

Involuntary Witness: Amanda Alvear and the Coverage of the Massacre in *Pulse* in Spanish-Language News Media

Testigos involuntarios: Amanda Alvear y la cobertura de la masacre de Pulse en los medios de noticias en español

Testemunhas involuntárias: Amanda Alvear e cobertura do massacre de Pulse na mídia noticiosa em espanhol

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Abstract: In this essay, I analyze the way in which the U.S. Spanish-language television media have utilized the *Snapchat* video posted by Amanda Alvear, one of the victims who died in the *Pulse* nightclub massacre in Orlando on June 12, 2016. While Alvear was filming a celebration moment with her friends in a *Snapchat* 10-second video, she accidentally recorded the first few seconds of the *Pulse* massacre. I argue that the Spanish-language news media transformed Alvear into an involuntary-posthumous- testimonial voice of the horrific incident while using Alvear's 10-second video as a tool to explain the magnitude of the tragic event at Pulse. Through the essay, I discuss the danger of seeing and disseminating this recording as evidence of what transpired at *Pulse* is that it imposes an intentionality upon Alvear that belies her video's intended purpose, positioning her as a mediating figure charged with bearing the burden of proof.

Keywords:

Pulse massacre; spanish-language news media; involuntary witnessing

Resumen: En este ensayo analizo la forma en que los medios televisivos en español de los Estados Unidos han utilizado el video de Snapchat publicado por Amanda Alvear, una de las víctimas que murieron en la masacre de la discoteca Pulse en Orlando el 12 de junio de 2016. Alvear grabó una celebración con sus amigos en la discoteca en un video de 10 segundos de Snapchat que coincidió con los primeros segundos de la masacre de Pulse, documentando así los

primeros momentos del trágico evento. Discuto que, al utilizar el video de Alvear como una herramienta para explicar la magnitud del trágico evento en Pulse los medios noticiosos en español, los medios transformaron a Alvear en una testigo involuntaria y póstuma del horrible incidente. A través del ensayo, discuto el peligro que conlleva ver y diseminar esta grabación como evidencia de lo que ocurrió en Pulse ya que supone una intencionalidad de parte de Alvear, cuyo propósito real de la grabación no fue documentar la tragedia. De esta forma los medios posicionan a la víctima como una figura mediadora que se encargó de soportar la carga de tener la prueba.

Palabras claves: masacre de pulse; noticiarios en español; testigo involuntario

Resumo: Neste ensaio, analisar como a mídia televisiva em espanhol nos Estados Unidos tem usado o vídeo de Snapchat publicada por Amanda Alvear, uma das vítimas que morreram no massacre da boate Press em Orlando em 12 de Junho, de 2016. Alvear gravou uma comemoração com seus amigos na discoteca em um vídeo de 10 segundos do Snapchat que coincidiu com os primeiros segundos do massacre de Pulse, documentando os primeiros momentos do trágico evento. Argumentam que usando vídeo Alvear como uma ferramenta para explicar a magnitude do acontecimento trágico na mídia Press em espanhol, a mídia transformado em um Alvear e testemunho póstumo o horrível incidente involuntário. Através de tentativa, eu discutir o perigo envolvido ver e disseminar esta gravação como prova do que aconteceu na imprensa uma vez que envolve uma intenção por parte do Alvear, cuja finalidade da gravação real não foi documentar a tragédia. Desta forma, a mídia posiciona a vítima como uma figura mediadora que se encarregou de suportar o ônus de ter provas.

Palavras-chave: massacre disco pulse; programas de notícias em espanhol; testemunha involuntária

“All of these young people [at *Pulse*] were engaged in the simple act of self-expression, joy, dancing, and just having a great time. They posted videos of themselves and that is the last image I have of my daughter.”

