

DOSSIER

JOURNALISTIC PROTOCOLS AND COVERAGE OF GENDER VIOLENCE:

values, agendas and disputes in the professional field



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ABSTRACT – This article examines the role of journalistic protocols in the coverage of gender-based violence against women, understanding them as normative and epistemic instruments that guide practices, dispute meanings, and reconfigure the professional ethos within the field of journalism. Based on the analysis of eight materials produced by traditional media outlets, feminist collectives, and advocacy organizations, the study explores the proposed operational procedures, the interdisciplinary knowledge required, and the normative guidelines mobilized by these documents. The research demonstrates the emergence of an ethics informed by notions of care and a more situated, reflexive, and socially engaged journalistic practice. It concludes that such protocols operate in the arenas of epistemic dispute and the formative devices capable of questioning forms of authority and legitimacy within journalism, contributing to the development of a practice more attuned to structural inequalities.

Keywords: Journalism. Gender-based violence. Journalistic protocols. Epistemic dispute.

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PROTOCOLOS JORNALÍSTICOS E COBERTURA DA VIOLÊNCIA DE GÊNERO: valores, agendas e disputas no campo profissional

RESUMO – Este artigo examina o papel de protocolos jornalísticos na cobertura da violência de gênero contra mulheres, entendendo-os como instrumentos normativos e epistêmicos que orientam práticas, disputam sentidos e reconfiguram o ethos profissional no campo do jornalismo. A partir da análise de oito materiais produzidos por veículos tradicionais, coletivos feministas e organizações de advocacy, exploram-se os procedimentos operacionais propostos, os saberes interdisciplinares requeridos e as orientações normativas mobilizadas por esses documentos. A pesquisa evidencia a emergência de uma ética informada por noções de cuidado e de uma prática jornalística mais situada, reflexiva e socialmente comprometida. Conclui-se que tais protocolos operam como arenas de disputa epistêmica e como dispositivos formativos capazes de problematizar as formas de autoridade e legitimidade no campo jornalístico, contribuindo para a constituição de um fazer mais sensível às desigualdades estruturais.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo. Violência de gênero. Protocolos jornalísticos. Disputa epistêmica.

PROTOCOLOS PERIODÍSTICOS Y COBERTURA DE LA VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO: valores, agendas y disputas en el ámbito profesional

RESUMEN – Este artículo examina el papel de los protocolos periodísticos en la cobertura de la violencia de género contra las mujeres, entendiéndolos como instrumentos normativos y epistémicos que orientan prácticas, disputan significados y reconfiguran el ethos profesional en el campo del periodismo. A partir de un análisis de ocho materiales producidos por medios tradicionales, colectivos feministas y organizaciones de incidencia, se exploran los procedimientos operativos propuestos, los saberes interdisciplinarios requeridos y las orientaciones normativas movilizadas por estos documentos. La investigación evidencia la emergencia de una ética informada por nociones de cuidado y de una práctica periodística más situada, reflexiva y socialmente comprometida. Se concluye que tales protocolos operan como arenas de disputa epistémica y como dispositivos formativos capaces de problematizar las formas de autoridad y legitimidad en el ámbito periodístico, contribuyendo a la constitución de un quehacer más sensible a las desigualdades estructurales.

Palabras clave: Journalism. Violencia de género. Protocolos periodísticos. Disputa epistémica.

1 Introduction

Research into alternatives to the routine approach to violence against women, taken by the news media, is crucial for a better understanding and public discussion of the phenomenon (Aubin et al., 2022). This active work of mobilization and politicization aimed at recognizing this violence as a “public” issue has, as one of its repercussions, the emergence of multiple proposals to revise journalistic production practices. These proposals come as manuals, guides, and advisory texts that seek to intervene directly in the

journalistic practice. Written mainly by practitioners, in collaboration with other agents working in the field – academic researchers, public officials, specialists in the area – these publications point to shifts in the ways journalism is practiced amid changes and challenges facing the news industry.

The protocols appear more strongly linked to experiences aimed at the thematic universe of so-called social issues, and such initiatives constitute privileged places to identify emerging approaches and new ways of formulating journalistic know-how. The following question guides this article: what understandings of journalism do these protocols present when advising practitioners on how to report on violence against women? To answer it, we examined a sample of eight guiding documents in Brazil, from various sources, such as traditional media outlets, feminist collectives, and advocacy organizations. Through a thematic analysis of the contents of such protocols and the epistemic and socio-political context that characterizes their emergence, the analysis focuses on three dimensions: operational elements (procedures), necessary knowledge (domains of knowledge) and characterization of good practices (ethical principles). Based on this, we reflect on the role of protocols as instruments for rationalizing and renewing journalistic practices, verifying whether they are in conflict with established forms of coverage of gender violence.

2 Violence against women: protocols and journalistic action

Despite the prominence of conservative movements, gender-based violence against women has been widely recognized as a social problem in Brazil. The implementation of policies related to this issue broadened the public debate, and changes in the legal framework, acknowledging the systematic nature of this violence, were decisive in this context (Pasinato & Ávila, 2023). However, the continuity of prevention policies faces dismantling actions (Pasinato & Colares, 2020), while neoconservative movements seek to remove the concept of gender from the understanding of femicide, reducing it to domestic and family violence (Campos, 2024; Pasinato, 2024).

