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“Novinha(s) from Acre”: a discussion on gender and ethics in journalistic coverage on the website ac24horas

“Novinha(s) do Acre”: uma discussão sobre gênero e ética na cobertura jornalística no website ac24horas

“Novinha(s) do Acre”: una discusión sobre género y ética en la cobertura periodística en el sitio web ac24horas

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Abstract

This article analyzes the journalistic ethics of the website ac24horas based on its coverage of gender issues involving underage girls. The corpus consists of eight news articles that include the term “novinha” in their titles, collected between 2016 and 2021. In the context of funk, the use of the term “novinha” emerged in Brazilian funk as a way to objectify and sexualize the body of a young woman, using bibliographic research and content analysis, as described by Laurence Bardin (2016), as our methodology. When journalists appropriate this term and use it in news, we see that this meaning persists. All articles published on ac24horas that include the word “novinha(s)” in the title were selected for analysis. The bibliographic references include studies by Simone de Beauvoir (2019), Rogério Christofolletti (2008, 2016), and Aldo Antônio Schmitz (2011), among other authors.

Keywords: Journalistic ethics; journalism; gender; women.

Resumo

O presente artigo analisa a ética jornalística do website ac24horas a partir da cobertura sobre questões de gênero envolvendo mulheres menores de idade. O corpus é formado por oito textos noticiosos que levam o termo “novinha” em seu título coletados entre 2016 e 2021. No contexto do funk, o uso do termo “novinha” surgiu no funk brasileiro como forma de objetificar e sexualizar o corpo de uma jovem mulher, tendo como metodologia a pesquisa bibliográfica e a Análise de Conteúdo, de Laurence Bardin (2016). Quando o jornalista se apropria desse termo e utiliza em notícias percebemos que esse significado ainda permanece. Foram selecionadas para análise todas as matérias publicadas no ac24horas que constam no título a palavra “novinha(s)”. Como referencial bibliográfico faz-se uso de estudos de Simone de Beauvoir (2019), Rogério Christofolletti (2008, 2016) e Aldo Antônio Schmitz (2011), entre outros autores.

Palavras-chave: Ética jornalística; gênero; jornalismo; mulheres.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la ética periodística del sitio web ac24horas en función de su cobertura de cuestiones de género que involucran a mujeres jóvenes. El corpus consta de ocho artículos periodísticos con el término “novinha” en



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sus títulos, recopilados entre 2016 y 2021. En el contexto del funk, entendemos que el término "novinha" surgió en la música funk brasileña y se utiliza para cosificar y sexualizar el cuerpo de una mujer joven, utilizando la investigación bibliográfica y el análisis de contenido, según lo descrito por Laurence Bardin (2016), como nuestra metodología. Cuando los periodistas se apropian de este término y lo utilizan en sus artículos periodísticos, nos damos cuenta de que este significado persiste. Se seleccionaron para el análisis todos los artículos publicados en ac24horas que incluyen la palabra "novinha(s)" en el título. Las referencias bibliográficas incluyen estudios de Simone de Beauvoir (2019), Rogério Christofoletti (2008, 2016) y Aldo Antônio Schmitz (2011), entre otros.

Palabras clave: Ética periodística; género; mujeres; periodismo.

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Introduction

This work aims to analyze the journalistic ethics of the website ac24horas based on its coverage of gender issues involving underage girls. The corpus consists of eight news that include the term “*novinha*”¹ in their title. The texts were published between the years 2016 and 2021. To study the subjects, we chose to use as our methodology the Content Analysis, by Laurence Bardin (2016), which is defined by the author herself as a set of techniques for analyzing communications. All eight texts found containing the term “*novinha*” are studied in this article.

The discomfort of seeing the term “*novinha*” in news titles, where young women were victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, sparked curiosity about whether the practice was common both on ac24horas and on other news websites in Acre.

