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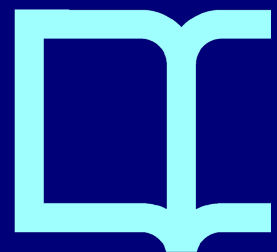
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FEMICIDE. WHO ARE THE SLAIN WOMEN IN THE NEWS?

Femicide in Mexico. Who are the slain women according to news media?

A quantitative study of social representations of victims and perpetrators.

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Abstract

Research on femicide news revealed discriminatory narratives against the victims in specific cases and social contexts. This paper uses a quantitative approach to analyze the news content that serves to create social representations of victims and perpetrators. We propose a methodology based on examining independent elements in the descriptions, identifying extra-textual patterns, and providing the data to compare the social representations of intimate partner violence (IPV), familiar, and non-IPV femicides. Three online news outlets were analyzed from July 2014 to December 2017, creating a corpus of 2,527 articles. The results revealed that it is more common to create negative representations of victims than negative representations of the perpetrators.

Keywords: Femicide, social representations, intimate partner violence (IPV), media representations, media discourse.

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Introduction

Femicide is the most extreme form of gender-based violence (GBV), and it is a worldwide human rights crisis. The problem is especially severe in Latin America; 14 countries from this region remain on the list of the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, 2022). Scholars argue that femicides and GBV are produced by cultural patterns, ideologies, and practices that discriminate against the female gender (Lagarde y de los Rios, 2005). These are perpetuated through private and public discourses such as the political, the legal, and the media (Lazar, 2007). Several empirical studies have shown that the media has the power to shape public opinion and affect how the audience perceives the events and the people who appear in them (Price et al., 1997). Research on the media discourse about femicide found the use of lurid details of the murder as a spectacle, negative representation of the victims by using gender stereotypes and moral evaluations, and justification of the perpetrators by emphasizing the causes out of their control (Alcocer Perulero, 2014; Boonzaier, 2022; Brodie, 2021; Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Calderón Garro, 2020; Fernández López, 2017; García et al., 2021; Lloyd & Ramon, 2017; Nader, 2014; Pröll & Magin, 2022; Ramírez, 2021; Sánchez, 2021; Taylor, 2009; Tiscareño-García & Miranda-Villanueva, 2020). These types of narratives can influence attitudes toward accepting or justifying GBV at social and individual levels (Hunnicut, 2009). Substantial evidence confirms that attitudes that legitimize GBV are associated with the perpetration among men (Stith et al., 2004), victimization among women (Abramsky et al., 2011), and negative reactions from the institutions and the community towards the victims (Flood & Pease, 2009).

There is an extensive body of literature on femicide news and scholars have made great advances to identify discriminatory discourses against the victims. Critical studies highlighted

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the symbolic violence in the media discourse by focusing on specific cases chosen by the volume of media attention or for being representative of discriminatory ideas (Balica et al., 2022; BardWigdor & Bonavitta, 2017; Calderón Garro, 2020; Fernández López, 2017; Sánchez, 2021). Nonetheless, these studies can be considered biased due to the selection process of the news pieces, in which the results were known before the analysis; it is not possible to argue that this type of coverage represents the media's general discourse on femicide. On the other hand, studies with a corpus that included the reporting of multiple cases tended to focus on a specific characteristic of the victims or the perpetrators, such as race, related poverty, or victim-blaming structures (Boonzaier, 2022; Brodie, 2021; Buitrón, 1997; Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Pröll & Magin, 2022; Taylor, 2009; Tiscareño-García & Miranda-Villanueva, 2020). Even though femicide is a global problem, the media studies published in English are dominated by the reading of media coverage from the United States and these tend to be the most highly cited in academic articles (Brodie, 2021). Hence, these studies mostly used local news (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Gillespie et al., 2013; Richards et al., 2011; Taylor, 2009; Wong & Lee, 2021), and their findings may not be generalizable to countries with different socio-political contexts, media landscapes, and in which race and ethnicities have different implications (Brodie, 2019). In addition, all the studies mentioned above did not analyze the pictures accompanying the news pieces, and the studies that analyzed the pictures and found the spectacularizing use of the female bodies did not analyze the text of the articles (Berlanga Gayón, 2017, 2015; González, 2018), with exception of the qualitative analysis made by Lloyd and Ramon (2017) that examined text and visuals.

The present work aims to contribute to strengthening the literature with an empirical study of online news of femicide, examining text and visuals and using a large corpus of 2,527

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articles from three relevant news outlets in Mexico, from July 2014 to December 2017. The main objective is to examine the elements that serve to construct the social representations (Moscovici, 1963) of femicide victims and perpetrators. This paper attempts to respond to the questions: (1) Which are the elements used to construct the social representation of the femicide victims? (2) Which are the elements used to construct the social representation of the perpetrators?

Mexico was selected for the study because is a country that represents the high rate of femicides in the Latin American region. The predominant language of the region is Spanish (Moreno, 2017) and Mexico is the Spanish-speaking country with the highest number of femicides from 2014 to the last statistic registered in 2020 (Brazil a mainly Portuguese-speaking country has the highest number of femicides, followed by Mexico in second place) (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, 2022).

