

# DISPUTES BETWEEN DISCOURSES:

journalism and violence against women

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**ABSTRACT** - In this paper we will present partial results from a study on how journalistic production treats violence against women. It questions the discourses circulating around this subject for each outbreak of violence. We intend to grasp the role of journalism in a culture that claims to defend women yet also criminalizes the victims of abuse. This investigative perspective draws on theoretical and methodological approaches of discourse such as those from works by Dominique Maingueneau, Patrick Charaudeau and Eni Orlandi, among others. We found that Journalistic production fails to clarify facts used in reports on violence against women, thereby upholding old prejudices.

**Key words:** Journalism. Discourses. Violence. Rape. Women.

## DISPUTA ENTRE DISCURSOS: jornalismo e a violência contra as mulheres

**RESUMO** - No presente artigo, trazemos parte dos resultados de pesquisa sobre o tratamento dado, pela produção jornalística, à violência contra as mulheres. A pesquisa dirige interrogações aos discursos que circulam sobre o assunto a cada eclosão de brutalidade. Pretende apreender o papel do jornalismo em uma cultura onde é possível sair em defesa do respeito às mulheres e, ao mesmo tempo, criminalizar a vítima pelos abusos sofridos. Essa perspectiva de investigação demanda referenciais teóricos e metodológicos sobre discursos, como, entre outros, os de Dominique Maingueneau, Patrick Charaudeau e Eni Orlandi. Constatou-se que a produção jornalística é pouco cuidadosa quanto à depuração dos fatos relatados em matérias sobre os casos de abuso das mulheres, assim corroborando antigos preconceitos.

**Palavras chave:** Jornalismo. Discursos. Violência. Estupro. Mulheres.

## **DISPUTAS ENTRE DISCURSOS: periodismo y violencia contra las mujeres**

**RESUMEN** - En el presente artículo, presentamos parte de los resultados de investigación sobre el tratamiento dado, por la producción periodística, a la violencia contra las mujeres. Ella dirige interrogantes a los discursos que circulan sobre el asunto a cada eclosión de brutalidad. Se pretende aprehender el papel del periodismo en una cultura donde es posible salir en defensa del respeto a las mujeres y al mismo tiempo criminalizar a la víctima por los abusos sufridos. Tal perspectiva de investigación demanda los referenciales teóricos y metodológicos escogidos, a saber, los de los discursos por la óptica de Dominique Maingueneau, Patrick Charaudeau y Eni Orlandi. Como conclusión central, se constató que la producción periodística es poco cuidadosa en cuanto a la depuración de los hechos relatados en materias sobre casos de abusos de mujeres, de forma a respaldar viejos preconceptos.

**Palabras clave:** Periodismo. Discursos. Violencia. Violación. Mujeres.

### **1. Introduction**

In this paper we present partial results from a broader study<sup>1</sup> on how journalistic production treats violence against women, particularly violence of a sexual nature. Therefore, this study is supported both by media reports of violence and reports of public protests against violence.

This study questions the discourses circulating in the public sphere around this issue for each outbreak of violence against women. We believe that this investigation can indicate our current state of ambiguity on this matter: on one hand, we have had an increasing number of laws passed that defend women and their rights, but on the other, violence against women continues and there are even discourses that blame the victim.

The main motivation for the study was the contradiction between legislation and social practice, between new principles and deep-rooted habits. This paradox occurs on a global scale, thereby strengthening the social importance of this issue.

There are international laws that marked a turning point for protecting women, for example, the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico, 1975, which put forth measures towards eliminating discrimination of women. Subsequently, there was the Organization of American States (OAS) summit in 1994 which laid out measures for preventing, punishing and eliminating violence against women.

Brazil supported and was involved with these steps, albeit in the background, and created the Women's Police Stations in 1985 which have gradually increased since then. A law was passed in 2006 to reduce and prevent domestic and family violence against women; Law nº 11.340/2006, commonly known in Brazil as the Maria da Penha Law<sup>2</sup>.

There have been further laws implemented recently for defending women against the most common form of violence they suffer from in Brazil: rape<sup>3</sup>.

An important step forward was taken on March 9, 2015, with the creation of Law nº 13.104. It “changes article 121 of Decree nº 2.848 (established on Dec. 7, 1940) by including femicide as a homicide offence and defining it as a heinous crime under article 1 from Law nº 8.072 (July 25, 1990)” (President of the Republic, Civil Office, Deputy Leader for Legal Issues, [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2015-2018/2015/lei/L13104.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2015-2018/2015/lei/L13104.htm)).

