

Covering Gender in Latin America

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Event hears how regional outlets fail to properly cover vital issues.

Journalists and activists have called for greater attention to be paid to issues of gender violence, feminism and the LGBTI community across the Latin American media landscape.

“If it doesn’t have a gender perspective, it isn’t good journalism,” Catalina Ruiz-Navarro, the editor of the magazine **Volcánica**, told delegates to the recent Latin American Digital Media and Journalism Forum in Mexico City.

Ruiz-Navarro, who also founded the **(e)stereotipas** website, argued that regional media had failed to properly cover the issues of gender violence suffered by millions of women in Latin America.

In 2016, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) reported that a woman died every two hours in the region because of her gender.

Ruiz-Navarro told the November 2017 event that the tone of much of the current coverage of such violence was sensationalistic, “which is why you have to be very conscious about the images that are reproduced and how stories [about attacks against women] are told,” she continued.

In 2014 the Mexican magazine *emeequis* wrote an exposé on **The Young Man who Played the Piano (and quartered his girlfriend)** a story about the murder of a young woman in which -as its own author later recognised - laid part of the blame on the victim for her own death.

Journalist Patricia Orozco, from the radio station **Onda Local** in Nicaragua, argued that reporters of any gender should challenge such bias.

“It doesn’t just mean talking about how women are treated badly,” she argued. “Gender violence is a social problem. Journalists, wherever they are, have to be on the side of women and not on the side of power.”

According to **reports** by women’s rights organisations, just in Nicaragua, where Orozco is from, 20 women were murdered between January and May 2017.

Ruiz-Navarro went on to argue that the media atmosphere served to normalise gender violence.

She said that it was vital that “women [victims] should have identities; we should find out their stories, know what their dreams were, what they wanted to do in our society. It is very important to individualise each case”.

Mael Vallejo is editorial director of the magazine **Chilango** and the newspaper **Máspormás**, both focusing on Mexico City.

He argued that men, who made up the majority of journalists, feared feminism. They were “afraid of tackling the subject, afraid of women’s empowerment,” Vallejo continued.

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, on average five women a day were killed in Mexico between 2000 and 2015.

Vallejo admitted that his own publications “have definitely transmitted a [macho] language, on the cover, in interviews, in photos. First we had to understand that we are being macho and, then, we had to **start to change**,” said Vallejo, adding that both outlets began to tackle gender issues.

“Chilango is not a magazine that normally covers such social or tough subjects, but we accepted that it was impossible not to see them and not to speak up,” he continued. “So, as all media has a politics and sports section, they should also all internalise feminism and gender violence; they are daily issues.”

For the first time ever, the forum also included a panel on LGBTI media from the region.

Delegates heard that the LGBTI community’s situation varied widely across Latin America. While Argentina, for example, has approved an progressive gender identity law, homosexuality remains illegal in other countries in the region.

Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Colombia have legalised same sex marriage and it is also legal in several Mexican states. Ecuador and Chile also now recognise same-sex civil unions. But Barbados, Belize,

Granada, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago are among the 72 states that criminalise same-sex relationships.

Uruguayan journalist Ana Fornaro is the founder and co-director of **Agencia Presentes**, a media outlet specialising in news about the LGBT community in Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, Peru and Honduras.

She noted that LGBT rights were very unequal, adding that while Latin American states had “different levels of advancement and respect, but in all of them the rights of the LGBTI+ collective are violated day after day.”

Most media spread discriminatory discourse about the community, whether consciously or unconsciously,

LGBT identities, Fornaro continued, “are treated with a sensationalist perspective, with a lot of morbid fascination. In general the transvestite and trans collectives are always in the crime section”.

She noted that Latin America media rarely ran stories directly focusing on news that affected LGBT people, although “there are alternative, independent, smaller media outlets that do address these subjects”.

According to the Distintas Latitudes website, there are **21 media outlets that cover LGBT** issues in Latin America.

“This is why we emerged with a very clear mission to influence the media agenda, not just in Argentina but throughout the region,” Fornaro said. “Our objective is for larger media outlets to use our news as a source. If they do not have the resources to investigate, we’re already doing it and we’re doing it to the best of our ability.”

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