

DOSSIER

FROM REPORTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE TO #METOO:

New York Times and its contributions to combative journalism



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ABSTRACT – The main objective of this paper is to identify the combative elements in the professional practices of American journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, focusing on investigative reports on sexual violence against women published in the New York Times. For this case study, a qualitative analysis was carried out on the book *She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement* and on the 2018 Pulitzer Prize-winning reports authored by these same journalists. The results show that these journalists conducted a thorough investigation, legitimizing female speech by bringing to light the complaints of women victims of sexual harassment. The commitment these journalists have to confronting aggressors and uncovering facts that are concealed by powerful figures, such as Donald Trump, is also evident.

Key words: Combative journalism. Investigative journalism. Sexual harassment. #MeToo. New York Times.

DE DENÚNCIAS DE VIOLÊNCIA SEXUAL AO #METOO: contribuições do New York Times para um jornalismo combativo

RESUMO – O objetivo principal deste artigo é identificar os elementos combativos que caracterizam as práticas profissionais das jornalistas norte-americanas Jodi Kantor e Megan Twohey, centrando-se nos trabalhos investigativos sobre violência sexual contra mulheres publicados no New York Times. Para o estudo de caso, realizou-se uma análise qualitativa do livro *Ela disse: os bastidores da reportagem que impulsionou o #MeToo* e de reportagens de autoria de ambas as jornalistas, pelas quais receberam o Prêmio Pulitzer de 2018. Os resultados indicam que as jornalistas realizaram uma investigação exaustiva, caracterizada por legitimar falas femininas, ao visibilizar as denúncias de mulheres vítimas de assédio sexual. Também é evidente o comprometimento das jornalistas em confrontar os agressores e revelar os fatos silenciados por figuras poderosas, como Donald Trump.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo combativo. Jornalismo investigativo. Assédio sexual. #MeToo. New York Times.

DE DENUNCIAS DE VIOLENCIA SEXUAL AL #METOO: las contribuciones de New York Times para un periodismo combativo

RESUMEN – El objetivo principal de este artículo es identificar los elementos combativos que caracterizan las prácticas profesionales de las periodistas estadounidenses Jodi Kantor y Megan Twohey, enfocándose en los trabajos de investigación sobre violencia sexual contra mujeres publicados en New York Times. Para el caso de estudio, se realizó un análisis cualitativo del libro *She said: la investigación periodística que destapó los abusos de Harvey Weinstein e impulsó el movimiento #MeToo* y de reportajes de autoría de ambas periodistas, por los cuales recibieron el premio Pulitzer de 2018. Los resultados indican que las periodistas realizaron una investigación exhaustiva, caracterizada por legitimar las hablas femininas al visibilizar las denuncias de mujeres víctimas de acoso sexual. También es evidente el compromiso de las periodistas al confrontar a los agresores y revelar los hechos que estaban silenciados por figuras poderosas, como Donald Trump.

Palabras clave: Periodismo combativo. Periodismo de investigación. Acoso sexual. #MeToo. New York Times.

1 Introduction and methodology

Feminist demands have come to garner a lot of attention in the media, mainly due to the stance that journalists and media organizations have taken to expose the many cases of sexual harassment against women. Without the constant influx of interviews, news investigations, and reports published on this topic, sexual consent, and harassment issues would not have had the impact they have had (Aubin et al., 2022). The #MeToo or *Ni Una Menos* movements, including several books published by victims of sexual abuse (Kouchner, 2021; Peiró, 2021), have discussed this issue on a global scale and thus reinforced this argument. This would not have been possible if it weren't for the social changes that have helped

push these crimes to be established as public problems. The passing of laws (Sobral et al., 2020), such as the “Maria da Penha” Law in Brazil¹, has given more media visibility to these crimes and led to feminist agendas being finally included in the public agenda (Silva et al., 2022b).

The book *She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement*, written by two New York Times journalists, Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey (2019), detailing the behind-the-scenes processes they used in their investigations in 2017, had great repercussions and helped the rapidly growing #MeToo movement reach a global scale. The book mainly addresses three cases: 1) the allegations involving former president Donald Trump and his inappropriate sexual behavior towards women; 2) the decades of sexual harassment and abuse allegedly committed by film producer Harvey Weinstein and; 3) Christine Blasey Ford’s decision to publicly accuse Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh of sexual assault.