This research contributes to the literature on femicide discourses in several ways: 1) The large corpus for analysis and open access availability (Gutiérrez Aldrete, 2020) contributes to data sharing and transparency in science. The coded articles can be consulted and used in regional and cross-cultural comparative studies, providing opportunities to study a global problem from an international perspective. 2) The methodology aims to integrate the interpretative with the quantitative approaches to improve the validity. We identify several independent elements registered in the dataset by applying content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) and critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2005; Van Dijk, 1996). The quantitative analysis revealed patterns and we determined the importance by the occurrence, producing objective data for the interpretation of the results (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). 3) We applied a deductive-inductive approach to the qualitative analysis, systematizing the findings of previous studies and allowing

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the identification of new elements that serve to create representations, including the possibility of positive descriptions of the victims. 4) Our literature review intends to contribute to the dialogue between studies published in English and Spanish, especially from Latin America. We recognize the relevance of previous studies' findings and the need for discussion and cooperation between researchers from different cultures and methodologies. 5) We examined intimate partner violence (IPV) and non-IPV femicides. Previous studies focused on just one type of femicide, western studies mainly focus on IPV femicides, and there are just a few studies that explore the media representation of non-IPV femicides (Brodie, 2021). We propose to analyze IPV and non-IPV femicides and add a third category: the familiar femicides, which are not committed by the victim's partner nor by a stranger, but by a member of the victim's family and have a special nature (Camara, 2020; Shalva Weil et al., 2016). The methodology created for the present study allows the identification of similarities and differences in the coverage of the three types of femicides and the understanding of the facets and nuances of misogynist murders.

This paper proposes that through the identification of single elements found across texts it is possible to map a system of ideas that serves to define a social representation of a group. This group can be morally evaluated by the audience, influencing social victim-blaming (Abramsky et al., 2011; Boonzaier, 2022; Flood & Pease, 2009), revictimization (Carranco, 2020), and making invisible the context of systemic gender discrimination (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013; Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010; Wright, 2011).

The present work is divided into four main parts: the framework, the methodology, the results and analysis, and the conclusions and discussion. The framework argues the benefits of using the social representation theory for our study, succinctly examines femicide as a social problem, and discusses previous studies on media discourses whose main findings were the

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sensationalist use of the information, victim-blaming narratives, and perpetrator's justification narratives. The methodology chapter explains the outlets and news pieces selected for the corpus of analysis and how we carried out the qualitative analysis. The results and analysis chapter contains five tables showing the percentages of incidence of the elements examined. Finally, the conclusions chapter discusses the implications of the results, the contributions made to the literature, and the limitations of our research.

Framework

Social Representation Theory

The nature of communication processes of social meaning construction is dynamic by nature (Marková & Marková, 2003). In addition, the increasing usage of digital media for news consumption (Reuters Institute, 2020) and the interaction of audiences through social media have made the flow of information faster than ever, creating a need for constant observation to better understand how public discourses can produce material conditions.

The social representations theory explains how public discourses can help to produce discrimination at social and individual levels, and as a theory of media communication, it links society with the individual and the media with the audience (Joffe, 2002). Social representations are systems of shared ideas, values, and emotions that are expressed through communication and material practices (Wagner et al., 1999). A representation provides a code for social exchange by classifying people and objects (Moscovici, 1963), creating the illusion of precision in defining and evaluating people, but this process is closely connected with the process of stereotyping (Pickering, 2001). When these categorizations are disseminated by the media it contributes to naturalizing certain ideas and transforming them into what is perceived as common sense (Höijer, 2011).

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Regarding the process of news-making, journalists and editors must explain an issue in a limited number of words and images and they can resort to categorizations that are already known by the audience to avoid the need for further explanations. The newsmakers make conscious or unconscious choices regarding the lexicon and the narrative, using ideas connected to social values and emotions (Van Dijk, 1996) and producing discourses that perpetuate stereotypes and moral evaluations toward the people involved (Joffe, 2002).

The Political And The Communicative Dimensions Of Femicide

The word femicide was created (Radford & Russell, 1992) to make visible that the murder of women for being women is a hate crime (Segato, 2014). It was translated to the Spanish *feminicidio* by Marcela Lagarde (2005) who emphasized that these murders are enabled by historical conditions that allow attacks against the integrity, health, freedom, and lives of women. The words give meaning to the world and can shape reality, therefore the idea of naming GBV murders of women as femicides is an effort to highlight the systemic context of gender violence and to be an instrument to change the perception of the problem at the societal level, as well as in scientific research and public policy creation processes (Corradi et al., 2016).

Scholars have discussed whether the word to define hate-crime murders against the female gender must be femicide (*femicidio*) or feminicide (*feminicidio*), the latter implying the systemic and institutional context of gender discrimination (Boira et al., 2015; García-Del Moral, 2018; Lagarde, 2006; Pröll & Magin, 2022; Saccomano, 2017). Regarding this matter, we follow Marcela Lagarde (2006) who explains that since the creation of the word femicide by Diana Russell, the concept included the specific oppression, discrimination, exploitation, and marginalization that affects women in a patriarchal system. Lagarde expressed the following: “Diana gave me permission to use it like this, translated as *feminicidio* (...) I say this for the ones

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who do not know if the word is femicide or feminicide, be peaceful, we do not have to be on one side or another, let's define the words and cite the authors [*sic*]" (Lagarde, 2006, p. 221). We decided to use the word *feminicidio* in Spanish and femicide in English to arrange with the common use of scholars and journalists from each language. The scholars that we consulted in Spanish, the news pieces in our corpus, and the law in Mexico all define misogynist murders as *feminicidios*; scholars consulted in English use femicide, except for Pröll and Magine (2022) that use the word feminicide.