We also searched other websites in Acre, such as G1 Acre; ContilNet; Ecos da Notícia; Agazeta.net; Agazeta do Acre and Opinião. News articles containing the term “*novinha*” were found in two of them: ContilNet and Ecos da Notícias. These media used the term more specifically: ContilNet in a single article, and Ecos da Notícia in two, both of which were publications of journalistic texts extracted from ac24horas, giving due credit to the authors.

Below are the titles, dates, and journalist identifications of the articles found on ac24horas, which will be analyzed in this article:

Table 1 - News collected from the website ac24horas during the development of the master’s thesis research project, organized by the author of the text herself

NEWS HEADLINE	JOURNALIST'S NAME	PUBLICATION DATE
" <i>Novinha</i> " is attacked with machete blows in Sena Madureira	By Staff	07/15/2016
" <i>Novinha</i> from the Hilux" is arrested in Rio Branco accused of participating in a gang that stole pickup trucks	By Staff	08/30/2017
" <i>Novinhas</i> " from Sena Madureira record the campaign "The Brazil I want" and the video goes viral on social media"	By Staff	07/03/2018
Camera captures moment when " <i>novinha</i> " steals motorcycle	By Staff	05/05/2019
Military Police act quickly and arrest <i>novinha</i> who stole a motorcycle	By Staff	07/20/2019
" <i>Novinhas</i> " get into a fistfight at Terminal Urbano, watch the video	By Staff	07/21/2019
" <i>Novinhas</i> " from Acre who want to be supported by rich men register on a portal	Leônidas Badaró	03/14/2020
" <i>Novinhas</i> " from Acre lured into prostitution in Bolivia are rescued by the Federal Police	Thais Farias	03/28/2021

The term “*novinhas*” and gender issues

When we consider the term “woman” from a language perspective, we understand that its meanings are not fixed; they are multiple and related to historical, social, and cultural contexts. We also understand that the meanings created about women are linked to power relations. Michel Foucault (1996) states that language and the discourses we produce are not neutral or impartial processes. They are pre-existing products of control and work to reinforce powers. Thus, discourses produced about women present historical, social, and cultural contexts, and with this, reinforce control, exclusion, and domination, because most of the time these discourses are produced by those who hold power, in this case, men.

Simone de Beauvoir (2019) discusses aspects that differentiate men from women, stating that “man represents both the positive and the neutral, to the point that we say ‘men’ to designate human beings [...] The woman appears as the negative, so that every determination is imputed to her as a limitation, without reciprocity” (Beauvoir, 2019, p. 11-12). And it continues:

Women define and differentiate themselves in relation to men, not the other way around, since humanity is masculine, and men define women not in themselves, but in relation to themselves; in this way, women are disregarded as autonomous beings. Man is considered the subject, the absolute, while woman is the other, that which is not defined and receives definition (Beauvoir, 2019, p. 9) (my translation).

¹ In this text, the term “*novinha*” will be used in Portuguese and means a sexualized young woman.



Binary thinking underpins the construction of difference and the objectification of this group based on gender issues. Women are constructed as the "other" in relation to society, therefore, their sexuality and social behavior are commonly used as justification for oppressive attitudes, since the group of women is marked as deviant, if we compare it to what is socially considered "civilized" and "normal," men.

For a long time, women were kept away from the arts, from work outside their homes, and from the city itself. They did not participate alongside men in most social activities, but they were represented, mainly through the sexualization of their bodies, for example, in paintings and sculptures, and more recently in advertising. The image of women is associated with appealing and sexist advertising campaigns that expose the female body in order to sell some type of product to men. "Even today, the female body, silent and dissected, continues to be the main support of advertising" (Perrot, 2003, p. 15).

Stuart Hall (2016) discusses fetishism, a concept related to representation and stereotyping, to explain the sexualization of the female body. She ceases to be a social subject, like the man, and is transformed into an object of desire for that man. Fetishism is related to the forbidden, to what is provocative, to a discourse that refers to the visible, but which at the same time cannot be seen. It is "then a strategy to be everything at once: both to represent and not to represent the object of pleasure and desire that is considered taboo, dangerous or forbidden" (Hall, 2016, p. 209).

