary researcher. Digital data were backed up continuously to prevent loss. Measures were taken to ensure that data could not be intercepted or accessed by unauthorized individuals during transmission.

### **Minimizing Harm**

The research was designed to minimize potential harm to participants. Given the sensitive nature of the topics discussed, participants were informed that they could end their participation at any time.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

As this study was conducted in La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico, it was imperative to approach the research with cultural sensitivity and awareness of potential harm to the victims. The researcher made efforts to understand and respect local customs. This included:

- Using culturally appropriate communication methods, such as employing a translator for non-confidential interactions, such as with police and other government officials.

- Being mindful of the social and cultural context when interpreting data and drawing conclusions, asking in detail about cultural norms and expectations.

### **Transparency and Accountability**

Transparency was maintained throughout the research process. The researcher represented herself as an anthropologist studying domestic violence with interest in its impact on higher education. Participants were informed about how their data would be used. Regular updates and summaries of findings were provided to participants who expressed interest. The researcher remained accountable to the participants and the broader community by:

- Reporting findings honestly and accurately.
- Acknowledging any limitations or biases in the research.
- Engaging with the community to discuss findings and their implications.

### **Addressing Power Dynamics**

The researcher was aware of the power dynamics inherent in the researcher-participant relationship, particularly given the sensitive nature of the study and the potential vulnerability of the participants. Efforts were made to:

- Create a comfortable and safe environment for participants to share their experiences.
- Encourage open and honest communication.
- Ensure that participants felt respected and valued throughout the research process.



## **Appendix D: Additional Findings**

### **1) Lack of Police Assistance**

Isabella's experience with the La Paz police department highlights a critical gap in local law enforcement's effectiveness. When Isabella's home was robbed, the police were of no assistance, leaving her feeling revictimized and unprotected. This lack of support from law enforcement significantly compounded her trauma, underscoring the urgent need for reform and improved police response to victims of crime. The failure of the police to provide adequate protection not only exacerbated Isabella's sense of vulnerability but also diminished her trust in public safety institutions, revealing a critical area for policy and procedural improvement.

### **2) Secretive Community Dynamics**

The social fabric of La Paz is characterized by a pervasive undercurrent of fear, vigilance, and a strong inclination towards secrecy. Community members often communicated sensitive information in hushed tones, reflecting a widespread reluctance to speak openly about the potential for violence and other sensitive issues. This secretive behavior appears to be a survival mechanism, driven by the need to maintain individual safety and avoid confrontation. This cultural tendency towards confidentiality suggests a deeply ingrained societal norm where open discourse is limited, potentially impeding efforts to foster transparency and communal trust.

### **3) Political Intimidation**

Political processes in La Paz operate under a veil of secrecy and intimidation, distinct from the democratic norms typically observed in other regions, such as the United States. One political candidate shared that he dropped out of the race after receiving a threatening phone call from two men who ordered him to do so. This anecdote highlights the prevalence of coercion and the lack of a safe and fair political environment. Such practices undermine democratic principles and indicate a need for measures to protect candidates and ensure the integrity of political processes.

#### **4) Environmental Neglect**

Environmental issues in La Paz are stark, with visible signs of neglect and pollution. The roads leading to La Ventana from La Paz are littered with trash, giving the area the appearance of a potential garbage dump. As an avid freediver in the Sea of Cortez, I frequently encountered and collected trash disposed of into the ocean. Despite the natural beauty and biodiversity of the Sea of Cortez, the environmental degradation is a serious concern, highlighting the need for robust environmental policies and community engagement in conservation efforts. This neglect reflects broader systemic issues related to environmental awareness and resource management.

#### **5) Corruption**

Corruption is a pervasive issue in La Paz, affecting various aspects of life, including the media. Numerous stories suggest that media coverage can be bought, with reporters allegedly willing to suppress negative stories if offered a higher bribe by the subjects of those stories. This practice not only compromises journalistic integrity but also perpetuates a culture of corruption and mistrust. The normalization of such corrupt practices indicates deep-rooted ethical challenges and underscores the need for systemic reforms to promote transparency and accountability.

#### **6) Inadequate Infrastructure**

Infrastructure in La Paz suffers from significant underfunding, with many roads in severe disrepair. The decayed state of the roads not only hampers transportation and economic activities but also poses safety risks to residents and visitors. This infrastructural neglect is indicative of broader governance issues and the need for substantial investment in public infrastructure to improve living conditions and support sustainable development. Addressing these infrastructure challenges is essential for enhancing the quality of life and fostering economic growth in the region.

**7) Distrust in the Banking System:** Distrust in the banking system is deep and widespread in La Paz. Many locals wish to purchase products online, particularly from

the USA or Europe, but face significant barriers due to payment method limitations. While it is possible to obtain a credit card from a bank, the pervasive distrust in these institutions and the high stakes involved deter many from doing so. In Mexico, obtaining a loan or a credit card requires providing information about family members who will be liable if the borrower fails to meet payment obligations. This practice intensifies the reluctance to engage with the banking system. There is robust opportunity for creating alternative solutions to overcome these barriers, which will be discussed in a subsequent report.

### **Compulsive Social Media Behaviors**

Women reported a compulsion to continuously check social media for messages, likes, and comments. On WhatsApp, the double blue checkmark indicating a message had been read triggered addictive behaviors, such as repeatedly checking if their intimate partner had read their message. The appearance of the double blue checkmarks started a timer for waiting for a response, adding to their anxiety and compulsive behavior.

### **Blocking Culture**

In two cases, one of which is not included in this study, the use of social media blocking to gain power and control in intimate relationships was observed. In both cases, the relationship dynamics were frenzied during the transition stage of intimacy and breakup, where each partner seemed confused, blocking, unblocking, following, unfollowing, and blocking again within days. This tool was representative of emotions playing out, with the blocked person feeling hurt and confused by the rapid changes.

In one case, the female requested a discussion about this behavior as it caused her deep emotional pain and confusion, to which the male partner responded by blocking her on WhatsApp. Social media companies can do nothing about the emotions people experience or their inability to control impulses, but it should be documented that blocking is a form of manipulation, a tool that allows people to express their emotions without using emojis or words.

## **Conclusion**

The additional findings from this study reveal critical issues in La Paz, including inadequate police protection, secretive community dynamics, political intimidation, environmental neglect, pervasive corruption, and decayed infrastructure. These challenges highlight the complex social, political, and environmental landscape in La Paz and underscore the need for comprehensive reforms to address these systemic issues. Future research should continue to explore these areas, focusing on developing practical solutions and engaging local stakeholders in efforts to foster a safer, more transparent, and sustainable community.