Femicide is not just about murder, it represents the result of persistent actions of discrimination and violence that include a wide variety of verbal, physical, sexual, and emotional violence, mutilations, and forced situations (Radford & Russell, 1992). Misogyny is the common element, but femicides are not all the same; they can be the result of different forms of GBV: (a) intimate partner femicides are committed by the victim's partners or ex-partners; (b) familiar femicides are committed by relatives of the victim taking advantage of the close relationship (Camara, 2020), including infants and the dowry-related (Shalva Weil et al., 2016); (c) non-intimate femicides are committed by strangers and organized crime groups; these can involve criminal practices that especially target women such as rape, trafficking, exploitation, and hatred of women with stigmatized occupations (sex workers, escorts, dancers, waitresses), can also be associated with extreme violence, torture, and public exhibition of the corpses as found in studies from Mexico (Gayón, 2015; Monárrez Fragoso, 2009; Segato, 2014).

Femicides are political regardless of the victim-perpetrator relationship because they are based on a hierarchical power relationship between genders (Segato, 2014). Rita Segato explains that femicides contain the implicit message that the perpetrator holds a political power that situates the victim in a vulnerable place personally and socially (Butler, 2012; Segato, 2014).

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This message is supported and amplified by elite actors and institutions such as the legal system, policymakers, and the media. Melissa Wright (2011) found that Mexican authorities tend to blame the femicide victims for being in dangerous public places, implying that their actions are irrational because, in the Mexican context of violence and the war on drugs, they were on the streets and did not take shelter in their homes. These types of institutional statements are reproduced by the media, which helps to normalize GBV, these are accompanied by material practices such as indifference from the prosecution offices to investigate the crimes, corruption, and discrimination against the victims' families (Segato, 2014). Systemic violence creates another level in the communicative dimension of femicide; it sends the message that there is a punishment for women, not just death, but the impunity of the crime, the public exhibition of the bodies, and public stigmatization (González, 2018; Monárrez Fragoso, 2009). This environment causes a feeling of helplessness in survivors and women at risk which results in greater vulnerability (Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, 2015). Nevertheless, feminist scholars and activists have worked hard to raise awareness about the systemic GBV. In Latin America, the similar social context and the shared language facilitated coordinated social mobilizations across countries with a unifying force, giving GBV unprecedented public visibility in the region (Belotti et al., 2021).

The Coverage Of Femicide

Studies on the news coverage of femicides in different countries (sometimes called intimate-partner homicide, intimate-partner domestic murders, or sexual murder of women) have found a sensationalist use of the information, victim-blaming narratives, perpetrator-justification narratives, and lack of explanations of the personal and systemic GBV context. These discourses

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can serve to create and reinforce negative categorizations of the victims, constructing otherness, and influencing the rejection of a group (Carranco, 2020).

Sensationalism

One of the first studies on femicide news carried out on Mexican newspapers revealed the use of the information as a spectacle, which serves the newspapers to increase their sales (Buitrón, 1997). In countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States studies found that the media reports IPV murders as rare “terribly unfortunate/spontaneously occurring/who could have seen it coming? tragedy, with no further discussion of the broader social patterns surrounding this violence” (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013, p. 221; Lloyd & Ramon, 2017; McManus & Dorfman, 2003). The narrative of ‘rare event’ which is already shocking is reinforced with details of the murder and magnifying the link between sex and violence (Lloyd & Ramon, 2017). In countries such as Mexico, Ecuador, Chile, and South Africa where non-IPV femicides are well recognized and widely covered in the news, studies found that the problem is explained around high statistics and with urgent tones (Ananías Soto & Vergara Sánchez, 2016; Arriaga Ornelas, 2002; Boonzaier, 2022; Fernández López, 2017). The stories tend to focus on the lurid details of the murder or the state of the victim's body (Ananías Soto & Vergara Sánchez, 2016), the use of alarmist narratives with words such as aberrant, deviant, and monstrous (Boonzaier, 2022), the over-exposition of the victims’ image (Tutivén et al., 2021), and photographs of the corpses showing the tortures suffered (Gayón, 2015). This type of coverage has an emotional impact and exacerbates morbidity which are indicators of sensationalist usage (Arbaoui et al., 2020). In fact, femicides involving rare or sensational characteristics are associated with higher news coverage (Brodie, 2019; McManus & Dorfman,

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2003). Mariana Berlanga (2015) argues that the woman's body is the place for writing a message sent by the murderers and by the media:

Femicide with the Juarez pattern has exhibited the torture to which the victims are usually subjected before being killed. Given that the body is semi-naked, it is possible to think about rape. The camera's excessive zoom is justified because in the middle of the chest a folded paper was placed, which we intuit, is what the photographer wants to show. The murderers not only ended the life of this woman but also took her corpse to the middle of the road and left it exposed with a message (our translation) (Berlanga Gayón, 2015, p. 118).

A study that compared photographs of femicide and other crimes in Mexican news revealed that it is frequent to show corpses with total or partial nudity, with legs open "these are invariably about women" (our translation) (González, 2018, p. 18). Rita Jiménez (2021) explains that through the exhibition of these photographs, the victims' bodies are made public, re-victimizing them and "carrying the implicit message that women are punished with their lives and exhibited as the ultimate punishing act" (our translation) (p. 19).

Victim-blaming Structures

In general, the empirical evidence indicates that stories tend to focus on the victims, and many times the perpetrators are not presented or established (González, 2018; Ramírez, 2021). The victims are described as a dichotomy of good and bad women (Brodie, 2021; Slakoff & Brennan, 2019). Good women are described as passive figures lacking agency and susceptible to violence, the bad women are transgressors of the social norm based on gender stereotypes and prejudices (Alcocer Perulero, 2014; Flores, 2017; Ravelo Blancas, 2017; Slakoff & Brennan,

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2019). Both narratives dilute the perpetrators' responsibility by attributing the causes of the crime to issues concerning the victim.