Kantor and Twohey (2019) revisit their investigative reporting on these individuals in the book, which won the Pulitzer Prize for journalism in 2018. Of note is the fact that this book was not written by journalists who are considered “stars” in their profession, and does not address an issue that has “never been seen before”, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu (2008). The topic could even be considered “unoriginal” in the sense that, for over 50 years, American journalism has reported cases of violence against women, questioned the visibility given to women in and by the media, and also called for feminist agendas and issues to be included in the press (Tuchman, 1978, 2009).

However, scientific research on the subject has shown that news coverage is reluctant to deconstruct stereotypes of gender violence, ultimately concealing the aggressors by blaming the women (Berns, 2001; Sanematsu, 2011; Gillespie et al., 2013). A recent study conducted by Leal et al. (2020) demonstrates the reluctance and problems many media forms have in treating physical and symbolic violence against women as gender issues.

In an effort to complement these aforementioned studies, this article explores a specific object of investigation and looks at these behind-the-scenes sexual allegation investigations told in a “journalist’s book” (Da Silva & Marocco, 2018) as a unique opportunity to analyze journalistic practice and routine, as well as the strategies

of “resistance and subversion” (Da Silva & Marocco, 2018, p. 36) that also shape the profession. The book exposes routines that, as Lelo (2019) reminds us, are less explored in other stories that investigate women journalists and the injustices in the work world to which they are subjected.

What is evident from the *She Said* book is that “everyday” issues can be investigated, lead to arrests, and even result in political reforms, all thanks to journalistic work. Harvey Weinstein was given a 23-year prison sentence in New York in 2020, and a further 16 years in prison in Los Angeles for rape and sexual assault; however, he continues to deny the allegations². Trump is still being investigated and could be arrested for bribing an actress with whom he allegedly had sexual relations³. A New York Times survey shows that more than 200 powerful men lost their positions, some even went to jail, as a result of these public accusations (Carlsen et al., 2018).

The agenda on gender and gender-related issues, such as violence, harassment, and femicide, can be a combat tool (Moraes, 2022), an “investigative gateway” as Kantor and Twohey put it (2019, p. 21), and therefore, an opportunity to flesh out a problem of systemic violence and hopefully raise awareness about a public issue that journalists have been writing about for more than a decade by denouncing criminal offenses and sexual crimes in newspapers. This is a fight that is more than just about giving visibility to violence against women without recognizing gender-based violence (Leal, 2016).

Therefore, the main objective of this article is to identify the combative elements employed by journalists Kantor and Twohey in their investigations into sexual violence against women published in the New York Times. It is important to state that this paper is based on an analysis of the book *She Said*, followed by a complementary analysis of the texts listed in table 1.

Table 1*Analyzed publications*

Title	Date	Type of Publication	Newspaper/ Editor	Link
<i>Sexual Misconduct Claims Trail a Hollywood Mogul</i>	06/10/2017	Report	NYT	https://bit.ly/2NzpjGX
<i>New Accusers Expand Claims Against Weinstein Into the 1970s</i>	30/10/2017	Report	NYT	https://nyti.ms/3JlaUMD
<i>Post-Weinstein, What's Different?</i>	29/10/2017	Editorial	NYT	https://bit.ly/2NzpjGX
<i>She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement</i>	2019	Book	Companhia das Letras	No link available

The corpus consists of heterogeneous objects of investigation – reports, an editorial, and a book – which not only allow us to compare the reports to the behind-the-scenes accounts in the book but also to understand the newspaper's position concerning the events. The reports and the editorial we selected to analyze are available online and free to access.

The investigative proposal of this article follows lines of works in the sociology of journalism (Bourdieu, 1994, 2002; Neveu, 2000, 2006) and studies on journalistic practices and norms in investigative and journalistic coverage (Tuchman, 1978; Ruellan, 1997; 2007, Leal, 2022; Silva et al., 2022a). The theoretical-methodological basis is mostly based on research that aims to deconstruct these techniques and norms by questioning premises such as objectivity (Christofoletti, 2004; Moraes & Silva, 2019; Maia & Barretos, 2022). As such, we also look to studies that offer a gender perspective in the deconstruction and problematization of journalism (Leite, 2017; Da Silva & Marocco, 2018).