Brazilian media coverage has followed this emergence of gender-based violence against women, focusing its attention on reports of violence by close partners, a statistically predominant form

of violence in Brazil and the rest of the world. However, while these figures provide an important overview of the scale and relevance of the problem, they do not reveal the context in which violence occurs and, at the same time, reinforce the notion of the home as the most dangerous place for women, thereby naturalizing male violence and rendering other forms of aggression in different contexts invisible (Pasinato, 2024).

As well as statistics, journalistic reports dealing with violence against women committed by affective partners have strong similar characteristics to those in other countries, despite different sociocultural contexts (Leal et al., 2020). Currently, the omission of the term “femicide” or the romanticization of the crime are less frequent, characteristics that were common in earlier coverage (Prado & Sanematsu, 2017).

Even so, coverage ranges from high-profile cases to crimes committed in the local community, notable for its repeated portrayal of women as guilty, its perception of these events as private tragedies, and its failure to highlight the dominance of patriarchal cultural values. This type of coverage aligns journalistic activity as part of a “critical route” of violence against women (Meneghel et al., 2011; Sagot, 2000), in which it is common for processes of re-victimization to occur, especially in social services and those linked to the police and the judiciary (Pasinato, 2024).

However, while with mainstream news media this pattern of coverage helps to perpetuate modes of visibility that reinforce violent ways of dealing with the issue, the visibility of journalistic coverage on the subject also responds to the political action of different agents and their struggle against gender inequality. Such dynamics reverberate not only through the internal processes of journalistic organizations, compelling them to reconfigure their professional practices, but also results into efforts to produce normative and guiding materials for journalistic work, grounded in the expectation of incorporating the emergence of critical perspectives within the professional field (Cunha & Weingrill, 2017; Ferreira & Bessa, 2020; Ibáñez & Zurbano-Berenguer, 2019; Rodrigues & Oliveira, 2021; Think Olga, 2016).

We argue that the development of protocols is part of recent efforts to modernize journalism, as defined by Albuquerque (2022, p. 51), who understands modernization as an effort to “alter the logic of how things operate, change practices, and challenge established

hierarchies and positions”. Albuquerque identified in the history of Brazilian journalism forms of socialization among practitioners and the development of a professional culture that resulted in what he characterizes as “authoritarian modernization”. We question whether the experiences, formats and journalistic strategies that generated the aforementioned protocols can be indicators of other forms of socialization and configuration of new professional *ethos*.

We understand that such protocols affect the socialization process of journalism practitioners, a field sometimes considered to lack a systematic set of codified knowledge and coercive mechanisms of authority, with role structures that are much less organized than in other professional fields. For Carlson (2022), it is essential to look beyond the presumed epistemic authority of journalists and understand it as a state of ongoing renegotiation. This perspective situates journalism “as only a mediated voice – and hardly a monolithic voice – among so many others that produce, circulate and respond to information and opinions about public life” (Carlson, 2022, p. 69, our translation), recognizing that its authority is built together with other actors. In this sense, protocols can be examined in the light of the notion of “epistemic disputes” (Carlson, 2023), continuous and contextual struggles between different actors over norms, practices and the very legitimacy of the knowledge produced by journalism.

Historically, manuals have emerged to organize editorial procedures, seeking standardization, and to shape the actions of journalists, but always facing tensions and constant processes of re-elaboration by the various actors involved in production (Albuquerque, 2022; Bronosky, 2010). However, as they are understood in the contemporary context, they not only function as technical guides but constitute arenas where the definitions of what journalism should be are contested. If the socialization of Brazilian journalists has been shaped by an authoritarian professional culture that has impacted their *ethos* (Albuquerque, 2022), it is relevant to ask whether protocols may signal fissures in these practices. For this, however, it is important not to postulate the idea that such experiences imply automatic changes in the definition of the professional role of journalists or in the way they define their work. Norms and guidelines are malleable and negotiable, serve to instruct and eventually constrain practitioners to make choices considered rational and appropriate in their organizations, but do not necessarily express the values and beliefs of these professionals. What journalists

say they do is only one aspect of understanding what they do when they practice journalism.

3 Intercepting practice beyond dualisms

A relevant approach to understanding the role played by such protocols can be found in Ryfe (2006, 2024), who seeks to escape from an approach to journalistic practice as derived from productive routines or deducible from the discursive control procedures that the field seeks to establish for professional practice. Ryfe argues that the combination of constitutive rules and regulative rules defines the form, culture, and ethics of journalism, affecting how journalists report on and interpret world events. Constitutive rules establish what is acceptable and expected in journalistic work, influencing professional identity and culture (references such as the search for truth and impartiality, for example), while regulatory rules guide the practical behavior of journalists and regulate their conduct (ethical standards and verification norms, for example).

Both rules act in combination. The constitutive rules provide parameters for the practice to be considered in accordance with journalistic roles. Regulatory rules, on the other hand, “are learned and understood as ‘things that journalists do’ and not as explicit rules of behavior” (Ryfe, 2006, p. 209). They serve “as resources for justification and not as causes of action” (Ryfe, 2006, p. 210), being necessary when there are doubts about how to act. Both types of norms are essential for addressing the form and operation of journalistic practice, and how they interact vary according to empirically observable conditions.

One way to do this is, on the one hand, to understand how practitioners deal with the set of knowledge, beliefs, and expectations they have about the world and their profession – the schemes. Built over time and based on experience, training, and exposure to the different dimensions of professional practice, they operate as cognitive frameworks or mental models for organizing and interpreting information about events and situations. On the other hand, practitioners also deal with scripts, sequences of actions, or standardized routines that they must follow. Scripts may include specific steps, such as selecting sources, verifying information, and methods for writing and editing content. These scripts are constrained

by norms, institutional practices, work circumstances, and what is perceived as the public's expectations.