Therefore, in attempting to understand the gender issues discussed in the corpus studied here, it is also important to analyze the use of the term "novinha". According to researcher Wagner Silva (2019), "the term refers to a hypersexualization of underage women who, in the funk universe, arouse fetishes, for example, such as that of virginity" (Silva, 2019, p.8). Thus, for the author (2019), in the early 2000s, at a time of greater eroticism in funk, the woman emerges as an object of male satisfaction in a position of submission where her body and sexuality are the main values. An example of this sexualization is the funk song "*Prisioneira*" by Bonde do Tigrão, released in 2010, which uses the term "novinha". Here's an excerpt:

Hands up, young girl
Hands up, young girl
Why?
Because today you're under arrest
You're under arrest, you're under arrest
[...]
And now I'm going to tell you your rights, huh
You have the right to sit
You have the right to bounce
You have the right to sit
To bounce, to twerk
You also have the right to stay quiet
(Bonde do Tigrão, 2010)

In this context, women appear to be male objects, without a will of their own, who need to be obedient and carry out commands. The lyrics have an erotic connotation, which can be observed through the use of the verbs "sit," "bounce," and "shake," which refer to sexual activity. And besides satisfying man's physical needs, she must remain quiet, silenced. Its existence is basically limited to the objectification of the body for the male practice of sex.

In 2014, Mc Romântico released "*As novinha 'tão' sensacional*" which also received a sertanejo version that same year, performed by the duo Pedro Paulo and Alex. The song has six verses:

The young girls are sensational
The young girls are sensational
Going down nicely, holding on tight
Going up nicely, holding on tight
Shaking it nicely, holding on tight
This is so good, it's sensational
(Mc Romântico, 2014)

Once again, women are portrayed as merely bodies available to give pleasure to men. She must be beautiful, “sensational,” to arouse the man’s interest and satisfy him. The terms “going down,” “going up,” “shaking,” and “holding,” once again, emphasize the sexual connotation of the song. Therefore, Silva (2019) states that in the universe of eroticization of funk, it is up to

women, in most cases, to assume the condition of a product, a static, non-fluid role. Their sexuality and identities lack the nuances that men possess [...] Their identity is recurrently limited to what their bodies can offer (Silva, 2019, p. 5).

In the quote lyrics, women are relegated to a role of submission to men. They have no identity, no occupation, they neither work nor study. They exist solely and exclusively for the benefit of man, they must always serve him, they have no desires or will of their own. It’s important to understand that even though the use of the term “novinha” with sexual connotations began in the funk music movement around the year 2000, the term is still used today and is no longer limited to songs of this musical genre. In addition to migrating to other genres, the term also appears in the news.

Ethics and journalistic practices

Kovach and Rosenstiel state that “the main purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (2004, p. 31). Adding to this statement, Rogério Christofolletti (2008) points out that “journalism distinguishes itself from gossip, rumor, and hearsay by this commitment to offering reliable and responsible information, among other important differences” (Christofolletti, 2008, p. 42).

Based on these thoughts, we can understand journalistic practice as a production that needs to have credibility, based on dialogue with sources, data collection, and the entire journalistic verification process, taking into account the public interest and writing the text using language accessible to all.

It is important to emphasize that the reader, in the case of the articles analyzed here, is not a passive recipient of the news, someone who does not develop the information and only accepts it as presented by the journalist. On the contrary, the public receives the product of journalistic work and decides what is useful to them or not, what they should or should not take into consideration. Therefore, it is important to follow investigative procedures during news production.

When a journalist does not provide this reliable and responsible information, he differs little or not at all from the average person, the non-journalist, who does not carry out investigative work and does not verify the information that has been passed on to him, thus becoming merely a replicator of information, without any journalistic work involved (Freitas, 2021, p. 32).