Our case study included six categories (table 2 and 3) for the qualitative and descriptive analysis of the publications that won the Pulitzer Prize and the book *She Said*, in which the journalists give behind-the-scenes accounts of their investigative journalism during the course of three years, including hundreds of interviews with women who have suffered sexual harassment or abuse.

Table 2*Analysis categories*

Professional structure and cultural aspect	Sources	Reports and testimonies from victims. Direct quotes from reports and the book.
	Verifying/Street Investigation	Important steps in the search for “facts”, such as going through archives, reading documents, and meeting sources.
		Contact with the issue outside the newsroom.
	Objective elements	Aspects that highlight detachment and professional autonomy. Documents, experts, and specialized sources consulted.

Table 3*Analysis categories*

Organizational aspect	Behind-the-scenes of newsrooms	Interesting facts about the investigation and writing processes. Possible changes to the writing while covering the topic.
	Competition	Proof of relationship with other journalists and other media, and the place occupied by the NYT in the news field.
	Interdependence on other fields	Newspaper/journalism relationship with other fields, such as politics, and its consequences on journalistic investigation and writing.

Both the book and the reports were collected, read, and categorized according to table 2, the goal being to identify the combative elements that characterize journalism in terms of the structural aspects, professional culture, and organizational aspects. Structural aspects and professional culture refer to relationships with sources (Ringoot & Ruellan, 2014) and the steps taken in the verification process. It is made up of three professional standards and practices that are considered potentially combative: 1)

polyphony and testimony; 2) data collection and street investigation; and 3) objectivity. As De Bruin (2000) observes, professional culture concerns the principles (objectivity and detachment/autonomy) that underlie the profession, shaping a professional identity.

Organizational aspects (Tuchman, 1978) refer to the productive routines that are established both inside and outside the news organization, in this case, the New York Times. It concerns the internal logic of writing (hierarchy among professionals and working conditions) and the external logic of competition and interdependence with other fields.

The objective of this article is to identify the combative elements in the journalistic work of Kantor and Twohey, and thus we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: Did the defense of a “combative” agenda marked by resistance allow us to question certain norms and techniques of journalism?

RQ2: By entering into “combat” with powerful figures such as Donald Trump and Harvey Weinstein, did the journalists practice “another form” of journalism that problematized the professional and organizational culture of the New York Times and its relationship with other social fields?

2 Combative journalism immune to structural issues

We use the term “combative journalism” in this paper to refer to the work of Kantor and Twohey. There are two reasons we made this decision. The first is that we base it on Padioleau’s (1976) definition of the rhetoric of critical expertise. By combining rigorous investigative work, in-depth knowledge of the social universe that the journalist covers, and an objectifying and attentive approach to numbers and data, the rhetoric of critical expertise affirms points of view based on the strength of field investigation. “Journalism forced to reposition itself” (Moraes & Maia, 2021, p. 7) in the face of more complex social dynamics. It is therefore about reporting in an engaged manner and seeking new ways to represent and frame themes and subjects.

However, a few inconsistencies regarding this engagement already appear at the beginning of the book. The journalists do not claim to be feminists⁴ and do not express any concern or

disagreement about using this term in journalism, although they do support some of the agendas on feminist issues. This is evident when they recognize sexism and cases of sexual harassment and abuse as a social problem, arguing that “this book serves as a lasting denunciation of Weinstein’s legacy: the exploitation of the workplace to manipulate, pressure and terrorize women” (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 11).

This “combative” disposition is characterized in Kantor and Twohey’s book; they were regarded as courageous for their investigative reporting and for confronting powerful figures such as producer Weinstein, “who used dishonest tactics to sabotage our work” (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 11). Their willingness to “combat” is justified mainly by the problematization (highlighted in the book) of the inseparable link between investigative processes, using certain sources, and the story as framed by journalistic coverage (Silva et al., 2022a).

