

To standardize or to silence: the production of meanings, symbolic violence, norms and silencing in journalistic discourses on female sexuality¹

ROGÉRIO PEREIRA BORGES

Pontifical Catholic University of Goiás (PUC Goiás) / Federal University of Goiás (UFG) – Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil.
E-mail: rogeriopereiraborges@hotmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-0173-8926

Volume 42
issue 1 / 2023

Contracampo e-ISSN 2238-2577
Niterói (RJ), 42 (1)
jan/2023-apr/2023

Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication is a quarterly publication of the Graduate Programme in Communication Studies (PPGCOM) at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). It aims to contribute to critical reflection within the field of Media Studies, being a space for dissemination of research and scientific thought.

¹ Text resulting from the research project Structural Changes of Journalistic Practices in the Digital Age, at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Goiás (PUC Goiás), coordinated by the author, having as a student of Scientific Initiation, with scholarship funded by CNPq, the student Victoria Lacerda Rocha.

PPG|COM UFF
Programa de Pós Graduação
COMUNICAÇÃO
MESTRADO E DOUTORADO

TO REFERENCE THIS ARTICLE, PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING CITATION:

Borges, R. (2023). To standardize or to silence: the production of meanings, symbolic violence, norms and silencing in journalistic discourses on female sexuality? *Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication*, Niterói, v. 42, n. 1.

Submitted on 01/26/2022; Accepted on 01/25/2023.

DOI – <http://dx.doi.org/10.22409/contracampo.v42i1.52981>



Abstract

This article discusses, based on journalistic discourses published in the newspaper Folha de S. Paulo and in the digital magazine AzMina, how productions of meanings about female sexuality still suffer from logics that incur in norms and silencing regarding topics considered taboo. At the same time, the text reflects on the differences in journalistic dynamics between a traditional vehicle and another designated as alternative, which are projected in the ways in which agendas are approached and in the distinction of the discourses. As theoretical supports, Discourse Analysis, spiral of silence, newsworthiness criteria and social construction of reality are discussed, in addition to themes related to symbolic violence linked to women's sexuality, choices regarding their own bodies and the stereotypes that orbit this field.

Keywords

sexuality; feminine; symbolic violence; journalism; bodies

Introduction

The ways in which the media approaches issues related to sexualities and gender identities arouse interest in the most diverse social spheres. Although the media are diverse in their approaches, interests, organizational cultures, audiences and editorial lines, themes related to subjectivities and intimacies have been present for a long time in media products – either for educational intentions or for sensationalist and profitable purposes.

The interest of social structures in the subjectivities of the human body is ancient, emerging even before drawing attention from media narratives. According to Michel Foucault (2015), from the 18th century the human body began to be seen as an object of micropower, through which its disciplinarization constituted an efficient means of control and social power. Institutions such as prisons, asylums, barracks, companies and schools continuously operated a subtle and sophisticated process of training and naturalization of norms and values that would be internalized by the subjects of society.

This was the model of disciplinary society described by Foucault in force until World War II. In this context of post-industrial mass societies, the author observes, although the themes of intimate life were apparently confined to private environments by the diffusion of social values focused on work, the fact is that such interests never ceased to be present in the most varied discursive environments.

Since the 18th century, sex has not ceased to provoke a kind of widespread discursive eroticism. And such discourses about sex did not multiply outside of power or against it, but there where it was exercised and as a means for its exercise; incitement to speak was created everywhere; in all places, there were devices for listening and recording, procedures for observing, interrogating and formulating. They dig it up and force it into an existence. (Foucault, 2015, pp. 36-37).

In this historical moment, the so-called control society emerged, as defined by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, in which the mechanisms of command presented themselves as “increasingly democratic”, in which the masses were replaced by an individualism accentuated by technologies and the media, and the disciplinary paradigm of power is replaced by what was called biopower, that is, “the form of power that regulates social life from inside, accompanying it, interpreting it, absorbing it and rearticulating it” (Silva, 2013, p. 1).

Again, the subjectivities of individuals were subjected to various systems of control and standardization, no longer linked solely to the physical limits or rigid dictates of the institutions with their processes of “social training” internalized in them, as school or church, but now engendered by fluid devices disseminated in society and independent from surveillance of other people. Control began to operate not from the outside in, but at the core of each individual’s imaginary, through the influence of film celebrities, advertising, the current standard of beauty and the most varied consumer goods “sold” to the whole society. However, even though the recurrence of these themes in media narratives is noticeable, their effects and characteristics were still unknown. Something that occurs by various strategies that reinforce stereotypes and lead to feedback of mentalities from which it is difficult to free oneself, especially when thinking about the roles ascribed to women in this scenario, in which they are historically and constantly standardized or silenced.

