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Gender Relations in Daily Newspaper Headlines: the Representation of Gender Inequality with Respect to the Media Representation of Women : Critical Discourse Analysis

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Gender Relations in Daily Newspaper Headlines: the Representation of Gender Inequality with Respect to the Media Representation of Women(Critical Discourse Analysis)

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Abstract:
This paper investigates gender related discourse in headlines of some famous daily newspapers in the USA. *Discourse* in this case refers to the entire set of social gender relations seen through the media. Based on an interdisciplinary approach to the problem, which includes both cultural and critical studies, the purpose of this research is to offer a critical review of the basic media strategies used in discursive representation of gender relations within the society. Through the critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the data collected from the Internet, the author is to describe the discursive reproduction of social power reflected in the newspaper headlines.

1. Introduction

As defined, a headline is the title or caption of a newspaper article, usually set in large type, which contains important or sensational piece of news. [27] In most cases, the headlines provide the essential information about the story that follows, which means that they function as summaries.

All headlines serve to attract people's attention and make them buy the newspapers. They must function as eye-catchers with the readers of different profiles because their main task is to transfer the ideology and system of beliefs of the dominant social structures. [20, p.1]

Mind control is the fundamental task of the elite mass media in contemporary democracies because they serve only to the interests of powerful individuals. The media, as the main means of indoctrination, have the crucial role in this organized system of control and management, ruled by megacorporations and private business.

1.1 Statement of the problem and purpose of the research

Despite the progress of democratization, the struggle against stereotypes and strengthening of the civil society, media discourse still belongs to the male domain. [1, p. 47; 25] Dominant gender stereotypes, such as those that men are born to hold leadership positions, are presented in the media on a daily basis. Also, gender-stereotyped content presenting women is dominant in the media being a prolonged arm of the male power in the society.

This research aims at offering a critical review of the basic media strategies used in discursive representation of gender relations in the modern society and answering the following questions:
 a) What is the role of media in representing and even reinforcing gender inequality?
 b) What discursive strategies do journalists of daily newspapers use in order to represent women in all positions?

2. Review of Literature

Bearing in mind the fact that this study aims to present the main discursive strategies used in newspaper headlines to reflect gender relations within the society, it seemed reasonable to analyze the headlines on *intertextual level*.

Considering the notion of *intertextuality*, Fairclough differs two types of *intertextuality*: "*manifest intertextuality*" and "*constititive intertextuality*" [6, p. 85] According to him, the former means that "specific other texts are overtly drawn upon within a text." The presence of those other texts is usually marked by the quotation marks. On the other hand, "*constititive intertextuality*" considers the "heterogeneous constitution of texts out of elements (types of convention) of orders of discourse (interdiscursivity)." [6, p.104]

Considering the connection between the linguistic and intertextual features of texts, Fairclough says: "Linguistic features of texts provide evidence which can be used in intertextual analysis, and intertextual analysis is a particular sort of interpretation of that evidence..." [5, p. 61] This definition, in fact, emphasizes the descriptive function of the linguistic analysis as opposed to the interpretative function of the intertextual analysis.

2.1. *Critical Discourse Analysis*

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used here in analyzing the data based on Van Dijk's definition of CDA as "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced , and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality". [15, 22] According to Van Dijk, "Critical research on discourse needs to satisfy a number of requirements in order to effectively realize its aims:

1. As is often the case for more marginal research traditions, CDA research has to be 'better' than other research in order to be accepted.
2. It focuses primarily on *social problems* and political issues, rather than on current paradigms and fashions.
3. Empirically adequate critical analysis of social problems is usually *multidisciplinary*.
4. Rather than merely *describe* discourse structures, it tries to *explain* them in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure.
5. More specifically, CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of *power* and *dominance* in society." [15, p. 2; 2]

Fairclough and Wodak state the principles of CDA in the following way:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discoures is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action. [4, p. 258-284. acc. to 15, p.2]

The term "critical" is used in specific sense by the authors mentioned because it implies "a different mode or perspective of theorizing, analysis, and application throughout the whole field."[13] The word "discourse" in this study refers to the discourse controlled by the mass media, especially in relation to gender inequality in newspaper headlines.

2.2. *Gender inequality and gendered media*

"*Gender inequality* refers to the obvious or hidden disparity between individuals due to gender. Gender is constructed both socially through social interactions as well as biologically through chromosomes, brain structure, and hormonal differences." [16, p. 1]

"*Media* helps create and reinforce a gender duality based on traditional views of men and women. Often, females and males are portrayed differently in television and film according to stereotypes. Boys and/or men are often portrayed as active, aggressive and sexually aggressive persons while women are portrayed as quaint, passive, pretty and incompetent beings." [18, 21]

2.3.   *Previous Studies*

This study is not the first one dealing with the presentation of gender relations in the media.

The researcher took some similar studies as inspiration for conducting the investigation on gender relationships in the print media, especially considering the representation of women.