Once they discovered the number of women who had been paid off to keep quiet, the journalists made an effort to listen to as many of these women’s stories as possible in an attempt to find a pattern of criminal male behavior, despite the insistence that this is “normal” or just “man talk”, as Trump claimed when he was accused of sexual harassment (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 30). Listening to the testimonies of several women and including them in their reports legitimized what these journalists were investigating. Their choice of sources was not completely neutral as it interfered with their coverage of a story, after all, the relationship between journalists and their sources is not only characterized by interdependence, but it is also structural (Ringoot & Ruellan, 2014).

Far from being isolated cases, the journalists, through their investigative research, discovered a number of crimes involving different actors, such as police and prosecutors who silenced complaints, doctors who continued to practice medicine despite having committed sexual abuses, and even a market for adopting children run by sexual predators. They established a “particular sociology” (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 74) of harassment for each type of company, from restaurants to Silicon Valley companies to the media itself. This was the case with Fox News, which paid millions of dollars to silence women who accused its news host, Bill O’Reilly, “one of the main critics of feminism in the United States” (p. 39), of sexual harassment.

The behind-the-scenes report in the book allows us to reflect on journalistic production as a collective construction, and can also lead to variances in journalistic coverage and the framing of sexual abuse of women, mainly because it tells the stories of how women reach higher-paid positions. This is what Kantor and Twohey (2019) talk about in their book when addressing the role of New York Times editor, Rebecca Corbett, who encouraged and guided the journalists to write about these harassment issues, and how her promotion, in 2013, changed the profile of senior professionals at that newspaper; its newsroom reached 50% women for the first time in 2017. The number of women in leadership positions currently exceeds that of men⁵. However, it is important to remember that this feminization in journalism, which can be seen in several countries, is not only associated with the professionalization of the career but also with the precariousness of continual gender inequalities (Neveu, 2000; Leite, 2017; Lelo, 2019). When mentioning Corbett's promotion to editor, the investigative journalists recalled her difficulty in reconciling work with motherhood.

When journalistic investigating gives visibility to female voices it deconstructs or problematizes some of the basic premises of the journalist/source relationship and the coverage of a topic. There are three dynamics in the book that illustrate these premises, which contribute to a more combative journalism, one that is more resistant to journalistic objectification, although some weaknesses are evident.

2.1 Polyphony and testimony as journalistic resources

When speaking of their professional practices, journalists often make a point to mention their obligation to the reader to present all points of view of a given situation. This corresponds to polyphony, understood as a “rule of modern journalistic writing that, when facing a conflict of interpretations, divergent positions must be expressed in the same speech or in the same broadcast, to which the journalist tends to, *a priori*, grant a status of equivalence” (Lemieux, 2000, p. 372). This is echoed by Leal (2022, p. 120) who states that “polyphony presupposes the diversity of voices, of world views, in everyday realities”. Now, looking at the journalists' reports, this definition does not apply as they are not necessarily hearing “both sides” of the story; they are focusing on the voices of women,

who lack visibility and even credibility, especially when the sources consulted in this type of journalistic coverage are the police.

The journalists exposed cases of harassment after hearing hundreds of testimonies from famous actresses to women just starting in their careers, such as Rose McGowan, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Ashley Judd, former models such as Rowanne Brewer, former and current employees of producer Weinstein, among others. Even though they listened to what the accused individuals had to say about the allegations before publishing their reports, they appeared to do so more out of respect for a standard in the profession, a strategic ritual (Neveu, 2006), than for something essential for publication. In addition to making it clear in the reports⁶, this is evident in the book when they recount Trump's reaction after presenting several women's allegations to the former president's staff about how he sexually harassed them: "no matter how brutal the conversation [journalist Megan Twohey] gave Trump plenty of opportunity to react to the allegations. They went ahead and published the article, with his comments and everything" (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 34). The focus was on the women's reports, once cleared of having no political ties to Hillary Clinton. It is clear that "the journalistic process is not only technical but also political" (Christofoletti, 2004, p. 88).

The challenge for Kantor and Twohey was to go public with reports that proved a pattern of sexist and criminal behavior against different women, not only famous women, but also company employees, especially those working for Weinstein. "Over the years, all the accounts of Mr. Weinstein's conduct share a common narrative: the women were asked to go to a hotel for what they believed to be work-related reasons, only to discover that Mr. Weinstein [...] sometimes appeared to have different interests" (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 185).

