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1 The term 'gender justice' is used increasingly by activists and scholars concerned that terms such as 'gender inequality' and 'gender discrimination' fail to adequately convey or address the ongoing gender-based injustices which women suffer (see Goetz, 2007).

2 For further information, and all of the GMMP project reports, see www.whomakesthenews.org.

3 Not all of the observatories in this network focus specifically on gender.

4 Up-to-date examples of international and national initiatives from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe can be found in the Media & Gender Monitor, No. 24 (2013), published by the World Association for Christian Communication.

5 The concept of gender-based censorship builds on the concept of gender-based violence against women, which was defined in 1992 by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman, or violence that affects women disproportionately' (United Nations, 2006. In-depth study on all forms of violence against women. Report of the Secretary General. A/61/122/Add. 1. para. 33).

Violence against women and media: advancements and challenges of a research and political agenda[1]

Aimée Vega Montiel

Introduction

- In Guatemala, two women are killed every day. This country ranks third for murders of women in the world
- Bolivia has the highest rates of domestic violence in Latin America
- In Mexico, more than 1,800 women were victims of feminicide in 2011
- In the United States, one-third of women murdered each year are killed by their partners
- In South Africa, a woman is killed every 6 hours by her partner
- In India, 22 women were killed each day in 2007 in dowry-related murders
- Between 250,000 and 500,000 women and girls were raped in the Rwandan genocide in 1994
- Between 40 and 50 per cent of women in European Union countries are victims of sexual harassment in the workplace
- Women and girls are 80 per cent of the people trafficked annually. 79% are trafficked for sexual exploitation (UN, 2011; Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Feminicidio, 2011).

In most societies, women –regardless of race, nationality, class or age– are victims of physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, or even of feminicide. Gender-based violence is the main obstacle to the achievement of women's and girl's human rights (Amorós, 1990; Lagarde, 1997).

As this is a structural problem, directly linked to the sustaining of patriarchy, international, regional and national organisations have called attention to the responsibility that key institutions have to eliminate gender-based violence. One of these actors are media industries. This is why analysing violence against women in both traditional and new media content as well as the prevalence of violence against women journalists have historically been at the core of the feminist scholarly agenda.

The aim of this paper is to present some of the most significant trends and challenges of feminist communication research of violence against women and to provide some keys to facing these challenges. The final purpose of this chapter is for it to serve as a statement from the IAMCR community about the role UNESCO and all organisations involved in the 'Global Alliance on Media and Gender' campaign have to play to firmly advance in the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence against women and girls

According to the 1993 UN General Assembly, violence of gender against women is defined as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life' (UN, 1994).

Violence against women has its origins in the patriarchal structure that oppresses women (Amorós, 1990). It is the manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women which have resulted in the domination and discrimination of women in society.

As an institutional response, global, regional and national organisations have taken significant steps towards state action to eliminate violence against women.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is the international bill of rights for women. This is the first international instrument to define violence against women and to set an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

The Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women, Belem do Parà, was founded in 1994 by the Organization of American States (OAS). This regional body recognises all kinds of violence against women as a violation of women's human rights.

These instruments have impacted favourably on the improvement of laws, regulations and policies to stop violence against women and girls in several countries, including Brazil, Spain, the USA, India, Mexico, Italy and the Philippines.

The definitions of violence of gender used by these instruments are based on the theoretical framework of feminist scholars. This issue became increasingly prominent in the literature in the 1960s, coinciding with the emergence of the second wave of feminism. In their analysis and conceptualisation of patriarchy, feminists first launched in the 1960s and 1970s the debate about sexual violence, as an attempt to define violence against women as a political problem, linked to their gender condition. In the 1980s scholars moved to the concept of domestic violence to emphasise gender inequality between women and men in the domestic sphere as the place where violence of gender is institutionalised.

The most important development of feminist theory was to move towards a holistic perspective that unites all forms of violence against women and looks at the specific contexts in which gender-based violence is perpetrated. This advancement is reflected in the definition of both types –physical, sexual, psychological, economic, feminicide– and modalities –institutional, community, work, school– of violence against women and girls.