—Mayra Alvear, San Francisco City Hall, July 12, 2016

The acts of serving as a witness for the media and providing corresponding testimony would at first glance seem to be synonymous actions. In fact, as Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski affirm, “every act of witnessing implies some kind of mediation: most fundamentally, putting an experience into language for the benefit of those who were not there” (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009). But what is at stake when a *Snapchat* video created to mark a moment of celebration in a digital community involuntarily documents one of the most violent tragedies ever confronted by the LGBT community in the United States? In this essay, I analyze the way in which the U.S. Spanish-language television media have used the *Snapchat* video posted by Amanda Alvear, one of the 49 victims who died on June 12, 2016 in the *Pulse* nightclub massacre in Orlando, Florida. In her 10-second video—which has since become one of the most viewed and shared on television and social media—Alvear filmed what was initially experienced as a celebration, not knowing that the recording would capture the first few seconds of the *Pulse* massacre. I argue that the coverage of this tragic event by Spanish-language television news media (for instance, *Telemundo* and *Univision*) has transformed Alvear into an involuntary—indeed posthumous—testimonial voice of what transpired at *Pulse*. Notions of bearing witness, witnessing, and testifying are blurred when these television networks employ Alvear’s *Snapchat* video as a tool to explicate the magnitude of the *Pulse* tragedy while defining her as both victim of and witness to this horrible event. As I argue throughout this essay, the danger of seeing and disseminating this recording as evidence of what transpired at *Pulse* is that it imposes an intentionality upon Alvear that belies her video’s intended purpose, positioning her—unjustly, I will argue—as a mediating figure charged with bearing the burden of proof.

1. An Involuntary Witness: Mediated Testimony

It is of course impossible to know Alvear's intention in uploading the brief *Snapchat* recording of Pulse to her profile on June 12th. Commenting on the energy and joy that emanated from the nightclub that evening, *Noche Latina* (Latin Night), a smiling Alvear captured a moment that, like so many others, is difficult to define in an era that constantly renegotiates the balance between public and private, and that requires the use of a digital social platform to guarantee the complicity of its followers. The eruption of the sound of bullets and the sight of bodies reacting to the shots interrupted the recording—but not without first registering the astonishment and fear on Alvear's face. As we now know, 49 people, mostly Latinx (and a majority—23 of the 49—of Puerto Rican descent, including Alvear), were murdered on the morning of June 12, 2016. The lack of information as to the motive for this act of violence and the public's need to understand, through the available evidence, what had happened, aroused a particular interest in Alvear's *Snapchat* recording once it was discovered by the television media. The video immediately became a sounding board that helped viewers and reporters reflect on the horror of the event. Alvear, a 25-year-old pharmacy technician who was preparing to become a registered nurse, was at *Pulse* to celebrate her recent weight loss. Her decision to celebrate with her friend Mercedes Marisol Flores, who also lost her life at *Pulse*, was due to Alvear's immense appreciation of the LGBTQ community—of which she was an ally. It is important to offer this information here because it provides the context surrounding the recording of Alvear's *Snapchat* video, which was intended to share this moment with her friends and relatives on the social media platform of *Snapchat*.

Alvear, like millions of social media users, was capturing a very specific “moment” via the features that *Snapchat* afforded her: this application deletes uploaded content 10 seconds (or less) after it is opened by the recipient. In broader perspective, social and mobile media has influenced how people arrange, record, and recall personal moments from the past. Furthermore, these media platforms influence the ways in which individuals maneuver their behavior, their sense of time, and their management of the activities of daily life within specific temporal parameters (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, and Falk, 2015). The immediacy and the ephemeral aspects of documenting meaningful events with *Snapchat* has led to a field of study called ephemeral studies. As explored in the essay “Sharing the Small Moments: Ephemeral Social Interaction on Snapchat,” there has been an increased interest in platforms “that are designed to

erase communication artifacts after a short period of time. Ephemeral social media thus share some properties of synchronous communication such as face-to-face conversation...” (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, & Falk, 2015). Part of what makes Alvear’s recording so surprising is how widely it was shared despite being originally conceived as part of the temporal archiving structure of *Snapchat*. If Snapchat’s objective is to provide a platform whereby the “sharing of a moment” is relatively effortless, then it is important to characterize the type of “moments” that are meant to be documented in this format. Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, and Falk’s definition of “moments” is thus very useful:

Here, we understand a “moment” to be shared content that is constrained to be contemporary and temporary. For the sender, content must be proximal and present-based, meaning that users cannot send archived photos from their phone. Rather, they must capture photographs and videos from within Snapchat interface in order to send a message. This guarantees that a shared “moment” is in fact occurring at (or very close) to the act of sharing (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, & Falk, 2015).