Their behind-the-scenes reports showed that not all sources carry the same weight, deconstructing the premise that they are all equal. The journalists argue that it would not be enough to hear different testimonies if they did not fit journalistic logic. In other words, they had to avoid singling out or stigmatizing the lives they reported on, they needed to express and represent trajectories and experiences of violence that were more than just vague or abstract, as well as the power relations that silenced them. Both Trump and Weinstein own companies and were "used to" resolving complaints with confidentiality agreements. In this case, caution was needed when publishing testimonies as making the complaint public could have

compromised the investigation and the credibility of the professionals.

These two journalists, as well as their sources, were publicly threatened, particularly due to the intense political polarization at the time with Trump in power. They didn't want to stir up strong political emotions and draw attention to questions about the role of the press, which is one of the fears many victims have when talking about the subject, as is evident in the following statement:

Dozens of Mr. Weinstein's former and current employees, from assistants to top executives, said they knew of inappropriate conduct while they worked for him. Only a handful said they ever confronted him. Mr. Weinstein enforced a code of silence; employees of the Weinstein Company have contracts saying they will not criticize it or its leaders in a way that could harm its "business reputation" or "any employee's personal reputation," a recent document shows. (Gabler et al., 2017).

Testimony as a journalistic resource appears to be complex because it distances journalism from a single "truth" and can allow awareness through the "liberation of voices", and highlight a struggle for recognition, as observed in other cases in which victims or minorities have their voices heard. When analyzing cases of violence against women in Brazil, the "moderating power of testimony" is important to bring up because "it manages to complicate the reports and go beyond a dichotomous coverage of the phenomena that is limited to presenting a victim and an attacker" (Maia & Barretos, 2022, p. 79). Testimonies also have a public and political side to them, allowing not only new journalistic frameworks on sexual assaults (from *faits divers* to societal facts) but also a broader conception of the notion of public interest, participating in the journalistic redefinition of the border between private and public spheres (Ruffio, 2020).

Put into a journalistic narrative, the statements collected in the reports seek to shape journalism into a record that is both unprecedented and ethical by using women sources from different professions. We say unprecedented because it is an exclusive story on famous figures, the repercussions of which were felt across the globe. Its uniqueness is not restricted to the media. The case of researcher Christine Blasey Ford, who accused Brett Kavanaugh of sexual assault, was invited to give a televised statement to Supreme Court senators, where she was questioned by a prosecutor about her case. The journalists report how the case was perceived as a historic milestone because it challenged "outdated social norms", leading to a groundbreaking opening statement in the Senate "due to the #MeToo movement, [...] a year ago she [Ford]

could have never testified”, concludes the researcher’s lawyer, Debra Katz, a specialist in sexual harassment who contacted the journalists about the case (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 244-306).

At various times in the book, the journalists highlight how unique the subject is and how much attention it garnered once published in the New York Times in October 2017. The book has an asserted combative position in claiming the role of the media and the desire to mobilize a large public in promoting social transformations: “And how do we ensure that progress reaches everyday American workplaces, where sexual harassment occurs all the time but rarely receives media attention? The answer is part cultural, part economic and part legal (New York Times, 2017).

Also of note is that the journalists were committed to searching for the contradictions of human experiences, especially regarding the plurality of women’s conditions highlighted by social inequalities and racial issues. Kantor says she investigated low-income workers at companies like Subway, Walmart, and McDonald’s, and observed how those cases are even more difficult to report. Regardless, many of them were inspired “by the actresses who spoke out, and identified with the experiences of those distant celebrities, but were unsure whether they had any way to address the problem” (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 242).

On one hand, these were public and famous figures. The allegations would soon become a scandal that would benefit newspaper marketing by capturing large audiences. On the other hand, the allegations were heard around the world, underlining how journalistic work can open the doors and encourage other anonymous women to report cases of sexual abuse. If journalistic narratives are to organize collective and individual human experiences (Leal, 2022), then they can shed light on what goes unseen in society by revealing and sharing experiences that can dialogue (Maia & Lelo, 2015) with the experiences of those who read them.