In this sense, we will analyze how these symbolic acts of violence, through norms and silencing, take place in journalistic discourses of two media outlets with different profiles – a traditional *newspaper* (*Folha de S. Paulo*) and an alternative newspaper (the digital magazine *AzMina*) – with regard to female sexuality and the body of women, instances that are the targets of enormous loads of invisibility and stereotyping. These are processes that configure symbolic and practical violence, gaining discriminatory, prejudiced, and sexist meanings, in ideas and in the physical body itself. We will see that it is possible to give different treatments to these themes, depending on how they are addressed and that mere intentions

are not enough to effectively attribute to them more libertarian views that escape stigmas.

Male predominance

The concern with the constitution of theoretical explanations about issues related to sexuality, gender and power in the midst of media discourses arises especially from the emergence of feminist themes among English Cultural Studies. According to Stuart Hall (2016), the feminist theoretical rupture in the 1960s contributed to an expansion of the understanding of “power”, which previously related only to issues of the public sphere, leaving out aspects related to private life and popular culture. Authors such as Simone de Beauvoir (2016), Betty Friedan (1963) and Kate Millett (1969) have raised pioneering approaches to how subjectivity, sexualities and gender identities interfere in the construction of the popular imaginary, socio-political system and *establishment in force*.

According to Beauvoir (2016), “the world has always belonged to males. None of the reasons they proposed to us to explain it seemed sufficient to us” (vol. 1, p. 95). Still, according to her, “the woman herself recognizes that the universe as a whole is masculine; men modeled it, directed it, and still dominate it today” (2016, vol. 2, p. 408). This is a very large weight also exerted on and by the media vehicles, which since its beginnings have not escaped this dynamic, however violent it has revealed itself. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir tries not only to understand the factors that led to such a scenario, but also to propose reflections on how to transform a historically formed context, often with pseudo biological arguments, which she refutes at various times.

In *Eros & Civilização*, Herbert Marcuse (2018) elaborates some of these questions, bringing the eminently social questions of psychoanalysis, about which he makes a critique in its Freudian conception, without, however, failing to recognize the validity of certain concepts and theoretical tracks found there. In this sense, he analyzes what he calls “repressive civilization”, in which what is defined as “archaic heritage of the individual being”, is mirrored, with repercussions on the collectivity. These processes are configured in the norms of sexuality and violence imposed on genders.

With the popularization and massification of media discourses, they gained more prominence, being considerable variables in the equation of sedimentation and diffusion of the idea of this “world of males”, of which Beauvoir (2016) speaks. The desire to ascertain the ways in which media discourses represent and naturalize aspects related to sexuality and gender especially was aimed at journalistic discourses for a good reason: in addition to a field of information production, it can be understood as an instance of power and knowledge building.

By investigating the relationships and practices, as well as the discourses produced in the instances of power and knowledge, one can not only understand the ways in which these productions are inscribed in society, but also fundamentally understand “the continuous, repetitive and endless pedagogical work [which] is put into action to inscribe in the bodies the ‘legitimate’ gender and sexuality” (Louro apud Silva, 2010, p, 58).

According to Veiga da Silva (2010, p. 62), the way journalistic narratives reproduce and characterize different genres has direct imbrications in our culture, in the system of social values, and even in how individuals are able to constitute and recognize the existing behavioral ‘norms’. This is so because, for the author, journalism has the power to legitimize the knowledge reported by it, but also “because the media participate in the didactic processes of explanation of knowledge that must be shared and taken as the guidance of society”, and therefore “have direct interference in the configurations of social conventions” (p. 62). As Pierre Bourdieu ponders, “there is no position in the system of production and circulation of symbolic goods [...] which does not involve a certain type of position and which does not also exclude a whole repertoire of abstractly possible positionings” (2007, p. 160).

Following this premise, journalism has an important symbolic power, potential for constructing meanings and standardizing cultural values in its discourse, so that the media in general can be described as one of the main “cultural pedagogical instances” since the emergence of mass societies. And in this privileged “social position”, journalism makes decisions, makes choices over other possible options, sometimes corroborating what society usually considers “correct” or “natural”, even if they are sexist and violent ideas.

Every day we are invited to know, through the media, the truths about how we should behave, the “tips” to live better, the most “appropriate” behavioral profiles, the legitimate ways of living our sexuality, adorning our bodies, in short, how to behave and subject ourselves as “normal” and “accepted”. (Silva, 2010, p. 30).

These processes of meaning production about what circulates in the social spheres often occurs in a tenuous and veiled way. They occur each time that a behavior, a norm or a value of our culture is naturalized or judged, in the form of a positioning, a comment, a negative or positive exposure, a privileged speech space in the news. Processes that occur in a way that legitimizes social fields, behaviors and values, while disqualifying so many others, being reproduced in a “playful, attractive, consumable, fast, intelligible and, above all, as a parameter of reality” of which the journalistic discourse is constituted (Silva, 2010, p. 27).