Alvear’s shared Snapchat moment provides us with an alternate version of this notion of “proximal and present-based” content in the sense that, while her video registers a moment that is meant to be shared and erased, it also becomes the record of a painful and violent event to which we are privy, as media witnesses, only for a very short time. The permanence of Alvear’s recording was only made possible because one of its recipients became immediately aware that this was an uncommon moment worthy of preservation and decided to film the *Snapchat* video with a phone camera so that it erased itself only in the context of the *Snapchat* algorithm, not from the public record.

In a relatively short time, therefore, Alvear's recording went from being merely a social media digital recording to becoming an important object of evidence—and Alvear became an involuntary witness to the events inside the club. The coverage provided by *Telemundo*, for instance, evinces a narrative management and media framing that gives new context to Alvear’s video. In a June 13 clip of the *Telemundo* news program that was uploaded by the network to its official YouTube channel, Alvear’s *Snapchat* recording appeared in a segment entitled “Estudiante hispana graba momento del ataque en Orlando” (Hispanic Student Films the Attack in Orlando). This suggestive title is important for several reasons: first because it puts forward an intentionality that Alvear did not have; and second because it provides a filter through which the

viewer will see the video as an object of evidence—one that is a posthumous testimonial voice. The framing of Alvear’s recording is filtered through this title and Jose Diaz Balart’s description of the video further frames it in this way:

Estas son las primeras imágenes desde adentro de la matanza en la discoteca *Pulse*. El escalofriante video fue grabado por Amanda Alvear una joven de origen puertorriqueño que sale junto a sus amigos bailando en el club. Todo es diversión hasta que comienzan a escucharse disparos al fondo. La última imagen es la expresión aterrorizada de la joven de 25 años que perdió la vida en el sanguinario ataque.

(These are the first images from inside the massacre at the *Pulse* nightclub. The chilling video was recorded by Amanda Alvear, a young woman of Puerto Rican origin who goes out with her friends to dance at the club. Everything is fun until you start to hear shots in the background. The last image is the terrified expression of the 25-year old girl who lost her life in the bloody attack.)

By interpreting her video as an object that actively documents the violent, tragic events at *Pulse*, Alvear’s original intention is redefined as consciously chronicling the massacre. This is made clearer by the evening news telecast of June 13th, in which Díaz Balart framed the recording in the following way: “La joven puertorriquena que documentó el tiroteo en un video que subió a las redes. Rogelio Moratario tiene esos testimonios...” [The young Puerto Rican woman who documented the shooting in a video that she uploaded to social media...]. By describing Alvear’s recording as a deliberate act of documentation, the *Telemundo* newscast inadvertently illustrates the complex layering of witnessing, revealing it to be a concept that is socially and politically charged (Ashuri and Pinchevski, 2009). As an eyewitness “account,” the video becomes an object from which we can extract a sort of fragmented testimony of the *Pulse* massacre that comes to involve not only its creator but also its many viewers. The process of witnessing, which was initially undertaken—unintentionally—by an eyewitness is thus regenerated and repeated by journalists and, eventually, by a multitude of television and online viewers of what was, originally, a temporary celebration of a personal moment. As Kari Anden-Papadopoulos asserts: “The field of witnessing embraces all the key agents of media witnessing—eyewitnesses (those who have firsthand experience of the event), mediators (the various agents and agencies who produce and broadcast testimonies), and audiences...” (758). The Spanish-