2.2 Data collection and field investigation

Although official data on the number of cases of violence or abuse is not the focus of the reports, nor the book, a great deal of research and reading went into giving the narrated stories “concreteness” in order to avoid the “she said, he said” dichotomy. As such, the journalists took

a few precautions in the book, especially in light of the public attacks they received from Trump. As the authors stated, “the material needed names, dates, legal and financial data, documents and on-the-record interviews” (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 185).

Being one of the tools of journalistic action, investigation is the main focus of the book, particularly the behind-the-scenes look at their reporting. There is a combative aspect to this action which is more explicitly claimed by the journalists, and rhetorical strategies (Ruellan, 2007) are also adapted to this objective: they expose their working methods to provide a more transparent look at how facts are collected and showing how they seek to rationalize the complexity of the reality they report. We selected some steps and choices that demonstrate the engagement of these two journalists and the newspaper:

a) Verifying testimonies and making them public in documents or evidence.

They describe their understanding of the journalistic practice, highlighting *habitus* (Bourdieu, 2002) as a guarantee of professionalism by arguing that “in the press, important documents are rarely hidden from the public” (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 187). To demonstrate this, the journalists talk about their reaction to a source who – for fear of retaliation – asked them not to include an important document in their report. This is a memo that criticized Weinstein’s behavior at the company (for example, asking his employees to give him a massage) which the production company knew about and later covered up. The journalists responded by saying “the strength of the memo is its role as a witness, documenting the producer’s inappropriate sexual conduct with other women” (p. 187). This showed the source the importance of journalistic credibility and how important a document can be to an investigation that only has accusations (up until that point) of what the producer had been up to. The memo corroborated the statements collected by the journalists, showing a pattern of behavior that was being carried out within the company.

b) Revealing their email exchanges with the accused, the victims of abuse, and between each other.

In addition to demonstrating a certain level of transparency, these exchanges are also an opportunity for journalists to show the

impacts these allegations had, for example, the crisis at the Weinstein Company began when the company's main directors stepped down shortly after a report with allegations against producer Weinstein was published. They show how they uphold the values of the profession "by placing their social function in the debate, journalists elaborate – and therefore negotiate – the terms of their qualification, the basis of their legitimacy as workers and as a group" (Ruellan, 1997, p. 156). Defining issues of harassment and sexual crimes and the way of thinking that underlies them are, therefore, also related to professional logic.

c) Financial data on confidentiality agreements involving complaints against Trump and Weinstein, revealing how the companies were complicit in the abuses.

Here, they reveal how they devoted themselves not only to street investigations but also to obtaining the facts. "In investigative journalism, knowing about the existence of incriminating documents is good; seeing these documents is excellent; having copies of them is even better" (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 93). The journalists discovered that compensation for sexual harassment had become a small industry where the terms of the settlements seemed like a way of covering up the truth, due to the fact they included several restrictive clauses: once the women had signed the settlement, they had to hand over all evidence in their possession, such as audio recordings, diaries and emails, they could not speak to journalists about the subject, just to name a few (p. 76). When consulting lawyers and experts, they discovered that these were standard practices when it came to dealing with the subject, which then led the journalists to wonder if "the public would be interested in those obscure legal instruments and their ramifications" (p. 78). Shortly after publishing their article, activists and legislators from California contacted the newspaper claiming they wanted to change the state's rules regarding the legality of secret compensation for sexual harassment.

2.3 Combative objectivity?

Although journalistic objectivity is understood as adopting a neutral position, protecting the journalist from activist engagement, it can also lead the journalist into simply writing factual summaries

or reproducing official statements, becoming less interested in or more resistant to assuming a protagonist role and challenging the problems that affect society. If these two journalists appear to be taking sides by acting as whistleblowers of sexual crimes, is it not because objectivity is not defined as the denial of subjectivity, “but as a commitment to the facts of the events” (Rocio & Henriques, 2021, p. 32)? A number of researchers respond positively to this question by proposing “another kind” of journalism, one which assumes different subjectivities and questions long-established newsworthiness criteria in order to expand the field to include new representations (Moraes, 2019; Moraes & Silva, 2019).