In other words, if information is not checked and verified, it does not follow the principles of journalistic work; it is just another piece of information circulating in society. Furthermore, the work of journalists must also be guided by the profession’s code of ethics, which was organized by the National Federation of Journalists (Fenaj) in 2007. This code cites guidelines and professional conduct to guide and ensure the execution of good work, both for the journalist and for society in general, which is the final “consumer” of the journalistic product.

Eugênio Bucci understands that “the internet, therefore, although it brings new technological openings that shorten paths, does not retire the precepts of good journalism” (2000, p.127). The author emphasizes that even with the internet boom, which has facilitated the publication and increasingly fast viral spread of news, we cannot and should not abandon good journalistic practices, such as: investigation, fact-checking, plurality of sources, and information handling.

Contemporary journalism cannot be limited to declarative journalism, that is, journalism based solely on statements from sources (Oliveira, 2018), without proper investigation. According to Israel Dias de Oliveira (2018), it is the journalist’s responsibility to investigate the veracity of the statements and not just publish them. The journalist cannot justify this behavior by claiming that they live under the pressure of speed; it is necessary, therefore, to develop a quick and easy method of investigation to meet their current needs.



According to Christofolletti and Vieira, clicks and views cannot be the most important metrics for a media's editorial decisions. "Nor can they be the only ones guiding decision-making in a strategy to attract the attention of audiences and funders" (Christofolletti; Vieira, 2016, p. 85).

Still following Christofolletti's (2016) line of thought, accuracy must take precedence over speed. "Although we are living in a dizzyingly accelerated era, journalism cannot renounce a fundamental value like accuracy in order to poorly and hastily serve its audience" (Christofolletti, 2016, p. 132). It is necessary to have mastery over the subject matter being addressed in order to treat it in depth, without constructing news texts using vague and superficial information. Furthermore, journalists should not replicate information from other medias without checking it or seeking out their own information to construct the news story. Pâmela Freitas states that:

When there is no investigation, in-depth analysis, and research into what one intends to discuss, the reporter becomes just another disseminator of information in the virtual realm, neglecting their professional attribute of informing the reader with the highest possible level of commitment. And for that, it is not even necessary to be a journalist (Freitas, 2021, p. 35).

Journalism is a profession within the social sphere, and its social practices need to be reflected upon. Reflecting on journalistic practices means thinking about the work being done, how it is being produced, for whom it is being done, and its social impact. This contributes to the credibility of journalism, which should strive for better execution to reduce, for example, the chances of error and professional misconduct.

News analysis

Of the eight articles analyzed here, six cite the police as a source of information. And in five of them, the police are the journalist's only source of information. It should be noted that there is no problem in using Public Security as a source of information for the media, as long as it is not the only source used and its statements are verified.

Regarding official sources, in this specific case – the police, Aldo Antônio Schmitz (2011) states that they are preferred by journalists, "because their actions and strategies have a direct impact on the public interest, due to their capacity and power of influence, facilitated and systematic access to media agendas" (Schmitz, 2011, p. 48). The author (2011) further emphasizes that press relations cannot be considered a source, but rather a bridge that mediates the interests of those it advises (Schmitz, 2011).

In the case of these six news, the use of the police as the main and/or only source of information can be understood as a way for the journalist to validate their text and the information contained therein. This is because the police are seen as the authority in the situation and responsible for "establishing peace" and "controlling security" in society.

Of the eight news, six do not bear the signature of a journalist; the text is simply classified as "By Staff". Reflecting on the practice allows us to question such acts. Why didn't the journalist want to sign the published text? Language is not neutral; it is always intentional. When you use the term "novinha" to refer to a group of women, you are already explicitly stating your opinion and thoughts about that particular group. We know that impartiality and neutrality are a myth, and that's not the issue here. However, journalists are still prohibited from engaging in discriminatory and humiliating practices during their work. We don't know if the journalist didn't sign the articles because he disagreed with the practice, but was subjected to it by a decision of superiors, or if he freely and spontaneously chose to use the term in a pejorative way.