Studies on media representation of GBV in many countries have identified various structures that blame women for their own victimization (Boonzaier, 2022). Research on the United States news proposed that domestic violence is interpreted through four frames: the police frame, just the facts, people are different from us, and victim-blaming and excusing the perpetrator (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Gillespie et al., 2013). Rae Taylor (2009) described victim-blaming strategies in IPV femicides including the use of negative language to describe the victims, highlighting that the victim did not report previous violence, her decision to not continue with the legal processes of previous violence, interaction with another man, suspicion of infidelity or being the mistress of the killer, and describing the IPV in terms of equal blame for woman and man, all explained as situations that contributed to her murder. Mcmanus and Dorfman (2003) found that narrative structures involving being argumentative, nagging, and flaunting success are the most common forms of victim-blaming related to IPV femicides.

Regarding non-IPV femicides' coverage, studies found that 'the good victims' are described around vulnerability with ideas like 'they were alone' (Arduino, 2014) and their advanced or young age (Brodie, 2021). Nonetheless, vulnerability also can be a reason to blame the victims, suggesting a lack of self-care and putting themselves in dangerous situations (Boonzaier, 2022; Slakoff & Brennan, 2019). Studies on Latin American media found victim-blaming structures based on a lack of self-care like highlighting going out to have fun (Ravelo Blancas, 2017), 'they were going to parties' (Fernández López, 2017), 'they accepted help from an unknown man' (BardWigdor & Bonavitta, 2017), 'what care do the young women have', or emphasizing they were in a dangerous place (García Guevara & Guachambosa Paredes, 2019).

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These narratives can be more aggressive when they are combined with the mention of alcohol and drug consumption implying that the effects can lead to irresponsible and promiscuous behaviors and transforming the victims into 'bad women' (Alméras & Montaña, 2007; Ravelo Blancas, 2017).

The sexual life of women is relevant in the coverage of IPV and non-IPV femicides, especially when it implies any transgression of monogamy, having a relationship with a married man or being liberal in agreeing to sexual relations, serving to create a sensationalist story, and blaming and stigmatizing the victims (Alcocer Perulero, 2014; Brodie, 2021; Mason & Monckton-Smith, 2008; Sánchez González, 2008). According to Marisol Alcocer (2014), it is common to point out that the victim was a sex worker, model, escort, or dancer. These professions represent a stereotype of promiscuity and without contextual explanations, the mention of these professions is a form of naturalizing violence (Sánchez González, 2008; Slakoff & Brennan, 2019). The sexualization of victims is used to explain the violence in IPV femicides, such as uncontrollable sexual jealousy, and it is normalized as a reaction to the woman's action, and in non-IPV femicides, the violence is attributed to an uncontrollable biological sexual impulse in men (Mason & Monckton-Smith, 2008).

The discursive victimization of women, as in material practices, have many layers. In addition to gender stereotypes, the coverage of femicides is permeated by other dimensions such as race, ethnicity, nationality, and poverty which helps to create a group of otherness defined by violence and social problems (Ramírez, 2021). Slakoff and Brennan (2017) found that in US news, white female victims are more likely to receive follow-up and sympathetic coverage than Latina/Black females. On the contrary, Latina/Black females are more likely to be portrayed as bad women, risk-takers, and their victimization is explained as an unavoidable consequence of

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their unsafe environment (Slakoff & Brennan, 2019) (see Brodie, 2021 and Boonzaier, 2022 for a similar conclusion in South African news).

Perpetrator Justification

Studies found a tendency in the news to explain the reasons of why the perpetrator killed the victim. Many of these reasons serve to exculpate the perpetrator or mitigate his responsibility (Lloyd & Ramon, 2017), highlighting causes that provoked the men to become enraged and portraying them as the victims (Taylor, 2009). Regarding IPV femicides, it is common to report jealousy and infidelity accompanied by a narrative in which it is shown as 'something natural' due to 'male honor' (Lloyd & Ramon, 2017; McManus & Dorfman, 2003; Nader, 2014) and the relativization of the concepts of femicide-suicide, romanticizing the love-passion-tragedy idea (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013; Ramírez, 2021). Another way of blurring the perpetrator's responsibility is focusing on causes beyond his will such as alcoholism, stress, and economic, or psychological problems, which can produce sympathy among the audience (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; McManus & Dorfman, 2003; Taylor, 2009). Even when they are described as 'monsters' with sexual and social dysfunctionalities (Ventura, 2014), the problem is portrayed as rare, alienated from society, and committed by someone who is not to blame for his actions (Taylor, 2009).

Based on the framework and previous studies we built the following hypotheses:

H1: News pieces spectacularize femicides by using the lurid details of the crime, photographs of the victim's bodies, and the overexposure of the victim's image.

H2: News pieces construct negative social representations of the victims based on victim-blaming structures and otherness.

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H3: News pieces construct social representations of perpetrators based on exculpatory narratives and alienation from the social context.