Ryfe's categorical framework, which does not posit an a priori sequential ordering among rules, offers a non-dualist approach that articulates roles and journalistic performance, accounting for the configuration of professional practice without idealizing journalism or universalizing practitioners' understandings of it. It allows us to shift traditional approaches to studying the relationship between normative expectations of journalistic roles and actual journalistic practice, which have a strong academic tradition (Mellado, 2021) and sometimes reiterate a separation (and relationship of precedence) between thinking and doing.

Our perspective is that protocols are of interest to us primarily as an articulation between a subject's action and their understanding of the action, rather than as a universal set of prescriptions or as the expression of an idealized form of journalistic thinking. They operate on sites of coupling within journalistic experience that challenge the notion of examining supposed gaps between thinking and doing (Ryfe, 2024). We assume that, by examining protocols, we intercept both regulative and constitutive rules that orient the emergence of renewed journalistic *ethos*. For this, as Albuquerque (2022, p. 216) recalls, "it is imperative to investigate the concrete conditions in which journalism is exercised, before considering its greater or lesser ability to satisfy abstract parameters".

4 The place and role of protocols

We think of protocols as instruments of these processes of rationalization of journalistic production practices that, by offering guidance on the construction of reports and best practices, conflict with the already established forms of coverage of gender violence. The projects that develop these protocols comprise an emerging sphere of journalism, often unrelated to the inaccurately named mainstream field (Steensen et al., 2023). Some of these initiatives are defined by proposals for more contextualized journalism focused on the experiences of different social subjects, either alternatively or in different modes of interaction with corporate journalism. They are part of arrangements that seek to renew and challenge the contemporary framework of practices, questioning the existence

of a “universal model” of journalism (Brouwers & Witschge, 2020; Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Deuze, 2019), the search for other narrative references (Maia & Barretos, 2018; Zibordi, 2021), and articulation with new actors and new institutional and economic formats (Fígaro et al., 2021; Grohmann et al., 2019; Harlow, 2019, 2022; Loosen et al., 2022; Mick & Tavares, 2017).

In Brazil, there is no unified terminology for understanding these arrangements in the journalism ecosystem (Pachi Filho et al., 2019), and expressions such as “new journalistic experiences” are used to refer to the diverse set that supports the protocols, indicating, however, that this varied “alternative” set involves observing a field that deals with a specific thematic and political agenda (Albuquerque & Gonçalves, 2024).

Most of these initiatives make up the field of independent digital journalism (Ganter & Paulino, 2021; Lago & Nonato, 2024). Terms such as radical, activist, citizen, participatory, community, peripheral, and advocacy journalism are grouped under the umbrella term “alternative”. Some of these projects can be characterized as part of a growing range of peripheral actors in journalism (Hanusch & Löhmann, 2022), operating, at least initially, on the margins of the professional field. Harlow (2022) argues that, in Latin America, these experiences redefine the understanding and meaning of alternative, standing out for dimensions such as positioning against injustice, priority for investigative journalism, focus on local issues and marginalized groups, active forms of public participation, action by “amateur” practitioners and alternative means of financing. This new sphere would, in general, have a critical position in relation to the mainstream media. However, even these studies recognize elements of “continuity” (Ganter & Paulino, 2021; Lyra & Zanforlin, 2025). Several initiatives are led by journalists who are well known in the traditional field and assimilate standards already established by corporate media. In addition, funding by international foundations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can sometimes reiterate more traditional understandings of journalism (Mesquita & Santos, 2024; Munoriyarwa et al., 2024; Young & Hermida, 2024).

It is in this environment that such initiatives stand out for offering good practice guides for journalists interested in aligning their work with a conception of “excellence”. It is worth remembering that these innovations also occur in a context of job insecurity, where guides can help to “produce more with less” and encourage the idea

of continuous training as an individual initiative. They are, therefore, resources linked to formative experiences, influencing professional socialization. It is important to examine whether, even when based on criticism, they do not reproduce assumptions of an idealized understanding of practices based on universal competencies.

The protocols, in our view, focus on the possibility of interpreting journalistic know-how from two seminal dimensions: identifying decisive elements for its understanding as epistemic practices, which negotiate norms, behaviors and modes of knowledge; and examining how practices deal with know-how in new situations, such as the approach to gender violence against women in its multiple dimensions. We understand these materials as a type of discursive genre that brings together field manuals and instructional guides, written by journalists and/or specialists, written to convey trade and practice in a specific subject area.

As they intend to function as a key place to understand and influence journalistic culture, they present themselves as “how-to guides” and as resources for continuing instruction within the professional experience of both novices and veterans. The protocols express the changing political economy of journalism, continued training processes and changes in professional practices, as well as disputes within the field. However, rather than treating such materials as peaceful and consensual, we must examine how the recommendations articulate tensions and a form of “not-knowing-how-to-do” that are part of learning strategies at work, the acquisition of knowledge about journalism in its practical experience, and the production of new professional norms. We do not assume a mirroring relationship between protocols and practice; there are numerous issues involved in the “translation” of these postulates into actual coverage. Nevertheless, they present themselves as a form of “know-how” thinking that is available for analysis, conceptually and practically intersecting journalistic experience.