However, the current cases of sexual violence somewhat contradict the progression laid out in these laws. These cases have occurred on all levels of disrespect and have generated debates on social networks, have led to public protests, and have originated tension between those in favor and those against any special treatment to the women offended.

If we look at data taken from the Ministry of Health's ([www.sim.saude.gov.br](http://www.sim.saude.gov.br)) Mortality Information System (SIM, in portuguese) we understand that 13 women are murdered per day. The data from the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea - [www.ipea.gov.br](http://www.ipea.gov.br)) shows that one woman is violated every 11 minutes. A survey from the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum on Brazilian Public Safety ([www.forumseguranca.org.br/publicacoes/10o-anuario-brasileiro-de-seguranca-publica](http://www.forumseguranca.org.br/publicacoes/10o-anuario-brasileiro-de-seguranca-publica)) revealed that five rapes were committed per hour in 2016.

As a result, the term “culture of rape” has been adopted to describe the situation in Brazil. Dr. Cynthia Semíramis Machado Vianna, a PhD in Law, human rights activist and historian on women rights, defines this term:

An expression that has become quite common to use when referring to violence against women is "culture of rape"; by which is understood a society that encourages sexual violence against women in society. However, this idea is quite restricted for contemporary times although it was completely acceptable by the time of its creation that occurred with the awareness groups in the 1960s and 1970s (Vianna, 2013, para. 1).

She extends explanation, referring to other works that also give origin to the term:

The New York Radical Feminists is a group that attracted a lot of attention in this area, their public actions and speeches being an inspiration for cinematographers and writers. Among some of their works are highlighted the documentary *Rape Culture* from Margaret Lazarus and Renner Wunderlich, and the book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* written by Susan Brownmiller, both in 1975 (Vianna, 2013, para. 5)

The use of the term culture of rape, both in the past and nowadays, is disturbing because it conveys a certain constancy of the expression, a factual event that is seemingly unchangeable. The expression itself is concerning because it alludes to a naturalization of rape.

So, it is interesting to map out the issue of abuse and how it circulates across information devices. We hope that this mapping will help us trace the intersecting and conflicting ideologies within a culture.

This is also an important research topic from a social point of view because it is at the heart of the fight for respect and equality, and because it may provide data towards overcoming conflicts. On the other hand, it is equally important for the observation of journalism in its specific features – something we will explore later in this text. This observation should help towards understanding journalism itself, its role in society by the exam of its modes of practice.

There is a question hovering over our investigations: Might new discourses be constrained by old ones which are already entrenched in the culture? We hope there is no hegemony here and that the responses on violence against women are crossed by many ethical perspectives. However, we believe that concepts for disempowering women have an unconfessed strong presence in Brazilian culture. Therefore, we conducted for this study a survey on a number of opinions about this issue, opinions that are transmitted across our information networks and echo the spirit of a community.

## 2. Theoretical support, methodology and corpus

There was a multiple murder that shocked the city of Campinas, Brazil, at the end of 2016. An ex-husband killed his whole family and then committed suicide. More information can be found on the *G1 news* site at: <http://g1.globo.com/sp/campinas-regiao/noticia/2017/01/familia-e-morta-em-chacina-durante-festa-de-reveillon-em-campinas.html>, Jan. 1, 2017, accessed on Jan. 2, 2017.

The murderer left a letter which explained his motives and also exposed his intense hatred for women. The article in the link above explains how he had committed this crime because he was frustrated with his separation process that prevented him from seeing his son.

Blaming women for the crimes committed against them occurs quite frequently in media, or should we say, in our culture. This fact, so often discussed, recognized and contested, and exemplified by the killing in Campinas and the media reports on it, is the reason for producing this study. It confirms the need to always examine justice for women and the laws that protect them.

This commitment is the main topic of this article<sup>4</sup>. It is guided by case study investigations, using qualitative, quantitative, comparative and evaluative approaches. It is also guided by universal concepts on reporting events through a discursive perspective.

We decided to focus on discourses and discourse analysis because, as explained by our theoretical and methodological references, Dominique Maingueneau and Patrick Charaudeau, discourses are the place where ideas and culture materialize, ideas that we hope to retrieve in this investigation.

