

CALL FOR PAPERS

THE MEDIA AND SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Informing, denouncing, raising awareness

International symposium
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GEM
GENDER EQUALITY MONITOR



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This symposium¹ aims to question the role of the media in the production of information about sexual and gender-based violence (hereafter referred to as SGBV), which we understand as ‘a multiplicity of types of coercive, non-hierarchical acts imposed by men to control women and any people who do not belong to the hegemonic masculine, throughout their lives’ (Connell, 2014; Buisson and Wetzels, 2022: 4). Thus, our approach to violence is based on the concept of a continuum (Kelly, 1988), making it possible to apprehend the different forms of this violence in their plurality and to define them by the way they are linked together. Such violence manifests itself in several forms: physical, verbal, psychological and sexual, as well as economic and administrative. It forms part of relationships of domination intertwined with other factors such as race, age, social class, religion, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity (Crenshaw, 2005; Diederich, 2006; Dierenberger and Karimi, 2019).

Over the past twenty years, many disciplines have taken up the issue of SGBV: psychology (Salmona, 2018; Pache, 2019), law (Le Magueresse, 2012 and 2021; Moron-Puech, 2022), medicine (Jouault, 2020), political science (Boussaguet, 2009; Delage, 2017) and sociology (Debauche and Hamel, 2013; Le Goaziou, 2013 and 2019; Brown et al., 2020; Lacombe, 2022). Different fields have been studied, such as armed conflicts (Audouin-Rouseau, 1994; Virgili and Branche, 2011; Cohen and Nordas, 2014), public space (Coutras, 1996; Condon and Lieber, 2005; Dekker, 2021), the family (Hamelin et al., 2010; Dussy, 2013), and work (Baldeck, 2021).

But SGBV has rarely been discussed by researchers in terms of its media coverage. While this question is the subject of studies abroad, particularly in English-language research (Bullock, 2007; Charlesworth and McDonald, 2013; Easteal et al., 2015; De Benedictis et al., 2019), this is far from being the case within French-language research, including in France itself. However, many dissertations in progress will soon be extending this state of the art (Beaulieu, Buisson, Itoh, Khemilat, Ruffio and Wetzels: see bibliography). The few existing studies focus on the media, but this research mainly focuses on femicide (Guérard and Lavender, 1999; Sapio, 2017, 2019, 2022) or on domestic violence: it particularly analyzes the press, and more specifically the daily press (Mucchielli, 2005; Hernández Orellana, 2012; Sépulchre, 2019; Lochon, 2021).

Institutions are increasingly vigilant about the role played by the media in the visibility and prevention of SGBV: in this sense, it is interesting to note that the Istanbul Convention, ratified by France in 2014, appeals to the ‘Participation of the private sector and the media’ in order to ‘to set guidelines and self-regulatory standards to prevent violence against women and to enhance respect for their dignity’ (art. 17). And, in a note written by Margaux Collet in the same year for the French High Council for Gender Equality, she emphasizes, among other things, that it is crucial to include articles relating to acts of violence against women in the ‘Politics’ section of newspapers, rather than in the ‘Other news’ section; it is also inadvisable to use the ‘words of the aggressor to create a headline’ or to use expressions such as ‘crime of passion’, a formula still very frequently found in the regional daily press (Ambroise-Rendu, 1993; Houel and al., 2003; Sapio, 2019). For its part, in March 2019, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted new

¹ This symposium is partially funded by the French National Research Agency (project Gender Equality Monitor - ANR-19-CE38-0012), the Cemti (University Paris 8) and the Carism (University Paris Panthéon-Assas).

Recommendation on Preventing and Combating Sexism, noting that: ‘Another aggravating factor is where the reach, or potential reach, of the sexist words or acts is extensive, including the means of transmission, use of social or mainstream media and the degree of repetition².’

The persistence of sensitive areas in media discourse – despite these recommendations – stems, among other things, from the structural characteristics of journalistic circles (Neveu, 2000; Damian-Gaillard and Saitta, 2020; Damian-Gaillard et al., 2021) which are not immune to the sexist logics of the society in which they exist. The composition of the editorial staff, the training and the conditions of recruitment and development of journalists are significant factors in producing information, as shown by the results of the Global Media Monitoring Project (Biscarrat et al., 2017; Breda, 2022). Thus, certain culturally and historically situated journalistic practices and traditions persist.