As Fischer (apud Silva, 2010) notes, media production is characterized by its appeal to the real concrete, its discourse of service to the public interest, and especially by its potential to determine what is discussed and apprehended by the public in societies, so that “what is not in the media [...] increasingly becomes foreign to the ways of knowing, learning and feeling of contemporary man” (p. 62). According to Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), who raised the *agenda-setting hypothesis*, it is not possible to prove with complete certainty the process that the media can guide society or influence it with the issues they want to be discussed by public opinion, but they demonstrate that there is a “very great coincidence” between the themes raised or covered by the media and the appeals that drive the debates in the hearings – in this case, in a political campaign. Of course, this is a hypothesis that needs to be incessantly confirmed as communication processes change, but it is still useful for reflections on the constant reproduction of certain worldviews that can generate ideas of homogeneity.

This whole normatizing process, characteristic of the media and journalism, understood by some authors as a construction of social reality, is further intensified by the alleged positivist discourse of the environment, which seeks to attribute to itself ideals of objectivity and impartiality validating the messages as the spokesperson of public opinion (Schons, 2019, p. 45). Social construction of reality that occurs through interactions and shared values, as Berger & Luckmann (2010) attest when defining “symbolic interactionism” and “internalizations of social structures” (p. 209). This web of references and forms of thought, making the world a “subjective reality” (2010, p. 167), of which the authors speak, bases an influential journalistic theory, the constructionist theory (Alsina, 2009), which confronts the idea that the facts are totally and objectively apprehensible and transmissible, refuting previous views in this direction, such as the mirror or hypodermic theories.

To Barros Filho (apud Schons, 2019), who understands this appeal to objectivity as a form of symbolic violence, “the legitimacy of the journalistic text comes from a recognition of legitimacy granted to the journalistic company. [...] the less clearly subjective the product, the more effective it will be in the construction of social reality” (p. 81-82). Now, if a text is constructed with techniques that guarantee objectivity, how can one say that it interferes in the construction of reality? This is the old and efficient “strategic ritual” that Gaye Tuchmann (1999) tells us to highlight the effort of journalistic media to show themselves to be “impartial” and “exempt”, reinforcing their credibility and symbolic heritage with the public.

The fact is, however, that these interferences do exist. We are constantly presented with what is considered as the morally accepted behavior of the time, to gender patterns considered as ideal, to stereotypes of each gender, to the traditional dichotomies man x woman, straight x homo, married x single, among many others which, by their very existence, disqualify and invisibilize diverse and plural existences.

In fact, the most unconscious provisions, such as those resulting from the *internalization of a primary class habitus*, were constituted through the internalization of an objectively selected system of signs, indices and sanctions, which are nothing more than the materialization, in objects, words and conducts, of a particular system of objective structures. Such provisions remain the principle of selection of all signs and indexes produced by the extremely diverse situations that are capable of determining their updating. (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 161, author's griffin).

But how do such interferences and standardization processes occur through media discourses? A possible path to this question is presented by Noelle-Neumann (2019) in her spiral of silence theory. According to the author, the debates that circulate in the midst of society, especially those of great social scope and with multiple divergent opinions, provoke a series of sociopsychological factors in individuals, which begin to weigh the consequences of expressing their opinions based on what they consider to be the majority opinion.

When considering that most people's opinion on a given topic is different from theirs, evaluating what is called a "climate of opinion", individuals tend to silence themselves for fear of reprisals or isolation. In this sense, the media contribute to this perception of opinion through three different forms:

[...] the *media* configures impressions about which opinions are dominant; they set impressions about which opinions are growing and which are not; and they configure impressions about which individual opinions can be articulated in public without risk of isolation. (Ortiz, 2019, pp. 259-260).

From this tacitly accepted system, there is a consistent process of standardization and silencing of everything that can shake such convictions. Even when something disruptive occurs, we have a referential device that leads to patterns that cause plurality to be quelled. This is noticeable in journalism regarding sexuality and women's bodies.

Visibility and standardization

As Foucault (2015) observed, the intimate relationship between power and sex permeates human relations, and today it is treated with some frequency in journalistic vehicles. The themes about sexuality circulate in the media, creating an impact on society, perhaps reformulating the concepts and moral norms already established. It is observed that the emergence of such discourses is related not only to the productive daily life and authority of the vehicle, but also to external pressures, which indirectly require its existence. As Giddens (1993, p. 25) points out, sexuality is a primary connection between "body, self-identity and social norms". In this sense, self-identity can be established through themes that cover sexuality and intimacy presented in digital media, which may have generated new social norms.

Themes that belong to the field of sexuality, in the most diverse aspects, are present in journalistic spaces much more frequently than before, but the question is how this visibility takes place. In a previous study, we could see some of these gears of sense production, which proved conflicting and problematic numerous times, within the scope of the cut out then chosen. Taking editions of *the newspaper Folha de S. Paulo*, between September and November 2018 (from the reunion of a set of articles through the compound week method), and using discourse analysis, with the election of devices and categories (Orlandi, 2012), a wide range of topics was found. In this survey, we analyzed 37 contents published by

the newspaper on the most different platforms taking the device of sexuality, taking into perspective discourses that appeared to be more liberal in relation to certain aspects of this theme and that could still be configured as social taboos.