Methodology

We chose the news outlets in the study considering that they inform about general topics, they have national coverage, with both print and digital versions, and the latter is available for consultation. Five newspapers have these characteristics in Mexico. We chose three to have equal representation of political ideologies. We included in the study the three with the most visits to their website to prioritize the ones with a major scope in the audience: 1) *El Universal*, first place in the ranking of visits to its website from the list of the most visited news sites in Mexico, center ideology, and open access to its online library; 2) *Excélsior*, second place in visits to its website, left-wing ideology, and open access to its online library; and 3) *Reforma*, third place in visits to its website, right-wing ideology, and online library available by paid subscription (Alexa.com, 2015; Rodelo & Muñoz, 2016; Secretaría de Gobernación, 2015). We collected the articles using the search engine of each outlet's website. A period of 41 months was covered from July 2014 (the date of the first government council meeting to study the possibility to declare Alert for Gender Violence due to the high rates of femicides) to December 2017 (the date in which this research registered the increase of media attention stabilizes to a low increase in the last three months). We applied two filtering processes to select the articles by using keywords entered in the site's search bar: 1) '*feminicidio*' (femicide), articles with the keyword in the headline, dealt with the topic in the body of the article, and those that reported on specific cases were added to the database. We discarded those that had the word in the body of the article, but the topic was not related; 2) '*mujer muerta*' (dead woman) to include femicides even if the article failed to describe them as such. We added to the database the articles reporting women

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murdered by (ex) partners, family, or acquaintances, and single or mass murders of women or at least one victim is a woman to cover femicides committed by organized crime groups and related to criminal practices that specifically target women. We discarded the articles referring to accidental deaths and articles that explicitly stated that the causes of death were not related to gender violence. Duplicates were deleted. The process produced our unit of analysis of N=2,527 articles, *El Universal* 1031, *Excelsior* 527, and *Reforma* 969.

We coded all the articles by using a codebook created for this study, based on content analysis, a method that seeks the latent content in communicative material (Krippendorff, 2004), and critical discourse analysis, which relates linguistic structures with the social context to find implicit meaning and evaluations (Van Dijk, 1996). The text and one photograph accompanying each article were analyzed; when an article contained more than one photograph, only the first one was analyzed. The coding was performed by a single coder and to verify reliability a sample of 100 items was re-coded by a second coder, obtaining good results, with a minimum of .90 of Krippendorff alpha index in every variable.

We performed an exploratory analysis with an inductive approach in one hundred random articles to identify structures that serve to construct social representations, even if those were not mentioned in previous studies. We compared the findings of the exploratory study with the findings of previous studies and systematized both to create the first codebook. The first codebook aimed to register ideas instead of single words and was used to code all the articles in the corpus resulting in a descriptive dataset. This dataset was analyzed with a quantitative approach to find relevant patterns, which were reformulated as variables to create the second codebook. The descriptive dataset was re-coded, registering:

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General And Socio-Demographic Characteristics

1. Lurid textual details such as torture, sexual abuse, multiple injuries, and the state of the corpse (Ananías Soto & Vergara Sánchez, 2016).
2. The number of women killed per article can be one or several related by geographic area, time period, mass murders, and cases with follow-up (Brodie, 2021).
3. Socio-demographics such as the mention of the dangerousness of a geographic area (Ramírez, 2021), age range, ethnicity, nationality, and economic situation (Brodie, 2021; Juárez Rios, 2021; Ravelo Blancas, 2017; Slakoff & Brennan, 2019).
4. Names of victims and perpetrators. Full name, first name, nickname, or no name, and the lack of any mention or reference to the perpetrator were noted (González, 2018; Ramírez, 2021).
5. Perpetrators' legal status as detained, convicted, or free (Brodie, 2019).
6. Victim-perpetrator relationship as (ex) partner, acquaintance, relative, or unknown (Camara, 2020), in cases with follow-up the most recent were noted.
7. The photographs were coded using three levels of Rodriguez and Dimitrova's (2011) methodology. The first is a denotative level. We registered the main subject in seven categories: 1.1) victim alive, 1.2) victim's corpse, 1.3) perpetrator, 1.4) victim and perpetrator together, 1.5) place (map, street, building, house), 1.6) victim's family, and 1.7) other subjects. The second is a connotative level. We registered actions and composition: 2.1) the facial features are recognizable, 2.2) the existence of context around the person, 2.3) the close-up of the face, 2.4) the persons' behavior or action 2.5) the gaze directed to the camera. The third is a contextual level, we registered 3.1) rituals of subordination or infantilization, 3.2) the victim's body with or without showing the face may indicate not only dehumanization but

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inferiority and impotence (Goffman, 1995), 3.3) lurid details such as nudity, pants on the knees, signs of torture, written messages, or denigrating positions (Gayón, 2015).

Descriptions Of The Victims

8. Evaluation adjectives and explicit appraisals such as ‘good daughter’, or ‘bad mother’ (Calderón Garro, 2020; García Guevara & Guachambosa Paredes, 2019; Taylor, 2009).
9. Mention stigmatized professions such as prostitute, any kind of sex work, waitress, hostess, escort, model, and dancer (Alcocer Perulero, 2014).
10. Use of victim-blaming strategies and gender stereotypes with implicit evaluation such as not reporting previous violence or not continuing with the legal processes (Gillespie et al., 2013; Taylor, 2009), the use of alcohol and drugs (Alméras & Montaña, 2007; Gutiérrez Aldrete, 2022; Juárez Rios, 2021; Ravelo Blancas, 2017), the insinuation of promiscuity (Alcocer Perulero, 2014; Taylor, 2009). References to not taking care of herself or exposing herself to danger (González, 2018; Slakoff & Brennan, 2019), going to a party, late at night (Fernández López, 2017; García Guevara & Guachambosa Paredes, 2019; Ravelo Blancas, 2017). References to the woman cause the perpetrator’s anger by being unfaithful, starting the discussion, and being mean to him (Lloyd & Ramon, 2017; McManus & Dorfman, 2003; Ramírez, 2021; Taylor, 2009).
11. Descriptions with an implicit moral evaluation such as ‘she had a criminal record’, and ‘she did not study, nor did she work’ (BardWigdor & Bonavitta, 2017; Gutiérrez Aldrete, 2022; Lloyd & Ramon, 2017). In cases with follow-up in which the first notes reported that the woman committed suicide and later it was proven to be femicide, we registered suicide as a negative evaluation. We used feminist critical discourse analysis to reveal the existence of

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implicit evaluations and examined the narrative to contextualize whether the statements contained victim-blaming structures (Lazar, 2007).