While they are partly responsible for the propagation of hate speech and harmful narratives about SGBV, the media also play a fundamental role in the prevention and denunciation of the latter, by opening up spaces for the production of ‘counter- discourses’ (Baider and Constantinou, 2019) and responses to stigmatization, ranging from ‘destigmatization’ (Bazin and Sapio, 2020) to ‘resignification’ (Paveau, 2020). In some cases, journalists themselves can provide metadiscursive reflections on media productions; this is the case with the collective known as Prenons la Une, which endeavours to take a critical look at the problematic aspects of journalistic writing.

Presentation of themes for papers

We are calling for proposals from different disciplines: information and communication sciences, history, sociology, semiology, law, political science, linguistics, and more broadly from any interdisciplinary approach able to shed light on the production, circulation and reception of media productions on SGBV. We thus subscribe to a broad vision of the notion of media, focusing not only on traditional information media – the press, television, radio, online media and other social media – but also on all media structures as defined by Benoit Lafon (2019), encompassing the publishing industry and exhibitions, as well as proto-media such as posters and engravings. Please note, however, that this call for papers relates only to informational discourse: we have excluded fiction and entertainment from our scope. Research on music, for example, will not be taken into account, especially since a symposium³ on the subject will soon be organized. Studies analyzing the media coverage of SGBV from a comparative perspective (international, over time, comparing different objects/platforms and types of violence) are welcome. Proposals can fall under one or more of the five proposed themes.

Theme 1 – The conditions of production of media content

For this theme we call for papers that question the professional logics at work in the visibility or concealment of SGBV within the media industries themselves. Proposals that address this perspective may relate, for example, to media that have built their editorial line around SGBV, but also to services or mechanisms created by the media industries so as to

² ‘[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism](https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1e-sexism/1680a217ca)’, 27 March 2019. [URL: <https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1e-sexism/1680a217ca>]

³ Symposium organized by the Centre Max Weber - ENS de Lyon, The Cemti and Deezer for autumn 2023.

editorialize this violence: the creation of pools of journalists dedicated to these questions, the creation of posts as gender editors or the drafting of good practice guides and other editorial charters⁴. Also, the violence that takes place within media companies themselves can be questioned, in particular by examining emblematic case studies such as the Ligue du Lol⁵, the Patrick Poivre D'Arvor (PPDA) affair⁶ and the 'Bas les Pattes' ('Hands off') column published in Libération in 2015⁷. A more general apprehension of this violence could enrich the reflections envisaged here. To what extent is it visible in media industries (Beaulieu, 2019)? Is it heard and/or addressed, and if so, by whom? What are the strategies used to fight against SGBV in these spaces? Conversely, by what mechanisms are they discredited or silenced? Finally, this theme will be an opportunity to consider the vocabulary (for example, the (non)use of the term femicide) and formats mobilized in the media field to place violence on the agenda (such as the interactive online map of the newspaper Libération to count femicides)⁸.

Theme 2 - Media representations of SGBV

Media discourses, whether 'socially constitutive' or 'socially constituted' (Fairclough, 1997), are not merely illustrative of the society that produces them but are considered in their capacity both to consolidate and to transform the latter. In other words, 'journalistic writings are also social facts' (Neveu, 2013: 64) that can reinforce sexist stereotypes (Coulomb-Gully, 2019), fuel violence and shape – by helping to naturalize them – stereotypical depictions of victims and attackers. Media devices can thus become the sounding board for hate speech defined 'as any discursive or semiotic manifestation inciting hatred, whether ethnic, racial, religious, or based on gender or sexual orientation' (Baider et al. Constantinou, 2019: 10). This type of discourse can either be characterized by violent formulations (from insults to verbal abuse) or it can be 'disguised', thus operating in a more insidious way. Without neglecting the contributions of feminist movements promoting, among other things, a critical scrutiny of media representations of SGBV (Ruffio, 2019; Lamy, 2021; Noetzel et al., 2022; Cavalin et al., 2022), we are asking for analyses of fact-based narratives attentive to the representations of the actors involved (victims, perpetrators of violence, witnesses, experts, politicians, activists), to the sources used by journalists (the police, the judicial system, local associations), to the images used and to the rhetorical devices deployed. These include the 'other news' style of information on SGBV; sensationalism; ascribing guilt to the victims; and the euphemization and even trivialization of SGBV (Burt, 1980; Benedict, 1992).