As an illustration of movements that can be found in more traditional communication vehicles, we can mention some results of this research. At the time, it was possible to catalog 11 discursive categories, separated by the themes contemplated by the newsletter in its different formats, from special subjects to fixed columns, from blogs to the health section. The categories then selected were: asexuality, celebrities, female behavior, male behavior, LGBTQIA+, masturbation, orgasm, pornography, relationships, health and child sexuality. Within this discursive universe, it was not difficult to verify the omnipresence of certain norms, which are in intense communion with symbolic violence regarding the freedom that should be exercised in respect of the body itself. As much as the editorial line considered democratic of *Folha de S. Paulo* has made attempts to lend more visibility to such topics, it has often bumped into culturally rooted senses in a patriarchal and macho society.

The newspaper makes genuine attempts in the opposite direction, but ends up betrayed in this goal by constructions that place certain behaviors as exceptional. This occurred, for example, in the category asexuality, in which *Folha de S. Paulo* tried to demonstrate, with a certain vehemence, that sexual pleasure does not need a partner and that people who think so – or who refute sex as something essential in their lives – suffer² prejudices. Thus, we opted for an emphasis on the fact that it is a minority and not in a broader look at the issue, which contributes to the idea of niche and exclusion of those who think and act like this.

In the category of celebrities, the same occurs when the analyzed texts seek to reinforce that the famous have a more libertarian sexual behavior, bringing this posture as a differential that draws attention, as something that is not “within the norms”. In both categories, it is perceived that the discursive reference is a so-called “normality” that would be interrupted by positions regarding sexuality that, so differentiated, deserve to be treated as almost exotic elements. The discourse of freedom on such issues is thus only superficial in these contents, since judgments and taboos are taken into account in their construction, even if it is in the effort to refute them, but always recognizing them.

Celebrity statements about their sex lives are often vectors for the topic to be addressed, as if the intimate behaviors of such public figures should be of greater interest. The logic of the audience says that this premise is true and the notoriety is a classic criterion of newsability, but this demonstrates once again by which main parameters the vehicle is based on the approach to the theme of sexuality. The behavior of famous people gains a projection that is based on mere curiosity about the intimacy of the character of the articles and articles and not about the themes that can be raised for discussion. They are the “new Olympians”, in the definition of Edgar Morin (2011), who eclipse mere mortals in issues that are common to all and who, when addressed, gain the reputation of something that belongs to a world apart, to the universe of fame, therefore “out of the norm”.

This infects, for example, debates that *Folha de S. Paulo* brought, in the period researched, on topics such as masturbation, orgasm and pornography, the latter category in close association with the visualization of sexual fetishes. We have here a series of taboos that current standards try to curb in many ways. Judith Butler attests that a narrative of the “I” in the world can only be given if there is a recognition of the “other”. “The other represents the possibility of history being returned in a new form, of the fragments being connected in some way, in some part of the opacity being illuminated” (2015, p. 105). On the other hand, Michel Maffesoli considers that “we relate to the other, we feel like the other, we act like the other, we talk like the other. Perhaps it would even be necessary to say that we are felt, acted, spoken by the other” (2014, p. 123, author’s emphasis). But what is this “other” that is revealed in such

2 Retrieved from: <https://f5.folha.uol.com.br/voceviu/2018/09/quem-sao-os-assexuais-relatos-de-brasileiros-que-nao-se-interessam-por-sexo.shtml>.

journalistic content? Numerous times, they are inaccessible and idealized celebrities, who do not belong to the reality of those who read.

This condition causes the debates about sexual freedom to go beyond the symbolic of the tangible and the achievable, restricting less standardized behaviors only to “who can do this”, wealthy people, who make a living from the exposure of their own body and their relationships, which are highly desired and eroticized. In the search to redeem this removal, the newspaper interviews anonymous people and tries to print the most popular texts, with the inclusion of terms that would not be published before. This reveals a naturalization of certain themes, but at the same time lets us see a somewhat artificial effort, as if these texts had the objective of “shocking”. It falls again into stereotypes, even if involuntarily.

There is an obvious attempt at evolution, but old vices are not suddenly eliminated. There is an ongoing process in this sense, in which mistakes are made, but also correct. *Folha de S. Paulo* opens spaces for less ingrainedly sexist views in its publications. In this research, it was found that there are interesting movements in order to mitigate the stigma of certain behaviors historically associated with men and women. In the blog *X de Sexo*, from *Folha*, it is commonly highlighted that women were stereotyped as romantic and virgin, a model that was broken with the sexual revolution and cultural advances, which brought greater equality between men and women, and the possibility of more sexual partners. Another regular finding was that the need for female pleasure is placed in the foreground.