Descriptions Of The Perpetrators

12. Evaluation adjectives and explicit appraisals such as ‘good father’ or ‘monster’ (Taylor, 2009; Ventura, 2014).
13. Belonging to an organized crime group which suggests cold blood and repetition (Monárrez Fragoso, 2009; Segato, 2014).
14. Implicit evaluations such as ‘he has no regrets’ or ‘he fought for his children’ (BardWigdor & Bonavitta, 2017; Taylor, 2009). We used feminist critical discourse analysis to reveal implicit meaning (Lazar, 2007).
15. Explanations for why he would have committed the crime and statements with an explicit or implicit causal nexus (logical or chronological) including exculpatory narratives such as jealousy, discussion with the victim, alcohol, drugs, distress, and mental pathologies (Ananías Soto & Vergara Sánchez, 2016; Brodie, 2019; Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Gillespie et al., 2013; Ramírez, 2021; Taylor, 2009).
16. Mention that the crime or the perpetrators are related to machismo, misogyny, and the patriarchal culture (Lazar, 2007).

Results And Analysis

The outlets in the study considerably increased the attention to femicide during the period in which we observed them. Comparing the first semester (July-December of 2014) with the last semester (July-December 2017), *El Universal* increased the number of articles about femicide by 254%, *Excélsior* increased by 381%, and *Reforma* increased by 319%. The news pieces can be divided into two main categories, the ones reporting cases and the ones that do not mention

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specific cases but report about laws, public policies, statistics, social movements, authorities' statements, and opinions.

Our analysis demonstrates that the use of sensational lurid details is an independent variable of whether the article reports a case or not. Articles with a social perspective can mention lurid details as common characteristics of femicides. The socio-demographic characteristics of victims and perpetrators can be found in both types of articles as well, but these are more common in articles that do not report specific cases, emphasizing the crimes occurring in specific geographic zones, between alien citizens, inside indigenous communities, and related to poverty. Another common characteristic is to not mention any characteristic of the perpetrator or even mention the existence of a perpetrator; instead, the stories can use euphemisms such as 'she was found dead' or 'the wave of violence took more victims.'

The results can be divided into four groups: general characteristics (table 1), identification with names and photographs (table 2), evaluations of victims (table 3), and evaluations of the perpetrators (table 4). In general, the categories listed in the tables have at least 5% in at least one outlet; nonetheless, we listed the results of measuring corpses' pictures due to their importance in previous studies.

Table 1 shows the elements that are independent of whether the news pieces mention specific individuals or not; and the news pieces that identify or describe specific individuals or a specific group of victims or perpetrators.

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Table 1. General characteristics

	<i>El Universal</i>	<i>Excélsior</i>	<i>Reforma</i>
Number of articles per outlet	N=1031	N=525	N=969
Total number of women	390	420	580
Sensational lurid details	12.1%	19.2%	16.5%
Socio-demographic associated	15.4%	7.6%	12.9%
No mention of the perpetrator	61%	17%	39%
Articles with identification / descriptions	n=548	n=359	n=609
Perpetrator in custody	41.4%	44.3%	35.8%
Perpetrator (ex) partner (IPV)	32.7%	31.6%	27.1%
Perpetrator relative/friend (familiar)	13.3%	16.6%	14.6%
Perpetrator unknown* (non-IPV)	54.0%	51.8%	58.3%
Articles with victims' descriptions	157	159	219
Articles with perpetrators' descriptions	223	182	247

*Unknown means that the perpetrator was a person unknown to the victim or that the article did not mention any relationship.

Table 2 shows how victims and perpetrators are personally identified with names and photographs.

Table 2. Identification with names and photographs %

	<i>El Universal</i>		<i>Excélsior</i>		<i>Reforma</i>	
	n=548		n=359		n=609	
	Victims	Perpetrators	Victims	Perpetrators	Victims	Perpetrators
Full name	13.5	18.4	20.5	23.5	27.3	18.4
Given name	23.0	23.4	19.1	12.7	14.9	12.8
	Photography					
Eye contact with the viewer	12.4	4.0	30.2	9.1	14.1	5.9
No eye contact with the viewer	7.9	2.0	5.6	4.5	8.5	0.8
Unrecognizable face features	0.5	5.7	1.7	11.4	0.7	3.6
The corpse with facial features	1.6	0.0	0.6	0.0	3.4	0.0
The corpse without facial features	3.1	0.0	2.5	0.0	1.1	0.0

The news pieces tend to focus more personally on the victims than on the perpetrators and tend to have negative and/or victim-blaming descriptions. *El Universal* uses negative descriptions or victim-blaming structures in 84.6% of the 162 articles with descriptions of the victim, *Excélsior* in 87.8% of 129 articles, and *Reforma* in 91.5% of 188 articles. Examples of the evaluations based on gender stereotypes are: 'she had multiple romantic partners', 'she went

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out with three men from a party’, ‘she had slept with others and maintained contact by messenger’. Implicit evaluation examples are: ‘she had self-destructive behaviors’ and ‘she had alcohol and drug addiction problems’.