At this point, we would say that scholarly developments have made a key contribution to the advancement of women's human rights, evidenced by the political dimension of feminist theory.

Media and violence against women and girls: a feminist scholar agenda

Both the CEDAW and Belem Do Parà call to the responsibility of the media in the elimination of violence against women and girls. In 1995 the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) called explicitly on governments to 'take effective measures or institute such measures (emphasis mine), including appropriate legislation against pornography and the project of violence against women and children in the media' (UN, 1995, p.102).

The BPfA called on both the media and advertising industries to:

- Establish, consistent with freedom of expression, professional guidelines and codes of conduct that address violent, degrading or pornographic materials concerning women in the media, including advertising

- Disseminate information aimed at eliminating spousal and child abuse and all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence

At the national level, laws regarding violence against women and girls in countries such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Spain and India list specific actions related to media industries. However, while the BPfA listed the actions which would achieve gender equality and stop gender-based violence, there is no single formal policy on gender and communication in most countries in the world.

All these mandates have been followed by extensive research developed by feminist scholars regarding media's role in the reproduction of violence against women. This is why gender-based violence in media content has become one of the core issues of the research agenda.

The representation of sexual violence in media content was one of the first issues taken up by feminist communication studies. Feminist critics showed how through the commodification of women's bodies, media content –news, films, magazines– contributed to the 'normalisation' of sexual assault, rape and other forms of sexual violence and how they reinforced gender inequalities.

This first stage was followed by analysis of other specific forms of violence against women. Coverage of domestic violence in the news media attracted special attention as its rise was alarming.

Based on a holistic perspective, current research includes the analysis of different forms and modalities of gender-based violence in media discourse (Vega Montiel, 2010).

Findings from numerous studies have demonstrated the ways in which media content reinforces violence against women and girls (Benedict, 1992; Cuklanz, 2000; Laguna, 2004; Diez, 2002; Vega Montiel, 2007).

These studies show that:

- Media content reproduces sexist stereotypes that associate male identity with violence, domination, independence, aggression and power, while women are depicted as emotional, vulnerable and sensitive, and dependent upon male actions (Elasmar, Hasegawa and Brain, 1999; McGhee and Frueh, 1980; Thompson and Zerbinos, 1995).

- Women are usually stereotyped as sexual objects or even as mere body parts. Some examples show that: female nudity in magazine advertisements increased significantly around the world between 1983 and 1993 (Reicht et al., 1999); teen female TV characters used to be hyper-gendered (Holdden, 2012). In consequence, female sexuality is represented not as the sexual liberation of women but as the availability of women for male consumption.

- Only 24% of news subjects are women, 76% are men. Representation of gender in news is associated with relations of domination and subordination: whereas men are represented as sportsmen, politicians and businessmen, women are represented as vox populi –that is to say, they use to be associated to the lack of status and power (WACC, 2010).

- News reports of violence of gender tend to represent women as victims –associated to their lack of power– or, conversely, as those responsible for the violence of which they are victims. Usually, aggressors are not part of news reports (Diez, 2002; Vega Montiel, 2007).

- Popular music is a powerful vehicle for the reproduction of violence of gender. That is the case with rock and pop music, country, rap and, most recently, reggaeton.

Feminist research has also shown how the Internet and ICTs are now part of the gender-based violence environment.

A central problem associated with digital communication is the growing circulation of pornography. Statistics show that there are 4.2 million web pages that offer pornography – 12% of the total number of websites in the world; 100,000 of them offer child pornography. The online pornography industry makes 97.06 billion dollars per year, a much higher profit than Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, Amazon, Netflix and Apple combined (Feminist Peace Network, 2006).

Video games are now part of the digital gender-based environment. Some of the most popular ones show assaults on women, rape, prostitution and murder. Some examples are Grand Theft Auto and Benki Kuosuko (Maltzahn, 2006).