“The circulating discourse is an empirical sum of wordings that define what human beings are, the actions, the events, their characteristics, their behaviors and the judgments attached to them” (Charaudeau, 2006, p. 118).

Circulating discourses are always changing in culture. They constitute the basis to our conversations, as well as those of the media and its production, since they indicate what is of interest to a community and the way to speak about these interests.

This understanding of the discourses role in the constitution of persons and, therefore, in the communication processes, guides our reading and interpretation of the media products on the issue in this paper.

According to this conception, discourse analysis should focus on specific marks that manifest in vocabulary evoking preconceived ideas and on phrases that convey implicit meanings, carrying the tone and idiosyncrasies of a culture.

For this reason the investigation conducted is based on Dominique Maingueneau's conception which states that a simple word, in discourse analysis, cannot be considered a sufficient unit by itself. However, it is invaluable as semantic crystallization of one discourse.

It would be wrong to think that the words in a discourse are only employed according to their virtual meanings in the language. Because, apart from their strict semantic value, lexical units tend to acquire the status of belonging signs. Among many terms *a priori* equivalent, the enunciators will be conducted to use the ones that mark their position in the discursive field. For example, we recognize how trendy it was to use a word like *structure* in literary reviews in the 1960s in contexts where the words *system*, *organization*, *totality* or *plan* could have been used to convey the same idea. This is because the restricted lexical universe is inseparable from the constitution of a territory of connivance (Maingueneau, 2008, p. 81).

At the same time, we are inspired and sustained by the words of Eni Orlandi (2007):

“There is a mode of being in silence that corresponds to the mode of being in meaning and the words themselves transpire silence” (Orlandi, 2007, p. 11).

Orlandi's theoretical reflections reveal a *foundational silence* which is the logic base for producing meaning and the background for meanings, and the *politics of silence* which harbor two types: *constitutive silence* and *local silence*.

*Local silence* is about interdictions, such as censorship, that come from social spaces in a certain place and time, serving power articulations.

*Constitutive silence* pertains to the fact that one saying eliminates, necessarily, other possible unrealized sayings. In reality, a saying camouflages other sayings, or meanings, that could emerge and yet remain silent. This silence can be associated to what it evokes or convokes since it doesn't leave specific marks in the text, it doesn't leave any documented words.

Taking all this in consideration, we started looking for phrases, expressions, and important words related to the theme of this paper and the raised hypotheses that conduct the analysis development.

In order to have a strong source for the study, the corpus needs to present a set of stable products to be examined, products that are also socially relevant for its place in the public sphere. Corresponding to these criteria, and avoiding the fluid and inconstant communications in the web, we chose printed press as our source. It is a place that may be conceived as record and memory of facts, a place where ideas clash and conciliate. Therefore, it is an appropriate place to put forth our propositions.

Continuing with the corpus design, trying to focus our investigation, we build a sample of journalistic production with two choices. One choice, related to the kind of media, led us to the discourse about the subject researched from the point of view of a larger-circulation newspaper, henceforth the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*. The other choice, guided by the more notorious case that cross the media in a controversial and persistent mode within different communication/information spaces, highlighted a few prominent events.

Thus, in the present article, we used reports from the *Folha de S. Paulo* on the gang rape of a 16-year old girl in the West Zone Rio de Janeiro on May 21, 2016 as a convergence point for our investigations. We took these reports in the duration related to its major presence in the newspaper, that is, we selected reports between the period of May 27 (the date the first article was printed) and June 18 (the date the police finished their investigations).

Apart from analyzing these materials, we also conducted a survey of this same case in the *Reader's Panel* section. We believe the letters sent in to the newspaper to be representative of discourses circulating about this case. Even though it's possible that the media vehicle could end up altering the level of the letters expressivity, being able to choose from a large number of them, an index of the discursive frameworks is automatically revealed.

### 3. Outline of the corpus and collected data

Keeping in mind the statistical data so far mentioned and the theoretical instrument that support us, we will describe, step by step, the journalistic materials and letters that make up the corpus.

We retrieved journalistic materials and letters from May 21 (the date the rape was committed) until the end of June (after the perpetrators had been indicted in June 17) using the keywords: rape,

violence, woman and women. The reports only started to be released after a video of the rape had been shown across social networks (May 24), and after the victim had already reported the crime to the police (May 26). The first report was therefore released on May 27.