The main common factor among the eight articles analyzed here is the use of the term "novinha" in all of them. We will start from the premise that journalists should not use adjectives, whatever they may be. Except in special situations, such as sports commentary, for example. But in news texts, journalists need to avoid making value judgments, which become evident with the use of adjectives.

As we saw earlier, the term "novinha" in the context of Brazilian funk music is used as a way to objectify and sexualize the young woman's body. When a journalist appropriates this term and uses it in their writing, the meaning remains. Using only this woman's body and sexuality as a way to represent her in the media. Furthermore, the use of the pejorative term is unnecessary and disproportionate, leading the reader to draw hasty conclusions about the person being discussed.

When using phrases like “*novinhas* attack each other”, “*novinhas* participate in a general brawl,” or “*novinhas* seek men to support them” with the pejorative term right in the title, the journalist reinforces stereotypes such as that of the gold-digging woman, who only wants the man’s money; or even emphasizes the idea that women are fighting over men – even if the motivation for the fight has not been revealed. By portraying young women in positions of rivalry and engaging in physical aggression, the reader is led to believe that the motivation may be a romantic relationship with a boyfriend or husband.

Furthermore, when it comes to news coverage where the heterosexual, white man is presented as the center of the discussion, it is not common to see his sexuality and bodies exposed in this way. This only happens with minority groups, such as women. What is the relevance of knowing that there are women from Acre on a dating site looking for men with money? Are there young men looking for older women with money? Probably yes, but this doesn’t become a topic in the media because men are given the right to exist in whatever way they see fit, while women, even when they are victims of a crime, as in the case of the three young women rescued by the Federal Police who were taken to Bolivia as victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, have their practices and conduct questioned by the website ac24horas.

In the first article published, titled “‘*Novinha*’ is attacked with machete blows in Sena Madureira”², on September 15, 2016, the text reports that a 17-year-old girl was attacked with machete blows while inside her home and shows an image of a woman lying on a stretcher on the floor, with her face blurred, her bra showing, and her entire body covered in blood. It is not possible to identify for sure who the source of the news is; it is inferred that the information is from the police, when it mentions that the police should investigate the case, but it does not make this clear.

Paragraph four of article 7 of the Code of Ethics for Journalists states that journalists cannot: “expose people who are threatened, exploited or at risk of death, concealing their identification, even partially, through voice, physical features, indication of places of work or residence, or any other signs” (Fenaj, 2007). And that is exactly what we observe, as the victim, a minor, was physically assaulted and exposed by the website through a photograph, even though the image is blurred. The victim appears only in a bra and covered in blood, which clearly shows the marks of the violence she suffered.

In the second article, “‘*Novinha*’ from the Hilux’ is arrested in Rio Branco accused of participating in a gang that stole pickup trucks”³, published on August 30, 2017, the source is also the police, and it is reported that a 15-year-old minor was apprehended “suspected of participating in a gang specializing in the theft of pickup trucks in Rio Branco”. According to the text, the young woman “attracted the victims’ attention using her charm and beauty, and when they became vulnerable, she called the rest of the gang who then announced the robbery”.

It is important to point out that in the headline of the article, ac24horas says that the minor is “accused” of participating in the criminal group, when, in fact, the case should be treated as enticement of minors. Furthermore, throughout the text it is stated that a police report was filed against the alleged group, meaning that the situation was still in the process of being opened as a police investigation. In that case, all the people would still be suspected of committing that crime.

Therefore, the term “accused” would not be the most appropriate, but rather “suspect”, since the process is still in the criminal investigation phase by a Civil Police delegate, and only after the end of the inquiry, if there is sufficient evidence, will the inquiry be sent to the State Public Prosecutor’s Office, which receives the complaint and decides whether to accept it or not. From that point on, by accepting the complaint, the investigation becomes a criminal process and the person is then accused of a crime. However, considering that she is a minor, the Statute of Children and Adolescents states in its article 104 that “minors under 18 years of age are criminally irresponsible, subject to the measures provided for in this law. Sole paragraph - For the purposes of this law, the age of the adolescent at the date of the act must be considered” (Brasil, 1990).