These guides incorporate shared experiences that unfold from journalistic work and should not be taken only as a manifestation of a discursive culture of a certain community. The “ways of doing journalism” can be defined as belonging to loosely structured domains, where the meaning of concepts depends on context and general rules are non-existent (Spiro et al., 1987 as cited in Lopes et al., 2010). Journalism seen in this way indicates that even the presence of resources and instruments such as protocols does not

reduce the difficulties for practitioners to identify patterns, principles, and relationships that shape the field of action. Effective action in these areas is related to the ability to adapt to new situations, make inferences, and construct understanding schemes capable of dealing with the problems that arise when addressing specific realities.

5 Research procedures

The protocols analyzed are dedicated to characterizing aspects of the journalistic workflow, from choice to management of post-publication content. They signal specific elements of journalistic procedures, articulating principles and guidelines into concrete and verifiable actions. In methodological terms, we carried out a qualitative study, based on an exploratory and documentary examination of the content of the protocols, with the objective of critically understanding the values, agendas, and epistemological structures underlying the materials.

The corpus was intentionally established based on a survey of initiatives that highlight gender-based violence against women as their focus or as a topic that warrants specific protocols and consists of documents made public on their institutional websites. For this mapping, a search was conducted in March 2025 in the Google Scholar database for scholarly articles on violence against women that referenced specific guides offering recommendations and guidelines for journalism practitioners covering the topic. In this first survey, the descriptors “guide”, “manual”, “protocol” were used.

Subsequently, using the Google search engine, publicly accessible materials were identified on the websites of media organizations, government agencies, and civil society organizations. The last sample totaled eight protocols. The following materials were examined, which deal specifically with experiences in the field of gender-based violence against women and serve as references for such coverage in Brazilian journalism: “Audio guide of the 3i Festival (Guia sonoro do Festival 3i) ‘How to cover violence against women’”, by the Digital Journalism Association – AJOR (*Associação de Jornalismo Digital* – 2022); “Universa Manual for Journalists: Good Practices in Covering Violence Against Women” (*Manual Universa para jornalistas: boas práticas na cobertura da violência contra a mulher*) from the news portal Universo On Line – UOL (2020); the

guides “The Agenda is the Right to Abortion in Cases of Rape” (Patrícia Galvão Institute, 2022b – Instituto Patrícia Galvão), “The Agenda is Violence and Harassment Against Women at Work” (Patrícia Galvão Institute, 2022a) and “Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Health: A guide to better understanding and communicating” (Patrícia Galvão Institute, 2021); the “Mini-Manual of Humanized Journalism – Violence against Women” (Think Olga, 2016) and “Mini-Manual of Humanized Journalism – Abortion” (Think Olga, 2017); and the “AzMina Magazine Writing Manual”, (Manual de Redação da Revista AzMina) by the AzMina Institute (2017) (InstitutoAzMina).

The chosen initiatives were published by organizations with different profiles (professional associations, media outlets, feminist institutes, and activist collectives), which claim to share a common commitment to the qualification of journalistic coverage on gender-based violence against women. The manuals and guides are presented not as technical documents, but as strategic tools for their work – whether to guide journalistic practice, influence public debate, or promote what they understand to be more ethical, accurate, and transformative coverage of violence against women.

AJOR is a non-profit civil association, registered as a civil society organization maintained by mechanisms such as annual fees from member entities, resources from civil society organizations (national and international institutes/foundations), intergovernmental organizations, private companies, donations from individuals, and projects via public notices. The association does not accept donations from political parties, elected officials, or governments. Universa/UOL is part of a private media company that is part of GrupoFolha, a corporation whose business model is based on advertising revenue, service subscriptions and digital products. Instituto Patrícia Galvão, Instituto AzMina and Think Olga (Olga Collective) are non-profit NGOs that rely on public funding through contracts and public notices, donations from national and international foundations, partnerships with multilateral organizations and donations from individuals. Think Olga and Instituto AzMina also operate with crowdfunding for specific projects.

The details of this material, with its editorial characterization, are presented in table 1:

Table 1*Protocols and manuals consulted*

Protocol	Characterization
Audio guide of the 3i Festival "How to cover violence against women", by the Association of Digital Journalism (AJOR).	Practical guide in sound format whose objective is to offer specific and immediate guidance to journalists and communicators on how to approach the topic of violence against women in an ethical, responsible and accurate way in their coverage, avoiding re-victimization and sensationalism. Focus on the daily practice of reporting. The version consulted was published in March 2022.
"Universa Manual for journalists: Good practices in covering violence against women", from Universo On Line (UOL).	A document in the form of an editorial manual intended to establish guidelines and best practices for the journalistic coverage produced by the editorial staff of the Universa section of the Universo On Line (UOL) portal, with a specific focus on issues related to women, gender, diversity, and women's rights. It emphasizes the goal of ensuring quality, accuracy and sensitivity in the story selection and coverage. The version consulted was published in November/2020.
Guide "The agenda is the right to abortion in case of rape", by the Patrícia Galvão Institute.	Specialized thematic guide, with statistical data and legal references, for communication that aims journalists, communicators, and legal/health professionals with information, arguments, and guidance for what it considers to be qualified and responsible coverage of the right to legal abortion in cases of rape. It also aims to combat disinformation and promote debate based on rights and evidence. The version consulted was published in April/2022.
Guide "The agenda is violence and harassment against women at work", by the Patrícia Galvão Institute.	Specialized thematic guide for communication that aims to provide information, data, contexts and guidance for journalists and communicators to produce in-depth and sensitive coverage on the different forms of violence and harassment suffered by women in the workplace, including legal aspects, affects, and ways of coping. The version consulted was published in March/2022.
Guide "Sexual and Reproductive Health of Women: A guide to understand and communicate better", by Patrícia Galvão Institute.	Informational and reference guide for communication, intended to provide a clear, rights-based and evidence-informed overview of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) for journalists, communicators, health professionals, educators, and activists. It aims to enhance understanding of the topic and to support the production of destigmatized content and communications that promote women's health and rights. The version consulted was published in September/2021.
Mini-manual of Humanized Journalism - Violence against women, by the Olga Collective.	An online practical guide that provides guidelines for journalistic coverage, with the aim of avoiding common mistakes in reporting on women and combating practices such as the romanticization of violence and the perpetuation of hate speech. Emphasizes non-revictimizing language and technical accuracy. The version consulted was published in June/2016.
"Mini-manual of Humanized Journalism – Abortion", by the Olga Collective.	Practical guide with direct language and concrete examples. It seeks to highlight the importance of avoiding narrative errors and biases in abortion coverage, prioritizing the destigmatization of women and framing the issue as a matter of public health. The version consulted was published in November/2017.
AzMina Magazine Writing Manual, from AzMina Institute.	Manual that establishes a mandatory editorial code of conduct for the journalistic production of the magazine. It focuses on aspects of language, technical guidelines, standardization of practices and ways of approaching subjects, emphasizing a feminist and intersectional perspective. The version consulted was published in February 2025.

An initial and exploratory thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was carried out, contrasting statements that characterize ways of doing journalism according to three dimensions:

1) Operational elements: identification of guidelines that provide parameters for journalistic action in the coverage of gender violence, focusing on the characterization of professional gestures and procedures.

2) Named and required knowledge: identification of domains of knowledge and terminologies presented as essential for working with the topic, including references to other fields of practice.

3) Terms associated with good journalistic practices: identification of qualifiers that assess procedures, make explicit reflections on journalistic practice, or indicate reference knowledge for professional practice.

The thematic analysis made it possible to identify recurring formulations in the protocols regarding these issue domains and to capture variations among the journalistic guidelines advocated. At this stage of the research, we were particularly attentive to the convergences and distinctions reflected in the content of the materials. The report and interpretation of the findings are presented in the following section.

6 Results and analysis

6.1 Reconfigurations in journalistic procedures

The selection of the agenda is the first field of intervention addressed by the manuals. When the examples of the agenda occur, they tend to focus on the characteristic violence related to the domestic and family sphere. The general orientation is to go beyond the superficiality of police records, seeking narratives that deepen the approach and develop elements capable of fostering empathy and expanding the social understanding of violence against women. The *Universa Manual* is particularly explicit in instructing journalists to “go beyond the police report” (*Boletim de Ocorrência*), which is regarded as a cold account indifferent to the situation, and to focus instead on humanizing the story. To this end, it proposes selecting “emblematic stories” that function as metonymies of systemic violence and recommends “showing Black women”, acknowledging both their invisibility in the media and the fact that they are disproportionately affected. These guidelines are reiterated by *the Audio Guide of*

theFestival 3i and the *Olga Collective's Mini-manual of Humanized Journalism*.

In contrast, the guides produced by the Patrícia Galvão Institute (IPG) are more narrowly focused, suggesting topics grounded in issues such as workplace harassment or the right to abortion, thereby expanding what is considered newsworthy. The Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health guide, for example, suggests guidelines that connect the local reality to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), investigating, for example, the "taboo" of infertility as a reproductive rights issue. The guide on workplace violence provides an editorial calendar, listing commemorative dates (such as the National Day to Combat Workplace Harassment) and trigger events (for example, court rulings) that could generate relevant news topics. In the case of *AzMina Magazine's Writing Guide*, violence is not treated as a specific topic, since "every topic is considered a women's issue and there are no prohibited agendas", although a "violence" section addresses issues such as political, digital, and institutional violence, hate speech, and reproductive rights.

After overcoming the indication of the importance of situating the event in the more general problem of violence, the empathetic approach to the victim appears as a central pillar. The *Universa Manual* advises journalists to approach the victim with attention to their world, listening to their full story – including their life before the violence – and to use sensitive language, such as "listening to her story" rather than "interviewing her for my story". Patience with the interlocutor is an emphasized attitude, given the traumatic nature of the experience. The *Audio Guide of the Festival 3i* also emphasizes empathy and listening without pressure or the pursuit of sensational statements. This emphasis aligns journalistic practice with principles of informed care regarding trauma, seeking to avoid any re-victimization. Journalistic performance is assessed not only in terms of reporting accuracy but also through compliance with these care-oriented procedures, as corroborated by the *AzMina* manual.

The diversification of sources is also highlighted as a foundational procedure for revising journalistic practices. The *Universa Manual*, the most detailed reference among the other materials, recommends seeking "qualified sources", such as gender researchers, activists, support centers, and specialized lawyers, besides public safety officials, who may lack the necessary sensitivity to deal with the violence being reported. The IPG materials provide a detailed operationalization of the recommendation to diversify sources. For instance, the abortion

guide explains how to use the Access to Information Act and navigate Ministry of Health platforms for data, and the Think Olga and IPG guides also offer a network of contacts with experts and organizations. The need to document the reporting process rigorously is also emphasized, through access to official documents or, in their absence, other forms of evidence, ensuring both the robustness of the reporting and the capacity to hold authorities to account.