We collected at a total of 56 reports, among them 30 were taken from the *Primeiro Caderno*, nine of which were on the front page. Nine were taken from the caderno *Cotidiano*, 15 from the *Caderno Ilustrada*, and one more from *Ilustríssima*. The *New York Times*, a weekly publication, printed a report that had our key words in it, thus appearing in our search.

Some reports were collected due to the presence of our key word but they did not have a direct relation to the the rape case studied. The reports from the caderno *Ilustrada* and the *Caderno Ilustríssima* did not deal with this specific case of rape but with rape in general, focusing on violence against women. One of these reports was on an Argentinian film in cinemas at the time about a female professor who was raped.

However, all these reports emphasize the harm done to the victims, the lack of support, the substandard laws and punishments. One of these reports (June 5th) briefly criticizes the position of the deputy who was first put in charge of the investigation. These reports were most certainly motivated by the event on May 21st even though they do not mention or comment on it directly.

The journal *New York Times* deals with rape cases in the U.S., particularly one that occurred on a university campus. It was a coincidence that this abuse had place at the same time as the one in Brazil.

A report from May 29th (“Drug trafficking, shots and funk music mark the rape scene in Rio”) contextualizes the event by describing the conditions of violence, the cultural habits, the drug trafficking and the lifestyle in many communities. It calls for social measures.

On June 1st an article was released (“Temer releases women protection plan with no deadline and no cost”) motivated by the study case but does not deal with it directly.

On the whole, these reports make up a disciplinary and vigilant proposal. As a vigilant perspective they ask the government organs for solutions while highlighting the ineffectiveness of their measures, whether palliative or demagogic. As a disciplinary principle they write at length on laws for protecting women, attitudes and preventative measures that need to be taken.



Overall, there were 39 reports focused on the facts and the investigative processes in the rape case in the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro. There were also nine reports on page A1, *Primeiro Caderno*, headlines which had only short excerpts of the main issue, treated in the inside reports.

The first article published on May 27 (“Rio Police arrest four suspects”) reports that the rape victim testified to the police on May 26th, after the video was posted on social networks on May 24th which showed her unconscious, half-naked, the body being moved around by men who were talking about rape. After giving her statement, the victim underwent a full body examination and was given medicine against sexually transmitted diseases.

The report reproduced the victim’s statement in which she described how she left home on Saturday night to meet a man whom she had been dating. She apparently did not remember anything after this meeting until the next day when she woke up in a strange house with 33 armed men around her. As soon as they had left her alone, she put on some clothes that were lying around close to her, took a taxi and went back home.

The police used the faces and the voices from the video for their investigation and were able to identify four suspects.

On May 28 there was a little headline on page A1 of the *Primeiro Caderno*, related to the *Editorial* called “Demeaning tragedy” that condemn the negligence in the treatment of cases of violence against women. The *Editorial* was clearly in defense of women’s rights.

In this same day, a whole page of the *Primeiro Caderno* was dedicated to this issue and the report proceeded (“Police do their job, but a ‘detail’ prevents rape suspects from being jailed”) describing the events and the fact that no one was jailed due to a lack of evidence. It also brought the victim declaration mentioning a second video in which she can be seen fighting off the men who raped her.

On May 30, the newspaper reported that Alessandro Thiers, the deputy in charge of the case, was replaced by deputy Cristiana Bento. This occurred because the victim’s defense accused the first deputy of being chauvinist, since he had asked the victim if she liked group sex.

One day later, on May 31, the headline “Deputy says ‘rape was proven’ and requests the imprisonment of 6” was followed up by a report in the *Primeiro Caderno* titled “‘Rape is proven’, says deputy

about crime in Rio". This report states the fact that examination of the victim's body, on May 26, provided no evidence of any bruising. However, Cristiana Bento states that there is no need for the presence of bruising to prove rape and that two of the six young men had already been detained.

The third suspect was arrested on June 2: "Man who shot selfie beside the raped girl has been arrested".

Another *Editorial* was published on June 6 about the case ("Brutal reality"). This report has an indirect relation to the case. It criticizes rushed government proposals that do not "deal with the unacceptable impunity for this crime".

On June 7, the second video was released. The deputy in charge stated that this video was indisputable evidence that the rape occurred and that the state treated the victim with negligence.

On June 8, a report titled "Rio Police try to reconstruct 30 hours of the girl's rape" puts together a chain of narratives about the known facts with details on the transit of videos taken by cell phones.