Table 3 shows descriptions with explicit and implicit evaluations of the victims. Neutral descriptions are not included because the categories did not show statistical relevance. We counted one (1) positive evaluation per article but rarely does one article contain more than one type of positive evaluation of the victim. For the negative evaluations, we counted a maximum of three types per article but rarely one article contained more than three types. In total, 94 articles use more than one type of negative evaluation structure.

Table 3. Victims’ descriptions with evaluation %

	<i>El Universal</i> n=162	<i>Excélsior</i> n=129	<i>Reforma</i> n=188
Positive description	16.0	13.7	8.5
Not reporting previous violence/ not continuing the legal process	9.2	3.8	3.2
Infidelity/promiscuity/interaction with men	17.9	16.8	14.4
Discussion/equal blame for both partners	10.5	20.6	15.4
Being argumentative, nagging, flaunting success	7.4	5.6	4.1
Lack of self-care/dangerous place/going out to have fun	20.4	13.7	10.1
Alcohol and drugs consumption	12.3	13.7	16.5
Stigmatized professions	8.0	16.8	15.4
Suicide*	8.0	0.8	3.7
Other negative description	13.6	10.7	18.1

*Articles that mentioned the victim’s suicide are the first reports of cases with follow-up in which the femicide was proven later.

Table 4 shows descriptions with evaluations of the perpetrators. The news pieces mention causes that justify, blur the perpetrator’s responsibility, or present them positively: *El Universal* in 36.1% of the 205 articles with evaluations of the perpetrators, *Excélsior* in 42.6% of 129 articles, and *Reforma* in 30.2% of 215 articles. Some examples are ‘he lost control in the face of extreme circumstances’, ‘the victim owed him money’, ‘he was sick of fighting with the victim’,

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‘the victim has humiliated him’, ‘the victim attacked him first’, ‘he was harassed in social media because of the victim’, bipolarity, schizophrenia, childhood trauma or a life of being abused. The mention of the murder or the perpetrators are related to misogyny and the patriarchal culture was less than 3% in the three outlets.

Table 4. Perpetrators’ descriptions with evaluations %

	El Universal n=205	Excélsior n=129	Reforma n=215
Positive description	6.3	2.3	1.9
Out-of-control anger	3.9	11.6	4.2
Alcohol, drugs	9.3	5.4	6.5
Discussion/couple problems	3.9	1.6	2.3
Jealousy/infidelity/passional	6.8	10.9	8.4
Pathology	2.9	5.4	4.2
Implicit blurring responsibility	2.9	5.4	2.8
Negative description	11.7	6.0	4.9
Lurid details	71.7	76.7	78.1

Analysis

H1 was partially confirmed. The use of lurid details of the crimes in the text is common even in articles non-focused on information about specific cases, indicating that newspapers continue to use this strategy to spectacularize femicides (Arriaga Ornelas, 2002; Boonzaier, 2022; Buitrón, 1997). The percentage of articles that accompany images of lifeless bodies is less than 3% which refutes the spectacularized use of victims’ body pictures suggested by previous studies (Gayón, 2015; González, 2018). The tendency to overexpose the image of the live victim was verified (Ananías Soto & Vergara Sánchez, 2016); although, in many cases, the photographs are published by relatives and activists seeking to attract public attention to the legal case. In general, the newspapers show more pictures of victims than the perpetrators, the use of their names (full and given) is more balanced, which could be explained as a source’s decision and not the outlets’.

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H2 was confirmed. The results of the use of gender stereotypes, victim-blaming strategies, and negative evaluations have overwhelming percentages in all three outlets (table 4). The articles that do not mention specific cases tend to emphasize the dangerousness of certain geographical areas and relate them to poverty, nationalities, or indigenous ethnicities. This narrative explains the problem from the victim's social class and material conditions (Ramírez, 2021), contributing to the stigmatization of an entire community, contextualizing them by violence and social problems, and motivating a sense of insecurity and rejection (BardWigdor & Bonavitta, 2017; Brodie, 2021; Slakoff & Brennan, 2019). Table 5 summarizes the articles in the three outlets to measure victim evaluation per femicide type. We found that some victim-blaming strategies are related to the victim-perpetrator relationship and others are common to the three types. For example, being nagging or argumentative is especially high in familiar femicides, and the consumption of alcohol and drugs is common among the three types. The socio-demographic characteristics related to being more prone to becoming a victim were not statistically relevant in the comparison per outlet, but per femicide type, it is relevant in non-IPV femicides.