Linked to pornography is the sexual trafficking of women, girls and boys that has been enhanced through the Internet. What some scholars call 'virtual traffic' refers to the implications of the Internet and other ICTs on sex trafficking (Maltzahn, 2006). Sex trafficking operates mainly in countries with a lack of Internet regulation and policy and a high percentage of poor women (UN, 2005).

At this point, we would say that 'reducing women to sexual objects and making them available for consumption through communication and information technologies seems to be one of the most dramatic expressions of the digital age' (Vega Montiel, 2013, p.21).

A final but no less important dimension of the gender-based violence and media relationship is the increase in violence against women journalists. Forms include sexual, physical, psychological, economic and feminicide. This occurs in conflict and post-conflict countries where the human rights of female journalists have become more vulnerable. This happens with the consent of states and in an environment in which news media do not ensure secure conditions for women journalists to develop their work. For this reason, just this year UNESCO and the International News Safety Institute (INSI) launched the Global Survey on Violence against Female Journalists. This effort goes together with other INSI actions, such as publications and training programmes aimed at female media workers.

In this context, we must also mention violence against women working in community media. Community media are crucial to ensuring women's human right to communicate. In particular, community radio is a vehicle for the empowerment of women and the expansion of notions and debates on women's human rights in rural communities. However, for decades most women in developing countries have been forced to operate their radio stations under conditions of scarcity as there has not been any official regulation of community media. This circumstance goes together with a context of violence of gender that prevails in rural communities, putting these women in a vulnerable position.

As in other areas, feminist communication scholars have been involved, together with activists, feminist advocates and women media workers, in important projects that have impacted at the global, regional and national levels. Examples are: the Who Makes the News? Global Media Monitoring Project, promoted by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and coordinated by scholars such as Margaret

Gallagher; the Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media from the International Women's Media Foundation, led by Carolyn Byerly; and Advancing Gender Equality in Decision-making in Media Organisations from the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), coordinated by Karen Ross, Claudia Padovani and Erzsébet Barát.

Conclusion

The analysis above suggests that, far from contributing to the discussion and understanding on the structural conditions of violence against women and girls, traditional and new media normalise it. By doing so, media promote gender-based violence (Meyers, 1997). This is why media are currently part of the problem rather than the solution to stopping violence against women.

Violence against women and girls is a public issue, as is the debate about the responsibility of media industries with respect to this issue. The growth of gender-based violence shows its mechanisms are more sophisticated than they were in the past, as are the forms of representing it in media content.

Through the examples provided, my objective was to demonstrate that scholars have developed enough theoretical and methodological keys to show that media do not improve women's human rights. As well, we have shown that feminist scholars have historically acted together with activists and advocates in setting the agenda on gender and communication and formulating policy.

What's next? My proposal here is to work together on a collective strategy, under the IAMCR umbrella, to put into global focus the responsibility that communication industries have in eliminating violence against women and girls. This is crucial to promoting public discussion to achieve public visibility and awareness.

The 'Global Alliance for Media and Gender' is a historical opportunity for scholars to act on a coordinated strategy, together with global, regional and national organisations, NGOs, feminist advocates, media owners and media workers, to make media industries firmly contribute to stopping violence of gender.

I think that to achieve this goal, the IAMCR would first lead on the production of a global comparative report on media and violence of gender against women and girls, with a cross-national and cross-regional perspective, emphasising advances and challenges. This report would include an analysis of different dimensions of the problem: existing legislation, policy, regulation, self-regulation and co-regulation forms, content of media and ICTs, security conditions for women workers in media industries, media literacy programs.

Secondly, and based on the data derived from the report, the IAMCR would, together with UNESCO and the organisations involved, be able to influence decision-makers in the field of regulation and policy.

The final purpose would be to call for the adoption of measures and legislation to stop gender violence in media. Media are still part of the problem but they can become part of the solution. They can contribute to preventing violence against women.

If the right to communicate states that all human beings have the right to express themselves, to be projected with dignity and to receive information based on social justice, then I firmly believe that communication is an essential human right for women's full citizenship. And only this will make possible world peace and human rights towards which the IAMCR has been working.

Salud.

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