Regarding writing and publication guidelines, the central recommendation is to shift the focus from the crime to the victim. The humanization of the victim and the contextualization of crime because of a “macho culture” appear again as imperatives. With the goal of fixing “basic errors of approach”, “the Mini-manual of Humanized Journalism” designates avoiding victim-blaming and refraining from justifying the aggressor as its main “golden rules”. The materials condemn the inclusion of information that can be interpreted as facilitating violence and advise that, if arguments such as “jealousy” are cited, they must be countered with the explanation of gender inequality.

Taken as a whole, the materials indicate that unnecessary and detailed descriptions of the crime should be avoided. The guidelines recommend accurately naming the crime (e.g., femicide), referencing the relevant legislation, using precise legal terminology to describe the accused, and providing information on reporting and support channels. IPG guides highlight a lexicon for ethical journalism, such as replacing “crime of passion” with “domestic violence”. Favoring formulations such as “woman reports rape” over “woman says she was raped” confers agency and credibility to the victim, treating her account as a formal action rather than a dubious allegation. The *Universa Manual* advises against narratives that romanticize the crime and the use of so-called “clickbait” headlines.

One of the most prominent professional gestures is the rejection of the false symmetry present in a certain canon of journalism. The *Universa Manual* warns against the reproduction of “sexist quotation marks that blame the victim” without contextualization. The AzMina’s manual adopts a stance of activist journalism and takes this guideline to an even more explicit level, stating that the magazine does not adhere to the practice of “hearing both sides” in cases where there is definitive evidence of violence, since it does not view it as its role to “give voice to an aggressor”. Terminological precision thus emerges as a fundamental operational and ethical tool. The *Think Olga manual*, for example, insists that rape should not be “softened” with terms

like “forced to have sex”, and abortion material prescribes the use of technical terms like “embryo” and “fetus” instead of “child” or “baby”.

Publication-related care also extends to the use of images. *Universa* explicitly prohibits the use of photos that may sexualize the victim or be used to construct a value judgment about their behavior. It also vetoes the publication of images of the crime scene or bodies, considering them re-victimizing and devoid of relevant informative value. The *Think Olga manual* and the *IPG guides* provide proactive guidance, including the use of images that reiterate the focus on public health. An innovative contribution is the guidance for the management of the post-publication digital environment, recognizing its toxicity. The *Universa Manual* recommends disabling the comments section and taking extra care with social media content.

6.2 Necessary knowledge and interdisciplinary dialogues

In addition to practical procedures, the manuals emphasize the need for a repertoire of specialized knowledge that transcends the traditional skills of the profession, functioning as training programs that define the necessary expertise and point to the fields of knowledge with which journalism must establish dialogue. A comprehensive understanding of the various forms of violence (domestic, sexual, femicide, online) is considered fundamental. A solid knowledge of the relevant legislation, such as the Maria da Penha Law and the Femicide Law, appears as an indispensable prerequisite.

The IPG guides raise this requirement further by demanding an understanding of a complex legal ecosystem. In the context of abortion, it is necessary to be familiar not only with legal permissions, but also with the legislation that guarantees access to services and with ordinances issued by the Ministry of Health. Regarding workplace harassment, legal knowledge extends beyond the Penal Code to include specific legislation, its shortcomings, and international treaties. Knowledge of the law is presented as a tool to “question authorities” and to “identify failures of the State”.

At the same time, the protocols signal the need for deeper conceptual engagement by providing precise definitions. The IPG health guide distinguishes sexual health, reproductive health, sexual rights, and reproductive rights. The guide on abortion details different forms of sexual violence, such as stealthing and marital

rape, providing a vocabulary for reporting invisible violations. The need to work with concepts from the Social Sciences and Psychology is emphasized, such as the “cycle of violence”, which is fundamental to understanding why abusive relationships are difficult to break. The concept of consent is also the subject of a precise definition, seeking to provide a conceptual tool against myths, misinformation, and justifications for sexual violence.

The concept of intersectionality, which analyzes how different axes of oppression (gender, race, class, sexual orientation) intersect and reinforce each other, appears with varying degrees of sophistication in the documents, reflecting the evolution of the feminist debate expressed in the manuals. The Think Olga and Universa manuals highlight specific vulnerabilities of black, indigenous, and less educated women. IPC’s guide to workplace violence details how black women, the poor, and LGBTQIA+ people face combined forms of discrimination. At AzMina Magazine, intersectionality constitutes the analytical foundation, grounded in an intersectional feminist perspective that rejects women as a universal category and incorporates the experiences of trans women, trans men, and non-binary individuals.

6.3 The compass of good practice: lexicon, reflection and positioning

In addition to guidelines and knowledge, the protocols are normative documents that seek to establish an ethical compass, proposing an *ethos* to cover gender violence. The analysis reveals a recurring lexicon whose terms explicitly reject claims of value neutrality. The expression “humanized journalism”, used by the Olga collective, is emblematic, encapsulating the shift in focus from the event to the person, and from crime to public health. An affective vocabulary gains prominence, with terms such as “empathy”, “sensitivity” and “care” being re-signified as essential ethical competencies.