As for what we might call male behavior, the published contents recognize that the figure of man is historically treated as having greater sexual privileges, which is something negative and has been overcome. The texts highlight the sexist aspect of society. Also as regularly, the idea of men more concerned with their own pleasure than with their partner is transmitted, a condemned behavior. Male sexual behavior is repeatedly criticized, sometimes treated as childish and self-centered. The male act of worrying more about one’s own pleasure than with that of the partner, as well as one’s selfish fetishes, are treated in a negative and reprehensible way.

It is an admirable struggle, but it must be recognized that, once again, the current norms dictate the journalistic paths that *Folha de S. Paulo* is taking to deal with these issues. These are contingencies that cannot and should not be ignored, but what is observed is that symbolic violence, even if heavily criticized, is always present, leading the debates. Sexist stereotypes are refuted, but remembered before that. This is also the case when the newspaper deals with issues related to love relationships. The first regularity found in this category concerns the separation of the concepts of sex and love. It was observed a distancing of the two ideas in the analyzed texts, where to practice sex one does not necessarily need to have a loving involvement, and vice versa. Recent behavioral proximities between males and females have been pointed out, in order to emphasize that both have had similar sexual habits and preferences thanks to cultural advances.

Therefore, there is an idealization, as a reference, the one which for so long was monopolizing the rules about love relationships. This standardization, once again, dictates the directions of the discussion, with *Folha de S. Paulo* bringing visions that confront such mentalities, but obliquely recognizing its might. The debate is driven exactly by the senses it tries to transform. This causes intentionalities not to fully transact in discourses, reformulating them to some extent, but reinforcing them on the other hand. This awareness-raising form finds flaws, since what it intends to combat has as much space as the alternative worldview that is proposed. Such discursive organization generates controversies, not always with proper deepening, relegating certain ideas to fields pejoratively designated as “militants”.

This can be seen in treatments to the category of pornography, for example. A divergence was found in the analyzed content regarding reports of pornography consumption. Although phrases that describe porn consumption as something pleasant have also been found, there are also reports about the damage that preference to this type of content can generate in the individual. In this dichotomy, a moralistic tone cannot be disguised, since the norms condemning such postures are tacitly accepted and

a solid silencing falls on the theme that gives it an air of something forbidden or shameful, which deserves caution.

Something similar occurs with the debates around issues related to the LGBTQIA+ audience. As a first regularity, it was found that the newspaper treated sexual orientation as something that could be discovered, acquired, and not subject to birth sex. Another regularity found was to equate homosexuality with heterosexuality, in an effort to make the approach “natural”. But the structural problem is right there: “naturalness.” The outdated and prejudiced idea that sexual orientations other than heteronormative ones are not very “natural” must be hard fought, but the constant repetition that some do not consider homosexual or bisexual relationships “natural” ends up creating statements that underline these arguments, giving rise to a series of distortions and malpractices even of scientifically accurate data.

We recognize that it is a difficult trap to escape, even because media discourses are embattled in social mentalities and many of them are reactionary and try to impose varied norms and violence. The challenge is, therefore, even if on a gradual scale, to break with such structures without the need to lend visibility precisely to what one wishes to overcome. In this direction, some good signs may come from the so-called alternative journalism, in which certain agendas are brought to the fore and worked with a mentality less surrounded by pressures from audiences and power groups of different natures. In these contents, there is a more fearless deepening in relation to certain agendas, giving prominence to initiatives that reveal potential for change.

It is not enough, therefore, to bring to the discourse topics that were previously taboo, such as female masturbation or sexual education in childhood, as it was possible to find in the journalistic texts of *Folha de S. Paulo*, but to make efforts in the sense that such discursive constructions do not belong to the universe of the “exotic” or the “rebellious” but approach the daily life of all audiences. Feminist initiatives that propose to dismantle symbolic violence around the body are obviously faced with the same challenges and obstacles. These spaces, however, demonstrate dealing with such missions with less shame and in more open ways, which contributes to the discussions being less superficial and reaching layers that more traditional vehicles only now begin to try to achieve.

Other approaches

An interesting example is the digital magazine *AzMina*, a journalistic website that integrates a broader initiative, the AzMina Institute, which works so that women-related topics are on the agenda with broader contents, which are explicitly positioned in favor of historical flags of women’s autonomy. “We produce impact information, bringing plurality of voices and stories to women’s routines” (AzMina, 2021). The differential of this space is the verticalization that promotes in the coverage of themes related to the obstacles that women face in society, many of them linked to the field of sexuality. This way of working allows the content not to be restricted to condemning anachronistic or inappropriate behavior and to consider proposals, complaints and analyses that go beyond.