In the third article, “‘*Novinhas*’ from Sena Madureira record the campaign ‘The Brazil I want’ and the video goes viral on social media”⁴, published on July 3, 2018, the source used in the text is a video that allegedly circulated on WhatsApp and was recorded by young people from the interior of Acre. In this particular article, the text does not provide any information of public interest; it simply states that the video

² Available at <<https://ac24horas.com/2016/07/15/novinha-e-agredida-a-golpes-de-facao-em-sena-madureira>>. Accessed on October 28, 2023.

³ Available at <https://ac24horas.com/2017/08/30/novinha-da-hilux-e-detida-em-rio-branco-acusada-de-participar-de-quadrilha-que-roubava-caminhonetes>. Accessed on October 28, 2023.

⁴ Available at <https://ac24horas.com/2018/07/03/novinhas-de-sena-madureira-gravam-campanha-brasil-que-eu-queiro-e-video-bomba-nas-redes-sociais>. Accessed on October 28, 2023.



is a parody of the Rede Globo program “The Brazil I Want”⁵, and then the journalist writes what the young women say in the video. The video is posted at the end.

The Code of Ethics, in its article 6, states that it is the duty of the journalist to: “disclose facts and information of public interest” and “respect the right to intimacy, privacy, honor and image of the citizen” (Fenaj, 2007). We can see that the satirical video recorded by the friends adds nothing to people’s social lives, so it shouldn’t have become a topic in media. Even if the two of them posted the video on their digital social networks, which we don’t know if that’s the case, that wouldn’t give the newspaper the right to use the information without authorization.

The fourth article, “‘Novinhas’ get into a fistfight at Terminal Urbano⁶, watch the video” published on May 5, 2019, is also based on a video posted on social media. In this time, the video shows four women and one man fighting at the Rio Branco Urban Terminal. The journalist describes what can be seen in the video. It is not possible, for example, to know who the people involved are, the motivation for the fight, and how it all happened. In other words, of the six questions we should answer in the lead – who, what, when, why, where, and how – three are not answered, and the other three are answered only partially; even so, the media chose to publish the story.

The lack of information for producing the text, and yet the decision to write and publish, makes us question the interests of the journalist and the website in publishing it. This leads us to infer that the journalistic practice, in this case, is interested in increasing website views and not in the public interest and the quality of the journalism being produced. The authors studied here say:

Clicks and page views cannot be the most important metrics for editorial decisions at an online news. Nor can they be the only ones guiding decision-making in a strategy to attract the attention of audiences and funders (Christofoletti; Vieira, 2016, p. 85).

Corroborating this thought, the Code of Ethics of Brazilian Journalists, in its first chapter, which deals with the right to information, states that “access to information of relevant public interest is a fundamental right” and that “the dissemination of accurate and correct information is the duty of the media and must be fulfilled regardless of its legal nature and the political line of its owners and/or directors” and that “the production and dissemination of information must be guided by the veracity of the facts and have as its purpose the public interest” (Fenaj, 2007).

In the fifth article, “Camera captures moment when ‘novinha’ steals motorcycle”⁷, published on July 20, 2019, we see a difference between this and the other police reports, because in this case, the source appears to be the victim, and not the police. The text does not directly state that the victim, Rubens Azevedo da Silva, was interviewed, but by mentioning his name and stating that a police report was filed, it suggests to the reader that he was interviewed by the journalist. The following day, July 21, 2019, the sixth article was published, “Military Police act quickly and arrest *novinha* who stole motorcycle”⁸, with a “resolution” of the theft that occurred. Both articles are uninformative and lack the necessary explanations for the public to understand what happened.