The case is revisited only ten days later, in June 18, with the article "Police accuse 7 after gang rape of teenager in Rio". It reports the end of investigations when seven people were accused but only two imprisoned. This article ends the successive narratives about the case.

The reports that retell the steps in the police investigation are not opinionated and even though, in several moments, they contain conflicting statements, there is a descriptive commitment of the situations, based on the statements from those involved: the victim, the perpetrators and the investigators.

Despite the conflicting information - the victim's statements saying that she woke up with 33 armed men surrounding her, or that she woke up and didn't remember anything, or that she woke up with two men holding her while another two were violating her, or that she was conscious and fought off the aggressors (the second video shows images confirming this statement), or the statement in the first *Editorial* that she was nude and bleeding although, later on, her examination did not reveal any bruises - there is no comparative approach to these data. The information that her genitals were injured and the one that there were no bruises are a glaring contradiction. Despite all this, there is no mention of any inconsistency between the reports. Therefore the newspaper considers that it is not necessary to offer any clarification on this matter.

As extension of the corpus, our study focused the reader's

letters from the section of the *Folha de S. Paulo* called *Reader's Panel*, always in page A3 of the *Primeiro Caderno*, as an object of observation. Using the same keywords we used in the previous phase (that is, rape, violence, woman and women) we were able to obtain references from May 29 until June 19, 2016.

The reader letters are unquestionable examples of what readers talk about, representing different perspectives of our ideology, at least partially. On the other side, the *Reader's Panel* brings a constant dialogue between readers, the paper and its journalists and/or columnists.

The newspaper, through its editorials and *ombudsman*, is praised and criticized by readers. The columnists are objects of scrutiny by both their fans and detractors. The sent letters address the content written in the columns, supporting, refuting, correcting and demanding pro-active positions.

Our keywords appeared on May 29<sup>th</sup> (two times) and May 30<sup>th</sup> (once) within this broad dialogue. The following results were obtained in June: our keywords appeared twice on the 1st; two times on the 2nd; once on the 3rd; once on the 4th; once on the 5th; once on the 6th; once on the 10th; twice on the 13<sup>th</sup>; once on the 14<sup>th</sup>, the only and last manifestation. It is worth noting that there is no letters in the *Reader's Panel*, in relation to our subject, till our final tracking in the end of June.

On Sundays, the *Reader's Panel* presents a chart of the most popular topics addressed in the letters. On June 5th the relevant topics were on Michel Temer (16%), Dilma Rouseff (14%) and violence against women (6%); these percentages were taken from a total of 1,178 messages sent in to the newspaper. Thus, there were around 70 letters on violence against women in that week. Despite the major political crisis that has shaken Brazil, and that is revealed in these topics, the issue of violence against women was still prominent.

June 12th saw an interest in violence drop as it does not appear among the top stories on Dilma Rouseff (14%), Michel Temer (12%) and Eduardo Cunha (7%), from a total of 1,195 messages. These numbers were somewhat similar the following week in the *Reader's Panel* on June 19th. Here, the topics were Michel Temer (15%), Lula (9%) and Eduardo Cunha (8%), from a total of 2,853 messages sent in to the newspaper.

In terms of the nature and content of the letters, eight were

written by males and seven by females; a total of 15 messages. Here we can see a number of males standing up for females. On the other hand, the topic of rape and abuse of women showed subtopics.

We have listed the most popular topics, in order of appearance. Elencamos, por ordem de surgimento, os tópicos privilegiados. There is some overlapping here; in other words, one letter might address more than one topic:

1 – The need to fight chauvinism and the culture of rape which lead to the abuse of women: six letters.

2 – Amazed that no one had been arrested yet (on May 28): one letter.

3 – Could not believe the deputy's attitude: one letter.

4 – Drawing attention to the fear that women live in: one letter.

5 – Before creating new laws, the existing laws must be enforced: one letter.

6 – Backlash against the Reinaldo Azevedo article: three letters.

7 – In support of the Reinaldo Azevedo article: one letter.

8 – Not blaming the critical situation of the country on the violence: one letter.

9 – A lack of institutional support: one letter.

10 – Backlash against the Marcelo Coelho article: one letter.

The positions against violence against women are evident here, particularly against sexual violence.