In addition, the manuals establish negative imperatives, with guidelines of “non-re-victimization” and “non-victim-blaming” serving as their core pillars. The Universa Manual states: “Never blame the victim. The victim is never guilty”. This orientation is reiterated by *the Sound Guide* of the *Festival 3i* and the Olga Collective’s mini-manual. The journalist is guided to evaluate each decision in light of its potential to cause additional harm or to reinforce stereotypes.

In conclusion, the analysis reveals a spectrum of positions regarding the role of journalism, ranging from the reform of canons to a more incisive critical stance. The *Universa Manual* and the *IPG guides* embody the reform proposal more strongly, operating within the hegemonic paradigm but seeking to make changes within it. Rather than challenging objectivity head-on, they requalify it by proposing that quality journalism is empathetic, contextualized, and conscious of its impact, aiming toward a higher standard of responsible journalism.

By contrast, the *AzMina Magazine* model is grounded differently and exhibits a more explicit rupture. Consistent with its mission to “confront gender inequalities and oppressions”, *AzMina* rejects any presumption of neutrality, arguing that its journalistic credibility does not derive from a supposed “view from nowhere”. Their commitment to the cause of gender equality precedes and informs journalistic practice, challenging myths of Anglo-Saxon journalism. The *Festival 3i* and *Olga* collective guides incorporate aspects of these two characteristic types. The coexistence and combination of aspects of these two perspectives is the hallmark of all the initiatives analyzed.

7 Discussion and conclusion

The proliferation of manuals, guides, and protocols for journalistic coverage of violence against women in Brazil represents a point of conflict in the journalism ecosystem. These documents emerge as a direct and coordinated response to a history of problematic coverage marked by sensationalism, the spectacularization of pain, the trivialization of gender-based crimes, and the blaming of victims. Its publication by feminist collectives, research institutes, and even major corporate media news portals signals not only an idea of specialization in an area of journalism, but also explicit articulation of epistemic disputes (Carlson, 2023) that reposition the meaning of protocols in journalism.

The comparison conducted among the eight protocols examined reinforces the non-homogeneous nature of these initiatives. We identified a spectrum of approaches ranging from combating disinformation and disparity in content that deals journalistically with the problem of gender violence to the adoption of the intersectionality category as the central analytical matrix. We found parameters such as those adopted by the *UOL* portal, making more ethical practices accessible and palatable to traditional newsrooms. By contrast, the

AzMina Magazine model pushes the boundaries of what is considered ethical and feasible in journalism, normalizing concepts such as intersectionality and the critique of neutrality. The comparative analysis and the synthesis presented point to convergences between all documents in the discussion of ethical parameters centered on the protection, empathy, and non-blaming of the victim. As a whole, the protocols show a transition from a principle-based approach to capacity building in terms of know-how.

Regarding the operational elements of journalistic procedure, there are manuals focused on the topic that provide little detail on how to do it, such as the Think Olga and Patrícia Galvão Institute guides. The Universa and AzMina manuals, on the other hand, present a great level of detail about the procedures. By contrast, the signaling of diverse forms of knowledge necessary for covering violence against women follows an inverse pattern, being more strongly emphasized in guides that are less detailed in procedural terms. Regarding best practices, each manual has different priorities, with varying suggestions and critiques of the dominant journalistic paradigm and the consequences for the coverage of gender-based violence.

Thinking about it from the perspective of thematic specialization, one could imagine that this is an idea that puts the work of journalism professionals in the spotlight, focused on improving coverage from the perspective of individual agent qualification. This perspective, in fact, incorporates a certain effort to transform journalistic procedures, equipping them with conceptual and operational tools capable of addressing gender violence not as an isolated and criminal event, but as a manifestation of structural and systemic inequality.

From this perspective, there is an understanding that, although all protocols converge towards a kind of “ethics of care” – prioritizing the dignity of the victim and their non-re-victimization –, they diverge in their ambitions and strategies, composing a spectrum that goes from the reform of hegemonic journalistic practices to the redefinition of the purpose and ethics of journalism. This would occur by reiterating the presence of a single unifying thread running through all the materials: a paradigmatic shift from a form of journalism focused exclusively on the problem to one that incorporates elements of so-called solutions journalism and rights-based journalism. The insistence on providing practical guidance and service-oriented information – such as the recurring mention of reporting channels, alongside legal information and the framing

of issues such as abortion within a rights-based perspective – exemplifies an expanded role for the journalist.

Operational elements partially corroborate this perception, such as frequent recommendations to “go beyond official sources” and listen carefully to victims, ensuring their safety and anonymity, seek specialists (if necessary), and be extremely careful with the language and images used. In the act of reporting, the guidelines suggest a shift in perspective insofar as they move away from generic recommendations to seek statistics and instead emphasize the importance of technical training for the practice of so-called data journalism, as well as the identification of specific sources relevant to the topic to be addressed. The contextualization of violence as a structural problem (machismo, rape culture, gender inequality, racism) is presented as a key narrative procedure. In the specific case of emphasizing the issue of black women and prioritizing the visibility of their stories, we propose a journalistic action that would directly contribute to a more equitable representation of victims of violence and challenge the power structures that perpetuate marginalization.

However, it should not be overlooked that, more than the individual journalist, who is the basic reference point for this approach focused on “specialization”, analysis of the materials reveals an effort by various organizations and collectives to redefine coverage by mobilizing an even greater number of agents, knowledge, and practices. If there is consensus on the need for a humanized approach, coverage should seek out multiple voices, without granting exclusive authority to journalism, which now finds itself in this epistemic dispute.