In this sense, Kantor and Twohey (2019) approach this “different” and combative journalism by using empathy and thoughtfulness when dealing with sources, gaining their trust by giving their cell phone numbers to all the women. This resulted in a multitude of calls from women looking to the journalists for justice.

It is through this personal involvement that these journalists seek to make the information more objective due to how they act when they identify a problem that must be fought and debated. This is evident when Kantor and Twohey conducted face-to-face meetings with the twelve sources in the investigation, the goal being to answer some unresolved questions about the Weinstein case: “what happened to the women who came forward and what conclusion did they reach from everything that had happened?” (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 315).

Also of note is how the journalists approached the women to get their stories. They did not contact their advisors because they knew that it was personal information. In this way, a journalist’s involvement with a social cause or specific agenda contributes to the productive process of journalism, mainly for preparation, verification, and street investigation. When they heard other testimonies from Weinstein’s employees about his sexual advances, and how he was dealing with cases of harassment⁷, the journalists made their combative aspect clear, which shapes professional identity: “no one had ever managed to stop that man. If the reporters had not published their findings, he could have harmed others” (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 183).

Without their commitment, these journalists would not have discovered so many cases of sexual harassment and abuse. This shows us the professional competence of these journalists in the way they take sides. We associate this position with the idea of “combat” or

“combative” as it characterizes resistance in journalism (attempts are often made to publicly discredit reporters) as well as other diversities, for example, the gender issue. We therefore refer to a tactical action from the moment they recognize a specific communication situation, perhaps through a “situational awakening” (Moraes, 2022, p. 112).

3 Combative journalism free of productive routines

Reports on crimes and sexual harassment have led to a number of changes in the newspaper's newsroom and its routine. Some of the more key changes include 1) a large team made up of reporters, editors, legal advisors, and lawyers; 2) journalists participating in meetings that were previously only held among editors (this shows the importance of the agenda and, in a way, the importance of breaking hierarchies, even if only temporarily); 3) the active participation of the publishers in the investigation due to Rebecca Corbett's position as senior editor of the newspaper.

However, while analyzing the book, what draws the most attention is how journalistic practice is mixed with other interests that interfere in its functioning as journalism is inserted in a logic of interdependencies that characterizes the relationship between information professionals and the different social universes. This field presents a specific logic that involves restrictions or limitations, such as immediacy in news production and keeping track of the competition, which underlie the exercise of the profession.

These limitations are present in the journalists' text even when defending the important role of journalism in going public with complaints when they recognize that journalistic mediation, at a certain point, can become an obstacle, especially during a challenging political environment with Trump in power and fierce competition between media. An “exclusive story” published by the New Yorker almost prevented Professor Ford's accusations against Kavanaugh from going public, a nominee for the Supreme Court who Ford accused of harassment and attempted rape. A couple of days before Ford testified before the senators, the magazine published a report that contained an interview with Deborah Ramirez, a source that, until then, the NYT had not been able to speak with and who said that she was at the same party where the sexual assault against Ford had occurred. However, Kantor and Twohey believed these

allegations and the evidence in the article to be weak, leading them to believe the allegations in that article to be unreliable.

The usual practice in journalism was for competitors to try to follow each other's reporting on relevant topics. If the post had an exclusive on Trump's dealings with Russia, the New York Times would try to report on the same material, and vice versa, not only to inform its own readers but to confirm the story. [...] The situation is different now. The New York Times discovered that Ramirez had told some former Yale colleagues that she was not sure whether the man who exposed himself was Kavanaugh (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 291).

The day after it was published, Republicans accused Democrats of creating a “shameful smear campaign” and a “leftist conspiracy” through the press. Speaking when Professor Ford testified about her allegations against Kavanaugh during a senate committee – even though she was heavily discredited for doing so – the journalists say: “Unlike the Weinstein case, in which the victims' voices were mediated by journalists, the world saw and heard this woman's personal unfiltered narration” (Kantor & Twohey, 2019, p. 300). This shows that when the media has an interdependence with other fields, such as politics, journalists are not as cohesive a group as one might imagine. And the search for an “exclusive” can help delegitimize a years-long investigation. In Ford's case, her testimony was well received by the media but did not prevent Kavanaugh from being nominated for the position.