Editorials such as *Behavior*, *Culture*, *Maternity*, *Violence*, *Feminisms* and *Health* denote the priority themes of this journalistic initiative, which works in *the crowdfunding system* and is not only attentive to the most urgent news, but investing in broader coverage and that not necessarily are on the agenda. This demonstrates that, unlike most of the contents analyzed in *Folha de S. Paulo*, the site is not guided by a celebrity or an ephemeris. This decision is made in a more organic way, often breaking the silence, the spiral that silences more controversial voices, confronting the attributes that are usually conditioned to gain such visibility. In a way, materials are more objective, gaining a more service-oriented profile.

In the violence editorial, for example, there are reports elucidating what usually happens after a woman denounces an aggression, regarding the obligation of condominium administrations to report

cases of domestic violence, about the preference of President Jair Bolsonaro to attack female journalists. It is also possible to access reports that talk about the mourning of women after an abortion, about the profile of Brazilian black feminists, who deal with the number of cases of depression and suicides among women that are constantly oppressed. They are not easy or simple topics, which run out in a celebrity that shows a more liberal behavior or a column that in which female masturbation³ is exalted, without an expanded contextualization. If, on the one hand, the texts of Folha de S. Paulo seem to prioritize certain issues that approach the well-known “women’s magazines” when it comes to sex – such as discovering pleasure with the clitoris, the possibilities of using vibrators and sex⁴ toys – on the other hand, AzMina magazine, in reports or opinion columns, elects other biases, as the history of lesbian visibility in sport⁵, the literature produced by prostitutes in Brazil⁶, the doubts that affect adolescents before losing their virginity⁷.

The pitfalls in which Folha de S. Paulo falls, for example, reaffirming stereotypes before trying to dismantle them are largely avoided by AzMina, since the magazine goes to the heart of the problem in less usual ways, not resorting to appeals and impulses that usually turn sexuality into something spectacularized, almost fetishized, although it attunes the discourse to the present times, with greater autonomy of women and more powerful voices coming from minorities. Problems related to sexual health and the discovery of sexuality by children are two enlightening points in the observation of these differences.

In Folha de S. Paulo, within the study, the first regularity found in this category is related to the benefits generated by sexual practice. Sex is reported as something that brings health benefits, which provides better sleep, and good mood⁸. As a regularity, reports about actions related to sexuality that can cause psychological damage, such as the fact that the woman is a companion for money, or consumes pornography, were also identified.⁹ In AzMina, the debate about safe abortion is prioritized, the stories of health professionals who fight for the well-being of women who often arrive with their bodies violated and information about contraceptives¹⁰. Journalistically more useful, these contents also stand out for not simplifying problems with much deeper roots.

This is even more evident when the theme is sexuality in childhood, contemplated by Folha de S. Paulo in a somewhat controversial way. In the traditional journal, within the research conducted, it was possible to find some discursive regularities. The first concerns the sexual orientation of children. Sexual orientation among children has been reported as something likely to be “discovered”, that is, something that is not linked to birth sex. Also as regularity, sex was reported as something that generates interest in minors. Finally, sex education was addressed as necessary.

In AzMina magazine, there is an extensive report¹¹, which brings many biases to address the

3 Retrieved from: <https://xdesexo.blogfolha.uol.com.br/2018/11/09/siririca-sonambula/>

4 Retrieved from <https://xdesexo.blogfolha.uol.com.br/2018/09/06/um-vibrador-para-chamar-de-meu/>

5 Retrieved from <https://azmina.com.br/colunas/secreto-e-proibido-uma-historia-sobre-a-visibilidade-lesbica-no-esporte/>

6 Retrieved from <https://azmina.com.br/colunas/a-literatura-produzida-por-prostitutas-no-brasil/>

7 Retrieved from <https://azmina.com.br/reportagens/11-coisas-que-voce-precisa-saber-antes-da-primeira-vez/>

8 Retrieved from <https://xdesexo.blogfolha.uol.com.br/2018/09/02/faco-muito-sexo-logo-nao-sou-sedentaria/>

9 Retrieved from <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/joaopereiracoutinho/2018/10/anjos-pornograficos.shtml>

10 Retrieved from <https://azmina.com.br/reportagens/de-corpo-e-alma-na-luta-a-enfermeira-que-batalha-pelo-aborto-seguro-ha-40-anos/>

11 Retrieved from <https://azmina.com.br/reportagens/o-que-e-a-tal-da-educacao-sexual/>

issue, such as the so-called “gender ideology” in schools, about the fear of some parents that open debate on such topics could affect the sexual orientation of their children and associating sex education with forms of abuse prevention. In another article, the magazine features impressive accounts of children and adolescents who witnessed their mothers and grandparents being murdered by aggressors inside their own homes¹². Traumas and violence that arise from historical and ingrained norms and oppressions, which deserve from the media less mild treatments. Only in this way will they be denounced and fought more effectively, without, even if not intentionally, invigorating old-fashioned and fetishized views about the violence that women usually suffer.