After examining the reader's letters, we then looked at reports which we had previously put aside during the first part of this study because they did not deal with, describe or opine on the gang rape that this study focuses on. Nonetheless, they are of interest to us because they put in circulation or mobilize discourses on violence against women.

One such report is an article from Reinaldo Azevedo titled "Rape as a Standard". In this article, he criticizes comments on the culture of rape. He believes that some defending women positions generate a situation where almost all male appreciation of women and their appearance becomes offensive. He also criticizes street protests that have, in some circumstances, taken advantage of the May 21 case to defend several other issues. He states that the victim disappears within this environment and becomes a pretext for political use. Azevedo's article barely touches on the gang rape case; it instead deals more with the current political view on protests (Azevedo, 2016).

On the other hand, Marcelo Coelho is accused (in a reader letter) of writing prejudiced statements about women who dance to funk music in his article “Bodies Exposed”. He comments on videos of young women dancing to funk, saying they dress the part when they go out to dance; in other words, they do not wear panties (Coelho, 2016). The main point of the article is important towards understanding the readers’ complaints and understanding that the article somewhat blames the women, insinuating that they, with their actions, are asking to be disrespected, devalued or abused.

#### **4. Considerations: an investigation crossed by many suppositions**

Going back to the issues that guide our study, such as the hypothesis of the ideology of women criminalization that prevails in modern times, we gathered some journalistic material while conducting our research of the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper. This material provides very specific data, some of them previously mentioned here, that somewhat speaks for us:

‘Women who use provocative clothing cannot complain if they are raped’. This phrase, capable of bringing chills, is representative of how one out of three Brazilians feel, according to a Datafolha study funded by the Brazilian Public Safety Forum (FBSP).

Even 30% of women share this reasoning, blaming the victim for the sexual violence they suffer.

According to official records, one woman is raped every 11 minutes in Brazil, a total of almost 50 thousand rapes per year. Yet estimates show that only 10% of these sexual assaults are reported, which suggests that this number could actually be closer to 500 thousand rapes per year.

(...) The approval index for the phrase that equates provocative clothing with rape rises among inhabitants of cities with a population of up to 50 thousand (37%), for people with only elementary school completed (41%) and for people over the age of 60 years (44%).

These numbers drop for those who are 34 or younger (23%) and those who have higher education (16%).

The importance of educating people on fighting sexual aggression is recognized by 91% of the interviewees who said they believe it is possible “to teach young boys to not rape (Mena, 2016, p.3, excerpt)

The data revealing that one-third of the population blames the victim is enough for us to assert the concrete reality of a “culture of rape” even though it is not hegemonic. In our study, this culture

manifested itself in the ways the removed deputy conducted his investigation, ways that suppose the victim responsibility for the violence suffered and are detectable in the reluctance to name the perpetrators and have them arrested.

On the other hand, the journalistic production in the reports on the case and the investigation procedures indirectly endorse this culture. These reports do not concern themselves with details. They assume that everything is going through the proper governmental organs and that there is no need for the newspaper to support or defend the victims, at least as far as providing any clarification goes.

However, all this does not go unnoticed. An article published on June 6 ("The culture of rape in newspapers") by Paula Cesarino Costa, *ombudsman*, heavily criticized the way the newspaper dealt with the case.

These criticisms were shared by readers who complained about the reports referring to the victim as "the girl who said she had been raped". These readers and the *ombudsman* had no doubt that she should be treated as rape victim. Despite the journalistic point of view that the expression "who said" is a mark of distancing and impartiality, Paula Cesarino Costa considered it a mark of "cowardice" on the newspaper's part.

On the other hand, she notes and criticizes the inconsistencies that we have appointed before. She states that the newspaper did not develop an in-depth approach: it should have included clearer data to explain the contradictions in the reports and highlighted possible public policies to provide a more accurate view of the situation in Brazil.

She regards it as the newspaper's duty to represent other voices, voices from specialists who can shed light on issues and contribute towards overcoming the culture of rape or the culture of blaming the victim as principle. This evaluation appeals to good journalism, founded on an ethical commitment.

However, neglecting data, the lack of accuracy, the silence with which the reports treated the inconsistencies, as if they don't exist or don't deserve attention, are not simply, in the view of our analysis, a case of bad journalism.