language news media's framing of Alvear's *Snapchat* video narrates, explains, and defines—if indirectly—both her video and Alvear herself as subjects that provide testimony from within. That is, the video serves as an eyewitness account of the events that occurred at *Pulse* and becomes evidence of them. Furthermore, by interpreting Alvear's actions as deliberately geared towards documenting the massacre, *Univision* and *Telemundo* newscasters incongruously position her as a kind of “citizen camera witness.” Anden-Papadopoulos defines “citizen camera witnesses” as “camera-wielding political activists and dissidents who put their lives at risk to produce the incontrovertible public testimony to unjust and disastrous developments around the world, in a critical bid to mobilize global solidarity through the affective power of the visual” (754). According to this definition, citizen camera witnesses are willing participants in the documentation process and are aware that they are providing testimony. The news coverage of by *Univision* and *Telemundo* often blurred Alvear's role, recognizing as her both victim and pseudo-citizen camera witness. But Alvear does not seem at all to have been consciously intending to “produce” a “public testimony” of what was happening at *Pulse*. Instead, as her mother, Mayra, stated in a speech given in honor of the 49 victims during the lighting of the Rainbow World Fund World Tree of Hope in San Francisco: “All of these young people [at *Pulse*] were engaged in the simple act of self-expression, joy, dancing, and just having a great time. They posted videos of themselves and that is the last image I have of my daughter.” These painful words subtly express how “sharing an ephemeral moment” via *Snapchat* can collide with a very present, tragic, and haunting reality that subsists in other media spaces.

Lourdes del Río's coverage on *Univisión* frames Alvear's recording in a similar way but opts to emphasize the other tragedies that the Alvear family had already suffered. Alluding to the death of her younger brother, Nelson, due to cancer, the *Univisión* newscast titled their *Pulse*-related *YouTube* segment “Mujer hispana enterró a un hijo por segunda vez” [Hispanic Woman Buries a Child for the Second Time]. Del Río's segment centers on Alvear's mother, who had not given any public declarations at that time; Alvear's eldest brother, Brian, had appeared on her behalf on various media platforms to give his impressions of and reactions to the massacre that killed his sister and to her *Snapchat* video: the last remaining image of her. The *Univisión* telecast of June 14th focused on the frustration and on the immense sadness provoked by viewing her last remaining image: “La mamá solo ha visto este video que ha recorrido todo el mundo una vez. Brian si lo ha visto varias veces. ‘Es terrible porque yo veo a mi hermanita y

quiero brincar en el teléfono para agarrarla y sacarla obviamente y a la amiga pero no se puede hacer nada” [The mother has only seen this video, which has been seen by the whole world, one time. Brian has seen it multiple times. ‘It is terrible because I see my little sister and I want to jump into the phone to grab hold of her and, obviously, to save her and her friend but I can’t do anything]. The reactions of Alvear’s mother and brother illustrate how the rise of media witnessing overlaps with a crisis of witnessing that is reminiscent of the Holocaust witness (Frosch and Pinchevski, 2009). Anden-Papadopoulos stresses that: “At the core of the discourse of the Holocaust witness is the impossibility of bearing witness: the traumatic event inhabits the extreme zones of human imagination of which cannot (or should not) speak...” (757). Alvear’s *Snapchat* not only elicits frustration and pain but also establishes a similar kind of “impossibility of bearing witness” in the sense that we are not privy to the events that occur right after the recording stops, but we do know that they resulted in an unexpected fatal outcome. Here the eyewitness accounts of massacre survivors fill in part of the story; Alvear’s *Snapchat* provides an unintentional public testimony that illustrates the instant when a shareable celebratory moment is burdened by violence.

Alvear’s dichotomous “voice,” which provides testimony from within and, equally, as a witness is best understood via the concept of bearing witness. To bear witness is to establish a poetics of relation between the event and the witness that either experienced it first-hand or viewed it as a bystander. With this definition in mind, I propose that the recording of Alvear moves through multiple processes of filtration and redefinition that shifts the video from its initial personal-public manifestation in the sphere of Snapchat/Facebook-type social media towards its reconceptualization and reinterpretation by news media as a posthumous testimonial. This new sense of the video as eyewitness testimony was disseminated massively and was employed to involve a media witness incarnated by the audience of viewers who watched the video and who participated in the meta-narratives created by reporters and journalists. The danger of seeing and disseminating this video as one that evidences part of what happened within *Pulse* is that it defines an intentionality, as I mentioned above, The shift of the video’s status towards testimony positions it among questions that meditate between the burden of proof and the burden of violence. Put another way, the “video-as-evidence,” previously an ephemeral *Snapchat*, is brought to bear a burden of proof that interrogates the magnitude of what happened at *Pulse*. My argument here is that these evidentiary objectives are not inherent in the *Snapchat*