⁴ For example [the guide](#) 'Le traitement médiatique des violences faites aux femmes. Outils à l'usage des journalistes' produced by Prenons la Une and the [Charte de communication inclusive à Mediapart](#)'.

⁵ Iris Gaudin, *Face à la ligue du Lol: harcèlement et sexisme dans les médias*, Paris, Massot éditions, 2020.

⁶ Damian-Gaillard and al., 'Violences sexuelles: quand les femmes journalistes se taisent', *theconversation.com*, June 2020; Jérôme Leffliâtre and Anne Diaktine, '[Harcèlements, agressions sexuelles, viols: les témoignages contre PPDA](#)', *Libération*, 8 November 2021.

⁷ Cécile Amar and al., '[Nous, femmes journalistes politiques et victimes de sexisme...](#)', *Libération*, 4 May 2015.

⁸ Virginie Ballet and Titiou Lecoq, '[Meurtres conjugaux. Des vies derrière les chiffres](#)'.

Theme 3 - Media circulation of testimonials

Going beyond the #MeToo phenomenon already studied by French researchers (Cavalin et al., 2022)⁹, this symposium aims to broaden the analysis of the testimony of violence through media other than social networks: television, radio, podcasts, cinema, press, and publishing. Who is behind the publication of these testimonies and to what extent does their publication contribute to the constitution of the public problem of SGBV? Does the appropriation of testimonies by mainstream media contribute to democratizing the subject? Does such an appropriation take place at the cost of depoliticization? How does the voice of victims circulate in media and cultural productions (to varying degrees of visibility), and can we identify particular characteristics from the profiles of the victims (public or anonymous personalities) and types of violence? By way of example, case studies could be based on testimonials on the radio (the Baupin case, Mediapart and France Inter¹⁰ [Buisson, 2022, forthcoming]); in the press (the Haenel case, Mediapart¹¹); on YouTube (Alix Desmoineaux, reality TV candidate, for Melty¹²), in a book (*Acquittée. Je l'ai tué pour ne pas mourir* (Acquitted. I killed him so as not to die), by Alexandra Lange¹³), on television (Delphine Leclerc, a victim of obstetric violence, in *La Maison des Maternelles*¹⁴) or in a podcast (*Ou peut-être une nuit*, Charlotte Pudlowski¹⁵).

We invite contributors to question the specificities of media platforms and their role in highlighting the power relations relating to SGBV testimonies, both for the audiovisual media (seating of guests, duration and modalities of exchanges between speakers, editing techniques, blurring of faces) and for the press (layout, anonymization, format, headings).

The place taken by the perpetrators of violence is also a subject for study. How do the media use the perpetrators' words and does this editorial choice raise questions within the profession? Whether it is the sequence cut from the documentary *Je ne suis pas une salope, je suis une journaliste* (I'm not a slut, I'm a journalist¹⁶), where Marie Portolano confronts Pierre Menès with the sexual assault to which he subjected her a few years earlier, or the 'Lettre d'un violeur' ('Letter from a rapist') published by *Libération*¹⁷ the same year, what does this tell us about editorial developments taking place within the media industries?

Theme 4 – The mechanisms and language of prevention and awareness

The language used about the prevention and/or awareness of SGBV can foster a critique of existing norms and promote behaviours that can prevent and/or subvert it, but they can also function as receptacles for these same norms, despite their initial aims. In this perspective, the book *Quand l'État parle des violences faites aux femmes* (When the state speaks of violence against women) by Myriam Hernández Orellana and Stéphanie Kunert is an essential contribution that points out the limits and contradictions of institutional communication in France. Based on the analysis of a corpus of

⁹ See also the study day '#MeTooInceste: regards pluriels sur une campagne de mobilisation', University Sorbonne Nouvelle, 16 September 2022, <https://metooinceste.sciencesconf.org/>.

¹⁰ Bredoux Lénaïg, « [Des femmes dénoncent les agressions et les harcèlements sexuels de Denis Baupin](#) », *Mediapart*, 9 mai 2016.

¹¹ Turchi Marine, « [#MeToo dans le cinéma : l'actrice Adèle Haenel brise un nouveau tabou](#) », *Mediapart*, 3 novembre 2019.

¹² Agnero Mathilde, « [Alix : "J'ai dénoncé un candidat à 2 productions, rien n'a changé"](#) », *YouTube*, publié par Melty, 2021.