Final remarks

Inserting deeper debates about silencing and formatting patterns, delicate and painful themes so often silent in our social tradition, still proves to be a challenge that is not only overcome by good intentions. Opening up more spaces for these debates is a relevant step, but it is not the only one to give a solution to such deficits, historical and culturally rooted. While there is distraction with celebrities and the tangential reinforcement of stereotypes, the real discussions that must be made do not find the proper spaces to develop. The different ways information reaches the public that digital environments have made possible with its technological advancement allow this invisible capsule to be broken at many points. In this process of improvement, there is no absolute dichotomy between the traditional press and the alternative. The latter also shows flaws and misconceptions, like any human activity, but there are currently other conditions for constructing discourses that do not accept the same editorial decisions, which fear the confrontation of taboos and that do not see the world and people through the same lenses. The polyphony that post-industrial journalism offers opens up loopholes for the silencing of some to be circumvented by others.

The themes anchored in sexuality are fertile ground for such silences, but not for reasons of modesty or principles. After all, we have never been more exposed than - and as willing to expose ourselves as - we are today. Digital networks operate, in large part, in the record of curiosity about intimacy, with the evident eroticization of content and the celebration of those who are willing to sell their own image as an item of desires. The audience contemplates this eroticization, reinvigorating newsability criteria that already existed before the advent of the Internet, but which were concentrated in certain niches. These borders have been erased and we can see news of great social relevance sharing space with intimate posts in personal profiles of artists coexisting without major ethical problematizations.

It is a liberation of the body, there is no doubt, but not exactly an absence of symbolic violence regarding its exploration or the entry into themes that should be guided with the same constancy and commitment, but which remain silent. Today we deal with the news in uninterrupted flow, which completely changes the logic of consumption and reading of reality. We have a fluidity that can drown out the themes that should be among the priorities, but that are cornered or treated within the same hedonistic conception. This cult of the external image that is consumed in networks guide the approaches, often misaffecting them. A report on fatphobia, published in Azmina¹³ magazine, is an initiative that goes against these standards that have come to be accepted as if they were liberal, but which are actually oppressive. Beauty at any cost, definition of muscles, sexual performance above any criticism and erotic incitement of desire are, in the contents analyzed by the research cited, components of an erroneous idea of female empowerment. In fact, they are elements of suppression of the identity and standardization of the behavior and bodies of the woman, who is pressured to fit into such patterns.

12 Retrieved from <https://azmina.com.br/reportagens/filhos-violencia-genero-pandemia/>

13 Retrieved from <https://azmina.com.br/reportagens/como-a-midia-cria-estereotipos-que-impulsionam-a-gordofobia/>

Often, feminism is accused of exercising patrolling in the face of stereotypes that continue to prevail, even in journalistic discourses that apparently seek to get out of machismos and stigmatizations. Talking openly about masturbation, sex in old age and erotic fantasies can arouse legitimate interests and such themes should be contemplated, but it is worth pointing out that they are not symbols of a libertarian coverage on female sexuality. This is an evolution in relation to silences on these specific topics, but they do not confront the basis of the problems that have silenced women not only in media spaces, but in society as a whole. Alternative journalism, although suffering from defects that they share with other more well-known and traditional media, can advance in this direction, influencing even their more conventional peers. Topics such as cancer in trans people¹⁴, reproductive rights in Latin¹⁵ America or on non-binary lesbians¹⁶ are virtually non-existent in media that do not have Azmina's commitment to differentiate itself from other media spaces by its engaged editorial line.

The so-called alternative journalism embraces representativeness without this being an obstacle to the production of reliable and well-refined content. To break these barriers allows such spaces to position themselves more vehemently, to defend without fear one side of the issue and take on the frameworks it adopts. It is a transformation of attitude with losses and gains, but that does not go unnoticed in what is produced in terms of journalism, reallocating logics that for so long contributed to the permanence of treatment of themes without proper strength and courage, reinforcing their standardization or even their silencing.

A digital magazine that defines itself as feminist and anti-racist obviously has much more freedom to embrace causes and be on the front of certain struggles and campaigns. The issue of abortion, for example, is a priority agenda for AzMina and this makes coverage of the subject much broader than it usually is in a traditional press agency. Folha de S. Paulo's initiatives – some of them emulating the spaces given precisely by alternative vehicles, such as thematic blogs and columns that are dedicated specifically to issues related to women and debates about sexuality as a whole – show that the newspaper, with more than a century of existence, tries to follow the march of time and the transformations of mentalities.

What needs to be clear, however, is that standardization persists, behavior modeling and chains that hold debates through taboos can still be perceived in the production of journalistic content. If alternative vehicles point out possible paths, that doesn't mean they have all the answers. On the other hand, traditional newspapers, such as *Folha de S. Paulo*, still have a long way to go and being aware of this is important so that they do not enter comfort zones, with the illusion that they no longer incur past mistakes regarding symbolic violence and stereotypes about sexualities – especially the female one – simply by announcing that they fight such ideas.