video itself but are fabricated by the intentions and manipulations of media outlets in their attempt to respond to tragic and violent events through meta-narratives that highlight the personal details of victims. But what is omitted from the coverage when the horrific magnitude of a massacre like that of *Pulse* is constantly filtered through the morbid fascination that comes from witnessing Alvear's video? This question leads us back to the notion of bearing witness. As Sue Gait indicates in her essay "Bearing Witness, Journalism and Moral Responsibility":

"'Bearing witness' provides a rationale for journalistic presence (a more noble purpose than the quest for ratings) and moralizes the inability to act directly to alleviate the suffering one is proximate to.... [T]he term... implies that certain events require being borne witness to because they require some form of public response" (1221). In this case, the response—or rather the reaction—is one of pain and impotence before the images of Alvear we see in the video.

The provisional aspect of bearing witness lies, in part, in the difficulty of capturing the full experience of the victim. I find Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé's definition of *queer testimonio* useful here because it alludes to the necessity of understanding the complexity of hearing, viewing, and feeling testimony as it is produced in non-written forms. In his monograph *Queer Latino Testimonio, Keith Haring, and Juanito Xtravaganza*, Cruz-Malavé gives an interesting account of how he encountered numerous difficulties when faced with the challenge of condensing and transcribing the testimony of the queer dancer and performer Juanito Xtravaganza into a memoir. Faced with the anxiety of not being able to capture fully this testimony in writing—and plagued with remorse lest he inadvertently imbue it with his own interests—Cruz-Malavé seeks out and finds alternative ways of understanding testimony: "I'd put myself through a practice of listening that required me to follow the trail of Juan's voice, to judge my retelling not only by its fidelity to the events in Juan's life, but by its fidelity to the traces that living had left in his voice—by all that ambivalent under- and over living that marked his and other people's lives, preventing them from being reduced to mere living, to mere usable circumstance" (96). While it is problematic to analyze Alvear's *Snapchat* video solely as a *testimonio* (given that, as I have been arguing, it was not intended to be one), we might nevertheless consider it briefly as the media (not Alvear) intended, that is, in the guise of a witness account wherein Alvear's gaze during those 10 crucial seconds provides us with a first-hand glimpse of that fatal evening.

The act of bearing witness is intensified when we focus on how the media reinterprets and contextualizes Alvear's *Snapchat*. Gait's definition of bearing witness is quite useful here

because, according to her, the act "... conceptually organizes what journalism does, and names a subject position for audiences other than voyeurism, but what it means requires clarification" (1220). Here, news outlets and their audiences bear witness to Alvear's recording and seek from it (and, by extension, from Alvear herself) a testimony—though one that is interrupted—of what transpired at *Pulse*. As Tait further notes, "... bearing witness refers to media practices of producing testimony, however the qualifier of 'possibility' renders bearing witness provisional" (1220). There is a sense of responsibility surrounding the act of bearing witness (Tait, 2011 and Zeligler, 1998), and this is apparent in the media coverage by *Univision* and *Telemundo* that tries to situate Alvear's *Snapchat* via analyses that highlight the brutal and unexpected dimension of the attack. By definition, the idea of bearing witness is mired in the inability and failure to be present; it "is a crucial concept for moralizing the inability to act directly to relieve suffering" (1225). Every time the video is shown, in other words, it reminds us of our inability to act to prevent an attack of this magnitude.