Kantor and Twohey also seek to differentiate themselves from other professionals as the NYT is regarded as a newspaper of record in North American journalism and an international reference, which gives them the chance to assume a more combative position, conscious of the symbolic power that it holds.

4 Final considerations

The New York Times was a pioneer in establishing certain professional criteria, which are still considered “technical” and “objective” today. This combative form of journalism helps characterize the work of Kantor and Twohey, mainly because they kind of break from the norm of journalistic objectification by increasing the scope of how sexual crimes are handled (from a gender perspective), and also by placing an emphasis on women's

voices, giving them visibility and, above all, credibility. Faced with the volume of complaints, mostly fueled by the #MeToo movement, these reporters took a position (which we describe as combative) to demonstrate the relationship between individual complaints and a collective problem, a perception that is shared by journalists from other countries (Pineda, 2022).

They took this position by using their skills and employing work techniques that are not found in journalism manuals, which partly answers our research questions (RQ1 and RQ2): they highlighted the extreme inequality between men and women, which is at the heart of the issue of gender-based violence. They also exposed the transversality of sexual crimes, which affect all social classes, and the power relations that are often hidden in professional routines. They are aware of the interdependencies journalism has with other fields and how intense the competition is. By (re)asserting their detachment from politicians, these journalists demonstrated a commitment to investigating and to professional criteria aligned with combative journalism.

In this case, different limitations are imposed on journalism when it comes to reporting crimes against women, which mainly problematizes the second investigation question (RQ2). One example is that publicly exposing crimes was a journalistic action that helped break a vicious circle of crimes involving celebrities and famous aggressors, although campaigns to report cases of harassment do not prevent or reduce the high statistics of femicide. One should also think about how combative journalism would be characterized in another situation other than a spectacular event involving Hollywood stars, one in which journalists might suffer more threats and are violated, as in Latin America. Especially because the appreciation of individual subjective issues and the interest in what is “common” are strategies adopted by communication companies.

It is also worth mentioning the gap in the book and reports on the interdependent feminist movements with journalism, which proved decisive in other contexts (Gonzales, 2007), as well as the renewal of the political agenda, thus problematizing the role that journalism intends to play in society from the perspective of struggles that derive from professional – and organizational – identity and the coverage of social issues.

Lastly, this type of combative journalism has gained space in the media thanks to the feminization of newsrooms (Woitowicz & Rocha, 2018; De Assis, 2023), which in some way favors the inclusion

of gender-related agendas that see women as sources. No less important are efforts to educate and train journalists to use critical thinking and gender awareness, such as academic undergraduate programs that include journalism and gender (Bertasso et al., 2020), which can use the book analyzed in this article as support material.

NOTES

- 1 Law 11.340 was sanctioned on August 7, 2006, became known as the “Maria da Penha” Law in honor of the woman whose husband tried to kill her twice and who since then has dedicated herself to the cause of combating violence against women. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.br/pt-br/noticias/assistencia-social/2022/08/lei-maria-da-penha-completa-16-anos-na-defesa-dos-direitos-das-mulheres>
- 2 Retrieved from: <https://veja.abril.com.br/coluna/em-cartaz/harvey-weinstein-e-sentenciado-a-16-anos-de-prisao-por-estupro/>
- 3 Retrieved from: https://oglobo.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2023/03/atriz-porno-stormy-daniels-pode-levar-a-indiciamento-de-trump-entenda.ghtml?utm_source=globo.com&utm_medium=oglobo
- 4 At some points in the book the accused individuals in the reports call them feminists, using the term in a derogatory way, but the authors do not respond to or comment on their positions in relation to feminist movements.
- 5 Retrieved from: www.statista.com/statistics/1218882/new-york-times-employees-gender-breakdown-us/
- 6 They show that they contacted all the sources mentioned in the reports, such as producer Weinstein’s companies, using phrases such as: “The company declined to comment on the email”.
- 7 A Weinstein Company employee says she was asked to facilitate Weinstein’s sexual conquests. “Managing Harvey’s past and present sexual conquests was never something I imagined would be part of my professional responsibilities”, she states (Twohey & Kantor, 2017, p. 182).

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