Table 5. Victims' evaluation per femicide type %

	IPV femicide	Familiar femicide	Non-IPV femicide
Total articles	470	225	821
Articles with evaluation	n=168	n=107	n=205
Positive description	12.0	11.2	13.7
Not reporting previous violence/ not continuing the legal process	6.6	0.9	6.3
Infidelity/promiscuity/interaction with men	17.8	19.6	3.9
Discussion between partners/equal blame for both partners	26.8	14.0	2.0
Being argumentative, nagging, flaunting success	6.0	19.6	2.4
Lack of self-care/dangerous place/going out to have fun	5.4	10.3	11.7
Alcohol and drugs consumption	13.7	12.1	11.2
Stigmatized professions	3.0	8.4	23.4
Suicide	8.9	0.9	4.4
Socio-demographic related	0.0	0.9	6.9
Other negative description	5.4	15.0	21.5

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The results shown in table 5 are the most surprising, we expected to find that not reporting previous violence, promiscuity suggestions, discussion, and being argumentative were victim-blaming strategies used just in IPV femicides. These strategies are not just common to the three types of femicide, but we found that women murdered by their father, son, cousin, grandfather, etc., are the most blamed for being promiscuous and argumentative. Women murdered by a strange man are most typically described in negative terms and the articles can even emphasize that they did not report previous harassment or suspicious behavior from the perpetrator, which suggests that they did not do their part to protect themselves. Insofar as the use of strategies including discussion and being argumentative, the percentages are not high in non-IPV femicides, but it is still surprising that these are used at all. These articles suggest that the victim should not have done anything when the perpetrator tried to rob her, rape her, kidnap her and so on.

H3 was confirmed. Most of the articles recounting the perpetrators' actions are descriptions of how they committed the crime with lurid details which were counted as negative evaluations; however, between 34 and 43% are exculpatory narratives (table 4). These types of constructions put the focus back on the victim's actions, blurring the perpetrators' responsibility and making invisible the context of personal and structural GBV (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Lloyd & Ramon, 2017; McManus & Dorfman, 2003; Nader, 2014; Taylor, 2009).

Conclusions And Discussion

The methodology demonstrated soundness and effectiveness to identify descriptions and evaluations, allowing comparison of positive, neutral, and negative representations. The results confirmed that sensationalism, victim-blaming, and perpetrator-justification narratives are a trend regardless of the political leaning of the news media. Hence, it is more common to mention

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negative aspects of the victims than negative aspects of the perpetrators, and it is more common to mention mitigating circumstances of the perpetrator's responsibility than the positive aspects of the victims. The descriptions of the victims are associated with gender stereotypes, negative moral evaluations, lack of self-care, and socio-demographic characteristics that serve to create otherness (difference from us) (Alcocer Perulero, 2014; Ananías Soto & Vergara Sánchez, 2016; Boonzaier, 2022; Brodie, 2019; Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Gillespie et al., 2013). On the other hand, the media tended to make invisible the existence of a perpetrator and the pieces with representation elements associated with justification, re-focus on the victims, and blurring the connection with misogyny (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Gillespie et al., 2013; Ramírez, 2021; Taylor, 2009). These narratives are used over and over, treated as common, contributing to create and perpetuate a social representation of a group, used to categorize, and evaluate (Wagner et al., 1999) all the victims of femicide even in the absence of descriptions. Social representations are systems of evaluations connected to emotions that can produce attitudes in individuals (Joffe, 2002), this means that social representations are connected to the material treatment that a person or a group receives from society (Abramsky et al., 2011; Boonzaier, 2022; Flood & Pease, 2009; Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010). When the representation is negative, it can produce discrimination against the victims and justification of the perpetrators (Salazar Rebolledo & Garza Castro, 2020). Although most of the articles do not contain elements of representation, the existent ones reinforce the idea that the murdered women are a 'type of women' who transgress in some way the moral values of the society (Alcocer Perulero, 2014; Flores, 2017; Ravelo Blancas, 2017; Slakoff & Brennan, 2019). The prejudice (Goffman, 1995) towards the victims generates social revictimization through stigmatization (Carranco, 2020) and confers certain legitimacy to GBV (Hunnicut, 2009).

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The present work exposes that news media amplifies the communicative dimension of femicide in a way that benefits perpetrators and the patriarchal system (Segato, 2014). The sensationalist elements of femicide reportage and the preference to focus on the victims' 'misbehavior' reveals the use of the information for marketing advantages (Buitrón, 1997) and disregard the consequences of disseminating discriminatory discourses. The increase of attention to the femicide issue and stopping using photographs of corpses could mean a step in the right direction. However, the content still reinforces the status quo and perpetuates the idea that women are in a social place of vulnerability, and they will be punished for transgressing the establishment (González, 2018; Segato, 2014).

The present study aimed to create a methodology that contributes to the dialogue between the literature on femicide media discourses in Spanish and English languages with the socio-political contexts that each represents, confirming the relevant contributions that Latin American and global South researchers have made to the field. The deductive-inductive nature of the methodology makes it possible to be applied in different socio-political contexts, providing the opportunity for comparative studies that help to better understand the roots of gender-based violence and discrimination in public discourses. The research design aimed to help to facilitate the analysis in future research but can also serve as an instrument for news producers to avoid creating content that helps to legitimize GBV in the society.

The primal limitation of the present study is that the articles were coded by one single coder. Although, the codebook was strongly discussed with the research group until we reached an agreement on all the variables. The dataset is available open access, and all the articles can be consulted online, which allows for public verification.

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Insofar as the results, the present work contributes to strengthening the findings of previous and future qualitative studies showing that the use of discriminatory structures is a quantitative tendency. Nonetheless, the quantitative nature of this work can fail in analyzing categories that do not represent statistical prominence. We recommend the continuation of qualitative studies that serve to reveal other strategies of discrimination embedded in the discourse. Even if they are not a trend, these practices in the public discourses must be eradicated in their totality.

During the process of coding, we observed that other actors play important roles in the construction of meaning, such as the families of the victims, activists, and authorities; therefore, extending the studies to these actors is an area of opportunity for future research that would help to better understand the problem.

The construction of negative social representations of victims and the irresolute attribution of the perpetrator's responsibility takes away the focus that conflict resolution policies should be on preventing men of becoming perpetrators and not on preventing women of becoming victims.

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