The act of viewing—of being a witness to—Alvear's video not only arouses our morbid fascination with the fact that we are seeing the last moments of this young woman's life, but it also positions the news media as diffusers and producers of testimonials. Here the production and extraction of a testimony from the *Snapchat* video happens by way of its placement within news segments that attempt to find and then trace the logic of what occurred and, in so doing, to reinterpret notions of witnessing and testimony. In other words, as we bear witness (as viewers, producers, and journalists) to Alvear's last moments of life, our processing of the recording forces us to consider her as both a victim of the attack and a posthumous eyewitness with her own testimonial account. There are, however, various modes of bearing witness that correspond to our *responses* to these events. Gait recognizes three dimensions of practices of bearing witness in her analysis of Nicholas Kristof's written accounts of his visits to Darfur. The first dimension relates to the reductive qualities of language and images that make them unable to properly express and represent trauma and violent acts. The second dimension considers the affective labor of the journalist as a "form of embodied practice" that provokes a sort of renouncement of neutrality and detachment from the event. The third dimension is more in line with how the Spanish-language news media have understood Alvear's *Snapchat*, which has a journalistic impact that is "... contingent on a response... a public reaction that manifests as action, rather than a 'collective shrug'" (1222). Although the public reaction to the *Pulse* massacre has led to

the creation of the OnePulse Foundation and of other local organizations that work to provide emotional and financial support to the victims, the same cannot be said of the Spanish-language television media. The public reaction that has resulted from viewing Alvear's video and listening to survivor accounts has not manifested itself as action among media networks (such as, again, *Univision* and *Telemundo*), whose coverage of issues affecting the Latinx LGBTQ communities in the United States still remains very limited.

2. The Burden of Proof and the Limits of Coverage

Initially, media coverage strongly emphasized the personal stories and individual characteristics of the massacre's victims. It is important to emphasize that this type of coverage was initially vital, if we recall that, with the exception of the CNN's Anderson Cooper and the *New York Times*'s Lizette Alvarez and Nick Madigan, no English-speaking media had pointed out that most of the victims were Latinx. As the journalist Wesley Lowery states in *They Cannot Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore, and a New Era in America's Racial Justice*, a book that traces the connections between the Black Lives Matter movement and the rise of digital recordings documenting police brutality in African American communities, the tendency of the media to focus on the personal details of the dead is advantageous at first because it is a way of trying to give a face to—and thereby understand—the victims of these types of attacks. But, as Lowery remarks, "... the media's [exclusive] focus on the victim... inadvertently blurs the context of the nation's history regarding race, police, and surveillance... . And by focusing [only] on the character of the victim, we inadvertently focus on the powerful and instead train our eyes and prejudice on the impotent" (36). Although I do not fully share Wesley's view, I would rescue from his work the idea that it is necessary not only to focus on the victims but also on the wider situation—in this case that the burden of violence continues to fall on LGBTQ communities, particularly Latinx and Afro-American, that endure without the sustained attention of the media in the United States.

I concur with Steven W. Thrasher's "LGBT People of Color Refuse to Be Erased After Orlando," which questions the lack of committed attention by mass media to attacks like those at *Pulse*. As Thrasher asserts, coverage of the *Pulse* massacre initially followed the usual pattern of treatment—that is, through the hegemonically white gaze that minimized the Latinx aspect of

this tragedy. But, as Thrasher notes, “The Latino organizations had to call their own press conferences to inform the media that the attack in *Pulse* not only happened in a gay discotheque, but that attack happened during the Latin Night” (2). Why is it so important to highlight this detail? Because the massacre at *Pulse* not only points to the violence and fear of being a queer person, but also, as Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes has suggested, the burden of violence that particularly affects people of color in the United States, who face homophobia as well as racial and ethnic discrimination. The fact that Alvear was one of 23 other victims of Puerto Rican descent did not generate much media attention at first. But, as the written observations of a number of scholars and journalists (including Thrasher, La Fountain-Stokes, Charlie Vazquez, and José Quiroga, among others) indicate, the minimization of the specificity of the Orlando murder victims is part of a larger trend that does not acknowledge what La Fountain-Stokes calls the “burden of violence” that queer Puerto Ricans face in the United States. There are approximately 600,000 Puerto Ricans residing in Orlando, but this number does not fully illustrate the underlying historical circumstances that have led to the formation of the Orlando Puerto Rican community, for example, Puerto Rico’s status as a U.S. territory subject to colonial rule since 1898; a decade-long recession; the territory’s inability to declare bankruptcy and its externally imposed fiscal control; the ongoing impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic; and a persistent political, social, and financial crisis that has caused major migrations to the United States. The Alvear family’s experience is a reflection of these circumstances and Mayra (Alvear’s mother) in particular is representative of these larger social issues since she migrated from Fajardo, Puerto Rico, very early on to seek out opportunities in Orlando. So, finally, to answer the question of what is omitted from the coverage when the horrific magnitude of a massacre like that of *Pulse* is constantly filtered through the morbid fascination that comes from witnessing Alvear’s video, it is clear that what is left out is the social subtext that would help us understand not only how atrocious the *Pulse* massacre was, but also how this was not an isolated incident. Unsurprisingly, none of the television channels mentioned herein spoke directly of the discrimination and intolerance faced by Latinx queer people. After all, we have but to remember caricature-like representation LGBTQ people receive on programs produced by *Univision* and *Telemundo*.