In the penultimate article, “‘Novinhas’ from Acre who want to be supported by rich men register on a portal”⁹, written by Leônidas Badaró and published on March 14, 2020, a dating website called Meu Patrocínio (My Sponsorship) is presented. The page description says “for successful and attractive people.” Men and women create a profile and search for a partner with items that attract them; women post sensual photos, while men state what they can offer. The site does not allow minors, and the article states that the women from Acre found on the platform are between 18 and 34 years old.

⁵ On January 14, 2018, the year of the presidential elections, Globo launched the segment “The Brazil I Want,” in which viewers were invited to record a 15-second video describing the Brazil they wanted for the future. The testimonials began airing on the network’s news programs starting in March. Available at <<https://memoriaglobo.globo.com/jornalismo/jornalismo-e-telejornais/jornal-hoje/quadros-e-colunas/noticia/o-brasil-que-eu-queiro.ghtml>>. Accessed on December 19, 2023.

⁶ Available at <<https://ac24horas.com/2019/05/05/novinhas-se-travam-no-pau-no-terminal-urbano/>>. Accessed on October 28, 2023.

⁷ Available at <<https://ac24horas.com/2019/07/20/camera-flagra-momento-em-que-novinha-rouba-motocicleta-em-rio-branco/>>. Accessed on October 28, 2023.

⁸ Available at <<https://ac24horas.com/2019/07/21/policia-militar-age-rapido-e-prende-novinha-que-roubou-moto/>>. Accessed on October 28, 2023.

⁹ Available at <https://ac24horas.com/2020/03/14/novinhas-acreanas-que-querem-ser-bancadas-por-homens-ricos-se-cadastram-em-portal/#google_vignette>. Accessed on October 28, 2023.



The text provides little information about the women from Acre who are on the platform; besides their age, it also mentions the cities where they live. Most of the article is a description of who the sugar babies¹⁰ and sugar daddies¹¹ are, and how much is paid to use the platform. The public interest factor needs to be taken into consideration. Who cares whether women from Acre are on dating platforms looking for successful men? Furthermore, it doesn't mention the men who are on the platform, which likely exists. Who are they? Why the interest in paying to date younger women? Once again, the term “*novinha*” appears as a pejorative way of addressing female sexuality, while men are not questioned about their use of the aforementioned website.

The website *ac24horas* suggests a dating site for sexual purposes, emphasizing the meeting of young women with older men. The presence or absence of women from Acre on the aforementioned website is not a criterion for newsworthiness, and it tends to lead people to create prejudices, mainly about the women who participate on the site, since there is no reflection or discussion in the text about this type of practice, such as: why is it common for older men to want to get involved with younger women? Another possibility for promoting this site would be paid advertising, but this was not indicated by the site either.

The last selected article is written by journalist Thaís Farias, “‘*Novinhas*’ from Acre lured into prostitution in Bolivia are rescued by the Federal Police”¹², and was published on March 28, 2021. The text was copied verbatim from the Instagram account of the Federal Police of Acre, but it does not provide credit and is signed by a journalist from *ac24horas*. This practice is considered plagiarism. Article 6 of the Code of Ethics for Journalists states that it is the duty of the journalist to “IX - respect the copyright and intellectual property rights of journalists in all their forms”, and Article 7 states that the journalist cannot “VIII - assume responsibility for publications, images and texts in whose production he or she did not participate” (Fenaj, 2007) (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Publication made on the Instagram account of the Federal Police of Acre on March 28, 2021



The text contains little information about the case, probably because these are crimes that are generally investigated under secrecy and because one of the three victims is a minor. The original text from the Federal Police does not use the term “*novinha*”, but rather young women. In other words, the choice to use the term “*novinha*” to refer to the group of women victims of violence came from the media itself or the journalist.