It may be that the level of engagement in certain causes by a communication vehicle like *AzMina* is not well regarded by the public, but we consider that this is exactly due to its ability to cause a shock in the views that have always prevailed on these same topics. A shock that *Folha de S. Paulo* is not much more cautious in applying, which is also not necessarily negative. These are different processes, but both of them must be qualified, so that they do not become counterproductive. After all, by one way or another, today's journalism cannot refrain from the task of confronting symbolic violence towards women, their bodies and their sexuality and a primordial step in this sense is to stop reproducing such prejudices and judgments.

14 Retrieved from <https://azmina.com.br/reportagens/pessoas-trans-também-podem-ter-cancer-de-mama/>

15 Retrieved from <https://azmina.com.br/reportagens/como-vao-os-direitos-reprodutivos-na-america-latina-durante-a-pandemia-do-coronavirus/>

16 Retrieved from <https://azmina.com.br/reportagens/sapatao-nao-binaries-nao-e-so-sobre-amar-mulheres/>

References

- Alsina, M. R. (2009). *A construção da notícia*. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- AzMina. (2021, December 20) Quem somos. AzMina. Retrieved from <https://azmina.com.br/instituto-azmina/quem-somos/>.
- Beauvoir, S. de. (2016) *O segundo sexo*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira.
- Berger, P. & Luckmann, T. (2010). *A construção social da realidade*. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- Bourdieu, P. (2007). *A economia das trocas simbólicas*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- Butler, J. (2015). *Relatar a si mesmo: crítica da violência ética*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica.
- Folha de S. Paulo (2019, December 12). Jornalismo profissional é antídoto para notícia falsa e intolerância. Folha de S. Paulo. Retrieved from <http://temas.folha.uol.com.br/projeto-editorial-da-folha/projeto-editorial-2017/introducao.shtml>.
- Foucault, M. (2015). *História da sexualidade: a vontade de saber*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz & Terra.
- Friedman, B. (2020). *A mística feminina*. Rio de Janeiro: Rosa dos Tempos.
- Giddens, A. (1993). *A transformação da intimidade: sexualidade, amor e erotismo nas sociedades modernas*. São Paulo: Unesp.
- Hall, S. (2016). *Cultura e representação*. Rio de Janeiro: Apicuri / PUC Rio.
- Maffesoli, M. (2014). *Homo eroticus: comunhões emocionais*. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária.
- McCombs, M. & Shaw, D. (1972). *The agenda-setting function of mass media*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317122086_The_Agenda-Setting_function_of_mass_media.
- Maksud, I. (2008). *Sexualidade e mídia: discursos jornalísticos sobre o “sexual” e vida privada*. Maringá: Psicologia em Estudo.
- Marcuse, H. (2018). *Éros et civilisation*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minut.
- Millet, K. (1969). *Sexual politics*. Londres: Hart-Davis.
- Morin, E. (2011). *Cultura de massas no século XX: vol. 1 – neurose*. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária.
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (2019). *A espiral do silêncio: opinião pública – nosso tecido social*. Florianópolis: Estudos Nacionais.
- Orlandi, E. (2012). *Análise de Discurso: princípios e procedimentos*. Campinas: Pontes.
- Ortiz, J. (2019). Opinião e cenários comunicativos: influência de fatores contextuais nos processos sociopsicológicos da espiral do silêncio. *Opinião Pública*, 25 (2), 258-286. <https://www.scielo.br/j/op/a/s9qcq8GjMMYZsc9BPhQ3Z9x/?lang=pt>.
- Silva, E. M. L. (2013). *Representação da mulher na mídia: entre o poder e a resistência*. Proceedings from IV Seminário Nacional Gênero e Práticas Culturais: João Pessoa.
- Silva, M. V. (2010). *Masculino, o gênero do jornalismo: Um estudo sobre os modos de produção das notícias*. [Master's Dissertation in Communication and Information, Graduate Program in Communication and Information, University Federal of Rio Grande do Sul]: Porto Alegre.
- Schons, A. da S. (2019). *Mulheres em pauta: as estratégias discursivas adotadas pelo jornal Folha de*

S. Paulo na cobertura do Dia Internacional das Mulheres no período de 1975 a 2015. [Master's Dissertation in Communication, Graduate Program in Communication, University of Brasília]: Brasília.

Tuchmann, G. (1999). A objectividade como ritual estratégico: uma análise das noções de objectividade dos jornalistas. In Traquina, N. (Ed.) *Jornalismo: questões, teorias e 'estórias'*. (74-90). Lisboa: Vega.

Rogério Pereira Borges is a professor of Journalism and in the Master's program in Literature at the Pontifical Catholic University of Goiás (PUC Goiás). He is also a professor and a researcher in the Graduate Program in Communication at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG). Rogério is postdoctoral researcher at the University Fernando Pessoa (UFP) – Porto – Portugal.