While I have primarily focused on the use and reception of Alvear’s *Snapchat* recording by Spanish-language television news media and their viewers, the impact the video has had via

other media outlets is tremendous. This impact can be seen in two ways: first, in terms of how the video and the conversation surrounding it has in some instances allowed for a more nuanced discussion about gun control and about our reactions to violence; second, centered on counter-reactions to Alvear's *Snapchat* in social media (particularly *YouTube*), where not only the impact but the very reality of the attack is questioned via the video's images. These fervent reactions to Alvear have in part been provoked because of the dissemination of her image, which has made her one of the most recognizable witnesses and victims of the massacre.

The June 12, 2017 NBC News segment "Mothers of Victims Find Inspiration After Tragedy," sheds light on how the families of the survivors and the victims are coping and seeking change a year after the attack. One of the voices we hear is, again, that of Mayra. This mother of three from Fajardo recounts how the memory of her daughter continues to inspire her: "There is no moment I don't think of my daughter. When I am driving, when I wake up, when I eat..." Still deeply affected by the last perturbing images of Alvear, Mayra has made it her mission to actively honor her daughter and the many young people that lost their lives at Pulse: "I wanted her to be remembered as love. Pure love...that grief I have to turn into something positive. We cannot live with grief." This is how the "49 Acts of Love" movement came about: Mayra, along with other mothers of survivors and victims of the attack, have committed themselves to complete 49 daily acts of love leading up to the day of the attack. This shift in focus towards actions for change and towards calling attention to solidarity, remembrance, and community is also the driving force behind other key organizations in which Mayra is an important participant—such as the *OnePulse Foundation*, which was organized by *Pulse* to provide a sanctuary of hope around the attack. The *OnePulse Foundation* funds are designated as aid for survivors and victim families. Mayra serves as a Victim's Liaison for OnePulse and, in this role, is actively working towards an objective she herself voiced during the 2016 lighting of the Rainbow World Fund World Tree of Hope: "Let us not let this young people ever be forgotten. Let us remember their names as a way to prove that love will forever conquer hate and intolerance..."

Alvear's image has also provoked a rather peculiar backlash from a small subsection of *YouTube* users who have questioned the validity of her *Snapchat* video as well as the magnitude of the attack itself. In essence, the burden of proof now lies on Alvear's recording, as these *YouTube* users—through their own recorded commentaries—deliberate over and question the