The journalist may have tried to use the derogatory term, referring to the bodies and sexuality of these women, as a way to attract the reader's attention, generate engagement with the text, and achieve a higher number of hits. The phrase “Young women from Acre are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in Bolivia” would attract far less attention and have less impact than “*novinhas* from Acre lured into prostitution”. Article 11 of Fenaj states that journalists cannot publish information “II - of a morbid, sensationalist nature or contrary to human values, especially in the coverage of crimes and accidents”. And once again, female sexuality and the female body appear as tools of engagement and appropriation to boost the reach of the media.

¹⁰ According to the platform mentioned in the article, “sugar baby” is a term used to define young people, mostly women, who seek a relationship with older, successful individuals who can provide them with the best that the world has to offer, through travel, gifts, professional help, and mentorship.

¹¹ According to the platform, a sugar daddy is a generous, experienced, confident, successful man who works hard and is therefore very prosperous, and who likes to share his wealth, knowledge, and moments with his sugar baby.

¹² Available at <<https://ac24horas.com/2021/03/28/novinhas-aliciadas-para-se-prostituir-na-bolivia-sao-resgatadas-pela-pf/>>. Accessed on October 28, 2023.

Michelle Perrot (2003), in a text published in a collection on the debate about the female body, states that “the object of the gaze and of desire, it [the female body] is spoken of. But it remains silent. Women do not speak, they should not speak of it. The modesty that covers its limbs or closes its lips is the very mark of femininity” (Perrot, 2003, p. 13). In other words, only others can speak about a woman’s body, which is noticeable both in the text that talks about young victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking, and in the text where the young women speak openly about sex and sexuality, and the journalist identifies that as something that should receive attention and become news.

Final considerations

This article analyzes the journalistic ethics of ac24horas based on its coverage of gender issues involving young women identified as “*novinhas*” in eight news stories, considering the following aspects: the first is the single source – the police. Six news articles used only the police perspective on the case, and sometimes this occurred implicitly, without explaining the origin of the information, leaving only clues. Judging by the amount of material we analyzed and the different time span (2016 to 2021), we can understand that, as a second aspect, there is a certain recurrence of this practice in the journalism of ac24horas.

The second aspect is the little or almost no fact-checking present in the website’s journalistic practice, and this can be seen in the lack of information and the fact that the texts, in general, do not answer the basic questions of a simple lead, for example. Therefore, there is a predominance of declarative journalism, which repeats information extracted from sources without checking it. Furthermore, the third aspect concerns disconnected information that can contribute to discrediting journalistic practice, a problem it has faced in recent years, and call into question the credibility of this media.

It was possible to identify at least eight violations of the Code of Ethics for Brazilian Journalists: “access to information of relevant public interest is a fundamental right”; therefore, “the dissemination of accurate and correct information is the duty of the media and must be fulfilled regardless of its legal nature [...] and the political leanings of its owners and/or directors”; “the production and dissemination of information must be guided by the veracity of the facts and have as its purpose the public interest”; it is the duty of the journalist to “disseminate facts and information of public interest”, “respect the right to intimacy, privacy, honor and image of the citizen”, “respect the copyright and intellectual property rights of the journalist in all its forms”; the journalist cannot “assume responsibility for publications, images, and texts in whose production he or she did not participate,” “use their status as a journalist to obtain personal advantages”, and “the journalist cannot disseminate information of a morbid, sensationalist nature or contrary to human values, especially in the coverage of crimes and accidents”. The Fenaj code should guide the work of journalists in newsrooms, but in this case, it was not followed by the professionals at ac24horas.

When it comes to gender issues, we realize that the use of the term “*novinha*” always emphasizes the sexuality of these young women, who in some cases are minors. The lack of information, which has already been mentioned, makes it difficult to interpret who these women presented in the news are. The common factor in the corpus is the way the female body is sexualized.

Another inference is the use of the term “*novinha*” as a resource to engage publications and, consequently, get more clicks and views on the website and social networks of the vehicle. The derogatory term would be used intentionally solely to attract the public’s attention and achieve interaction with the reader. In some cases, they may even comment on the post and share it with others because of the term used.

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