Paying attention to words is a procedure in discourse analysis because, apart from their specific meanings, they imprint interpretative meanings. Readers and the *ombudsman* recognized

this in the expression used about the victim: “the girl who said she had been raped”. This treatment from the outset casts doubt on the truthfulness of the victim’s statements and shows the newspaper’s indecisive position. This position is also reinforced by the vocabulary oscillations, calling her either girl, young woman or youth.

Nevertheless, and still as a discourse analysis strategy, we also need to pay attention to the absence of words: to what the silence of an abstention implies or to the silence that some presences pose, marking a field of meaning by discard. We remember Orlandi’s thoughts on a mode of being in silence that means, and about a *constitutive silence* that refers to an unsaid full of alluded meanings.

We noted desirable journalism in each report we analyzed. It was informative and not opinionative, it was descriptive and not dramatized, it was objective and non-fictional. To this ideal journalism the reports even used the required discursive resources: third person, citations with quotation marks, and shortness on adjectives.

However, for the reader who follows the reports word for word, thus following the history pace in the newspaper, the inconsistencies within them slowly weaken the victim’s credibility, since it brings her conflicting statements without bringing anything to clear up the discrepancies within.

It happens that abstention evokes meaning. For instance, bits of incriminating information are offered: she is 16 years old and already has a three-year old son who lives with her parents; she goes out late at night and doesn’t say when she will be back; she herself said she had already been addicted to drugs but has since given them up. This information, together with the contradictions that are not cleared up, can lead readers to believe the victim is to blame for the crime.

On the other hand, not clearing up the contradictions shows a disregard which is typical of a position in the ideology of the culture of rape: the verdict is given before the trial, disregarding verification. Then again, taking bits and pieces from personal life without any contextualization, these details about the victim’s life could make her appear to be guilty. But, these same details, with context, could also present her as less stereotyped and maybe more humanized.

In what was not said, and still remains to be said, inhabit meanings that pre-convict this girl, as if the abuse, any one, could be forgivable in some situations.

However, the reports that were not on the case study because they do not describe or follow the investigation, do not doubt that the rape occurred nor do they doubt the victim's condition. They consider the fact as indisputable and are focused on demanding just actions, thus supporting the victim declarations.

At the same time, observing the data from the second collection, the silence of journalistic materials is counterbalanced by directly addressing the issues connected to the case. At no point did any reader letter cast doubt on the victim and her circumstances. Quite the opposite, they believed there was a crime that needed to be solved and needed to be a source of preventative measures.

These letters that reject prejudices, if understood as representative of our culture, are a consistent sign of more respect for women. It is true that we might only be dealing with a small sample size related to the age and higher education group in which the blaming of women rate is lower.

Moreover, our research led us to identify disputed discourses in the reader's letters, especially when dealing with prejudices. A consequence of the newspaper emitted discourses, the reader's letters, exploring the various nuances of the case, or the subtopics, list the discourses that circulate and constitute our ideology. At the same time, they were a gratifying encounter, because they restored the integrity of the victim, saving her from the silence to which she was sentenced to.

\*Translated by Lee Sharp

## NOTES

- 1 I refer to the study as being broad in terms of its temporality; it started in 2006 as the base for a project on censorship supported by FAPESP (*Censorship on the scene*). It is also broad in terms of its scope as it is mainly concerned with tracing processes of supervision, control and exclusion by investigating the words and discourses which these processes establish. This opens up many perspectives, including the one developed in this paper. The Productivity in Research scholarship, granted by CNPq, is connected to this research.



- 2 The name given to this law is in commemoration of Maria da Penha Maia Fernandes, a victim of domestic violence over her 23 years of marriage. In 1983, her husband shot her and left her paraplegic. Maria da Penha took her case to the OAS Interamericana Commission of Human Rights. It was only 19 years after her denouncement that her husband was tried. He was sentenced to eight years but only served two years in a closed prison. The Maria da Penha Law was included in paragraph 9 of Article 129 which criminalizes the domestic abuse of women. This article means the abusers can be sent to jail, be held in police custody and have this custody time increased.
- 3 Law 12.015, August 7th, 2009, classifies it as “crimes against sexual dignity” under the chapter “crimes against sexual freedom”. Article 213 defines rape as “forcing someone, through violence or serious threat, to have sexual intercourse or perform other unwanted sexual acts” and establishes the related punishments. (Brazilian Penal Code, <http://www4.planalto.gov.br/legislacao>).
- 4 This article was partially presented at the congress for International Association for Media and Communication Research, IAMCR 2017.

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