The bodies of knowledge identified as necessary range from familiarity with specific legislation and the various types of violence to an understanding of concepts such as the cycle of violence, consent, intersectionality (gender and race), and the psychosocial impact of trauma. These issues are associated with best practices through their articulation with the themes of ethics, responsibility, empathy, and sensitivity. Journalism is viewed not merely as a transmitter of facts, but as another social actor (Carvalho, 2023) with the potential to contribute to the prevention of violence and to cultural transformation – or, conversely, to the perpetuation of stereotypes and the blaming of victims. The need for critical reflection on one’s own practice and broader environment of production (and not just newsrooms) is an inseparable dimension of these practices. Yet, also in this case, the scrutiny of journalism focuses on action as something distributed

and constituted through a set of practices. This theoretical-practical framework does not seem to be a repertoire to be individually acquired by the professional journalist.

Therefore, the importance of using statistical data to assess the scale of the problem, which appears repeatedly in the materials, does so in a way that differs from the idea of seeking a more accurate determination of facts according to an investigative journalism model. It involves appropriating methods and technologies to produce missing data and “counter-data”, a form of activism that builds counter-hegemonic records capable of enabling the emergence of a restorative and transformative data science (D'Ignazio et al., 2024, p. 31).

The manuals on journalistic coverage of gender violence against women, although they follow on from previous guides, do not appear to be fully aligned with the tradition of prescribing or standardizing journalistic action. By not targeting the individual operator and going beyond the universe of agents directly involved in production, the manuals examined can be perceived in what Aznar et al. (2024) called a second generation of codes. This second generation of manuals is marked by combined processes of co-regulation between different social agents (activist organizations; new journalistic arrangements; expert communities, etc.) and social self-regulation, when organizations that are not thematically or professionally related to the field of communication, but from different spheres affected by it, provide guidelines for journalistic work, characterizing the emergence of a new journalistic/media ecosystem (Aznar et al., 2024, p.10).

It is important to remember that, until then, protocols had not been developed to address what practitioners should do and what resources they should use in journalistic production situations. They played a limited role in articulating ethical and epistemic dimensions with technical precepts. Current materials, however, attempt to design situated forms of action, capable of explaining the different dimensions present in the activities and making them interpretable not only by practitioners, but also by readers/interlocutors, overcoming dichotomies between principled guidance and technical training. They make it possible to glimpse features of a reflexive disposition that signal which forms of practical knowledge (knowledge of know-how) and which perspectives on practical domains are at stake.

The guidelines based on such protocols propose to reposition journalism within the constellation of knowledges, removing it from a unique and sovereign position of enunciation and situating it instead as

one of the levers within a broad network of knowledge and expertise. The complexity of the topic imposes a permanent conversation with other fields of activity. This coding represents an attempt to institutionalize an ethic of care (Steiner, 2018) by making certain re-victimizing narratives discursively unacceptable in journalism. The perspective emphasizes that practices and discourses that bear witness to gender violence in alternative ways require that this issue be revisited with proposals such as more “empathetic” journalism or journalism that is capable of listening to women’s suffering (Steiner, 2018), which would enable them to produce some kind of ethical action.

Thus, even procedures considered standard in the field, such as “hearing both sides”, are called into question. Considering that it is not the role of reporting to “give space to the words of an aggressor”, there is tension with the dogma of “neutrality”, arguing that artificial balance can serve injustice. In the case of violence against women, the guides are, in fact, teaching practitioners to actively construct a narrative aligned with human rights, adopting a “positioned reflective journalistic practice” (Moraes, 2023).

The concerns expressed about the circulation of published material also signal a broadening of the idea of accountability for actions, revealing a change in the conception of the role of journalists. Responsibility extends to curating the informational space that the publication creates, a defensive curatorial practice that anticipates the possibility of attacks and hate speech. This redefines the “product” of journalistic work: it is not only the article itself, but also the experience of engaging with it. By proposing to “control comments”, the newspaper assumes the responsibility of protecting not only the dignity of the person portrayed in the article, but also the integrity of the narrative itself and readers who could be exposed to violent speech. The emphasis shifts from an individualistic paradigm, which determines an episodic and individual role for professionals who create and publish content, to a vision of continuous and distributed action – common and collective – to curate an information ecosystem.

The detailed analysis of manuals and guides for covering violence against women reveals a complex and changing field in journalism. Taken together, they represent more than just lists of best practices or the “codification” of empathy as a professional procedure. By “making explicit” knowledge inscribed in professional practices, they operate as a device that reveals beliefs, assumptions, and theories that are integral and constitutive of the very activity of journalism. It is

not a matter of dealing with the reality of violence as new knowledge to be acquired, but of taking this knowledge as a way of relating to the world. This indicates the relevance of investigating, from the reality of the protocols, the possible relationships between learning, knowledge and experience in this renewed journalistic environment.

In terms of the operational elements of journalistic procedure, protocols vary in terms of the level of detail regarding procedures. However, they converge in emphasizing the importance of diverse and distributed forms of knowledge necessary to cover violence against women, in association with other practices, and capable of performing practical and cooperative intelligence. In this sense, manuals disrupt and distort the relationship between journalism practitioners and journalism and, in line with reflections proposed by Witschge and Sabbah (2023), they mainly call into question not only the relationship between journalism and its audiences, but also the diversity of communities affected by it.

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