veracity of the reported news. According to one of these dissenting voices, Hibernian Son, Alvear's video demonstrates how the tragic and violent act that occurred in *Pulse* could not have taken place at all because of the large number of people who were there and could have stopped the murderer. The comments made and verdicts handed down by similar users range from questioning how long it would have taken to recharge the machine guns used by the murderer to remarking on the numerous people seen in the video who, according to Hibernian Son, would have been able to stop the attacker. Hibernian Son also criticizes the reaction time of Alvear, stating that "she should have moved quickly." There is a latent racist and homophobic subtext in many of these commentaries, for instance those of Rich Vanclaren, whose video "Who is Amanda Alvear?" intended, according to him, to "... correct the historical record on the Pulse nightclub shooting since it will affect the well-being of our children and grandchildren." What followed in the nearly 8-minute long video was an amalgamation of various news segments that covered the media's reaction to the *Pulse* shooting. On the first screen, we were shown the question "who is Amanda Alvar?" and this was immediately followed by her 10-second *Snapchat* video. Vanclaren then provided the following description: "With this video, Amanda Alvear became the CoverGirl of the Pulse nightclub shooting," seeming to suggest that she was actively seeking to become a recognized figure, which consequently diminishes both her victimhood and the fact of the shooting. The remaining portions of his video were filled with news segments that made use of Alvear's *Snapchat* in order to depict her as a witness-victim of the events at the club. In these segments, Vanclaren commented upon the voices of Alvear's family members (her father, Mayra, and Brian) by flashing superimposed titles—"the grieving mother" and "the grieving son"—over footage of them as they reflect on the pain and grief they felt during the first few days after the shooting. Further suggesting that Alvear's murder was a hoax masterminded for the purposes of media attention and monetary gain, Vanclaren proceeded to superimpose sound clips of cartoons in order to lighten the serious tone of the video, transforming it into one that mocks the pain caused by this horrific event. It was clear from his video that Vanclaren judged all of the coverage of the *Pulse* shooting through the filter of Alvear's image, which he viewed incredulously. In fact, his video suggested that Alvear herself was not a victim of the attack and that her video was created to scam the system. Comparing her image on the *Snapchat* video with other photos of her that have surfaced, her face was compared to that of another Latina woman who mildly resembled Amanda, leading him to conclude that, if

we are to accept the *Snapchat* recording as evidence that the attack indeed killed Alvear and 48 other people, then it is necessary to question whether the attack really occurred. It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the reasoning behind these types of speculations, which are vaguely reminiscent of conspirationalist allegations of voter fraud in Latinx and African American communities during past presidential elections. As of July 2017, Vanclaren's video had received quite a bit of traction on *YouTube* with 572 views, with comments that were mostly opposed to the views it put forward. One of the most notable commentaries was by Brian Alvear, who condemns entirely the characterization Vanclaren made of his family and of him. Vanclaren's video has since been taken down but he has continuously created other videos that questions the validity of the *Pulse* massacre on his YouTube channel.

By way of conclusion, I want to remark on how a lack of serious and consistent coverage in Spanish-language television news media has led recently towards a sensationalizing of the *Pulse* attack that privileges morbidity at the expense of victims in order to guarantee viewership with insensitive dramatized reenactments. This phenomenon is evidenced by Univision's decision to use the *Pulse* attack as a subject in one of their dramatized docuseries programs, *Crónicas de sábado* (Saturday Chronicles), hosted by journalists María Antonieta Collins and Felix De Bedout. According to the hosts, this episode—called “Baño de sangre” (Blood Bath)—intended to present viewers a dramatization of what occurred in the bathroom at *Pulse* where victims and survivors sought refuge against the shooter. The episode interwove dramatized scenes of bloodied bodies on the nightclub floor and people screaming in the bathroom stalls with testimonies of five survivors. This dramatization poses a problem in the sense that, although we are viewing a troubling reenactment that presumably documents what happened and is described through the testimonies of Norman Casiano, Miguel Ángel Leyva, Jorshua Hernández, Francisco Pabón, and Orlando Torres, we as viewers are left with various questions. For example, what is the purpose of the dramatized reenactments? How do they fill the voids left by eyewitness testimonies? How do the bloodied and dead bodies depicted in these scenes affect the viewers, especially survivors and victim families? The insensitive projection of these images even, if described by these five survivors of the attack, still demonstrates a sort of detachment with this coverage that relied mostly on emphasizing morbid details of the attack. While the survivor testimonies provide heart wrenching details about their ordeal, *Univision* opted to represent the attack in gruesome detail so as to make the episode align with the brand of the

program. Unsurprisingly, the disgust of the victims' relatives and friends, who saw some of these images in the commercials advertising the program, led to online petitions to cancel the broadcast. After several days of promoting it, the channel seemed, perhaps due to public and institutional pressure, to have decided to cancel the episode: it was not aired on the announced date but was, ultimately, aired in March 2017.

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