¹³ Lange Alexandra, *Acquittée. Je l'ai tué pour ne pas mourir*, Michel Lafon, 2012.

¹⁴ « Violences obstétricales : les prévenir et les réparer », émission *La Maison des Maternelles*, 28 juin 2022, *France 2*.

¹⁵ Pudlowski Charlotte, « [Ou peut-être une nuit](#) », *Injustices*, saison 2, 6 épisodes, Louie Média, 2020.

¹⁶ Portolano Marie, « Je ne suis pas une salope, je suis une journaliste », *Canal+*, 2021.

¹⁷ Ecoiffier Matthieu, « [Pourquoi "Libé" publie la lettre d'un violeur](#) », *Libération*, 7 mars 2021.

government campaigns, the authors underline the paradoxical nature of the language used in institutional communication where ‘women’s power to act is almost non-existent [...] while the State, as a tutelary speaker, systematically addresses them in the imperative (in particular by enjoining them to “break their silence”)’ (2014: 90-91). We therefore invite contributors to extend these observations by working on other French or foreign government initiatives, and on institutional campaigns led by associations and communities such as the Hubertine Auclert centre in Île-de-France. We are also looking for work analyzing educational content dealing with SGBV such as comics (Les Crocodiles by Thomas Mathieu¹⁸ and Mon vagin, mon gynéco et moi (My vagina, my gynecologist and me by Rachel Lev¹⁹) and Instagram accounts (@stopfisha; @disbonjoursalepute), to mention just a few examples.

There are relatively few studies of the language used to prevent SGBV (Bruneel, 2018; Stassin, 2019; see also theme 4 of the ‘(Cyber)harcèlement’/‘(Cyber)harassment’ symposium²⁰), and there are even fewer relating to the reception of the language and mechanisms for preventing violence against women (Potter and al., 2011; Romero, 2020; Sapio, 2020; Basile-Commaille and Fourquet-Courbet, 2021; Léon, 2021).

In this theme, we are also interested in media platforms and digital mechanisms when they are mobilized within the framework of a mediation with the perpetrators of violence, with the victims and the actors in the field (Oddone 2020; Sapio 2023), and in the framework of restorative justice. Recent years seem to have witnessed an increasing number of initiatives, such as the app developed by the Marseille city hall to fight against SGBV on the beach²¹ and the website ‘deposetaplaite.fr’²².

Theme 5 – The sensitive corpus of data: emotions and commitment in research

Studying practices and media discourses relating to SGBV can place researchers who come into contact with them in a situation of emotional vulnerability, in some cases identified as a ‘vicarious syndrome’ (Bourdet, 2021). But what can be said and done about such emotions experienced during research? We invite contributors to reflect on this question by foregrounding their places as social and political subjects. How does ‘our fieldwork, especially when it is difficult or painful, modify us, both as people and as researchers?’ (Paveau, 2013). How can repeated exposure to stories and images of violence affect research? What should we do when the media language that we study revives personal traumas? While the emotions experienced are likely to hinder scientific reflection, they can also trigger a power to act (Paveau, 2013), an ‘emotional charge (émotricité)’ (Le Cam and Ruellan, 2017), and lead to the development of new hypotheses for research (Dalibert, 2021). The researcher may also not feel any particular emotions, and then feel at odds with the social reactions that people expect in the discussion of sensitive subjects.

In this theme, we are also interested in the place of affects in the relationship to fieldwork, and more specifically to the corpus of data, something much less often studied in existing research: for example in the process of data collection, during which a feeling of guilt towards the victims (Dussy, 2013) or sometimes one of joy (Joël, 2015) can emerge. Finally, there is the question of the conditions for sharing research results: how are we to talk about sensitive and

¹⁸ Bruxelles, Le Lombard, 2014.

¹⁹ Paris, Editions Leduc, 2021.

²⁰ December 2022 : <https://www.sfsic.org/aac-evenement/colloque-international-cyberharcèlement/>

²¹ « [Marseille lance une application pour signaler les violences sexistes et sexuelles sur les plages](#) », *Ouest France*, 6 août 2022.

²² <https://deposetaplaite.fr/>

gruelling data? What place should be given to victims and aggressors? Should we anonymize victims, or on the contrary give them a face and a name when they are sometimes reduced to a mere statistic (Salles, 2021)? How are we to communicate stories and images of violence without thereby rekindling their pain (Julliard, 2021)?

[Translated by Andrew Brown]

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