One of them is the study called "Critical discourse analysis and the semiotic construction of gender identities" [11, 26], done by *Izabel Magalhães* from the University of Brasilia, in which she discusses textual and semiotic aspects of adverts according to critical discourse analysis. Her analysis was based on the texts taken from the adverts found in a few famous Brazilian magazines, which were analyzed according to *semiotic aspects* and the notions of vocabulary, modality, cohesion and intertextuality.

Under the semiotic aspects Magalhães implies "the ways in which photos represent women and men, their styles of dressing and issues related to their bodies, as well as the particular place of photos in adverts."

In the vocabulary analysis, she deals with lexical choice in the texts, "what kinds of wording are favoured, and whether or not words are attributed new meanings in rewordings and in new lexicalisations."

Considering cohesion in the texts analysed, she says: "In adverts, clauses and periods are connected so as to produce a particular rhetorical mode, one which will arouse in the readers the desire to purchase the product being advertised in the text. Such cohesive markers as reference, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical items will be of interest here."

According to her, "the feminine is represented as a commodified body; it is also frail and pathological. The masculine is linked with power, but with fashion too. Adverts position readers ideologically, so that they can define their gender identities as consumers." [11, 26]

The next study dealing with this topic is the one called: "Women and the Media / Study on the Marginalization of Female Discourse Power" conducted by the two Chinese scholars, LI Xiao-hui and LEI Min. [19, p. 47-55, 28]

They gave a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis on the marginalization of female discourse power and study the potential sexual discrimination of this phenomenon, regarding females as the subjects and the objects of the mass media. They actually aim at the "awakening the masses to establish the correct sexual ideology in harmony and pursuing the equality of discourse power between females and males."

They point out that there are two reasons for using these discriminating practices in the mass media, the first being the *feudal tradition*, which presents the males as the masters of the outdoor life and the females as the masters of the indoor life, and the second being the *women's unresponsiveness* to the challenges of pursuing equality in discourse power.

The famous linguist and professor of linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, Robin Lakoff, introduced many ideas about women's language and gender inequality in her most famous work *Language and Woman's Place.* [10, p. 45-80, 24] According to her, "women experience linguistic discrimination in two ways: in the way they are taught to use language, and in the way general language treats them." Both of them actually serve "to relegate women to certain subservient functions: that of sex-object, of a servant; and that therefore certain lexical items mean one thing applied to men and another applied to women."

3. Methodology

The research methodology covers research design and instruments, data collection and data analysis.

3.1.   Research Design and Instruments

This research was conducted by using the descriptive qualitative research method. It is used because the data analyzed were collected in form of words and not numbers. Discourse Analysis as a scientific approach does not offer the answers to a particular problem, but helps us to understand the circumstances behind a particular "problem". It focuses on linguistic devices or speech acts and how they serve powerful social groups to fulfill their interests.

3.2.   Data Collection

The data were collected from the Internet as one of the most powerful contemporary mass medium containing a pile of information, including the web-pages of the greatest world newspapers. The newspaper headlines reflecting gender relations were taken from the web pages of the two prominent daily newspapers: *The LA Times* and *The New York Post*.

3.3.   Data analysis

According to Van Dijk [14, p. 95-120], there are a few levels and dimensions of CDA:
1) *Topics*: semantic macrostructures, which "represent what a discourse is about globally speaking, embody most important information on a discourse, and explain overall coherence of text and talk."
2) *Local meanings* as meaning of words and relationships between propositions which directly influences mental images, and consequently the opinions and attitudes of the recipients.
3) Subtle *formal structures* that are much less controlled by the speaker such as intonation, rhetoric figures, syntactic and propositional structures and so on.
4) *Context models* present discourse structures as related to local and global context.
5) *Event models* imply that "language users not only form mental models of the situation they interact in, but also of the events or situations they speak or write about."
6) *Social cognition* stands for the notions of power, dominance and social inequality as well as the focus of CDA on social groups, organizations and institutions.
7) *The relation between discourse and society* implies the analysis on the two levels: the first one being the level of interaction and situations and the second one the level of groups, social organizations and institutions.

This model will serve as a guidance in the following data analysis because it represents the essence of CDA as an approach that is specifically interested in the discursive dimensions of power and dominance abuse or detailed descriptions of discursive violations of human rights by the powerful social groups. The analysis will be conducted through the comparison of 2 headlines found in the newspapers and considering the role of women in society.

4. Findings and Discussion

Susan Fiske, a famous professor of Psychology at Princeton University and researcher of stereotyping and discrimination, explains: "stereotyping exerts control or power over people, pressuring them to conform; therefore, stereotyping maintains the status quo." [18, p. 621-628; 30]

However, stereotypes, especially those about women, are created and reinforced by the media. Female stereotypes that may be found in the print media strong influence the overall image

of women in the society because they tend to underestimate women and present them as sexual objects and inferior human beings.

The examples below will serve as an effective background for a critical discourse analysis of gender stereotyping and objectifying of women in the print media. They have been taken from the two famous US daily newspapers: *L.A. Times* and *The New York Post*.

EXAMPLE 1: Representation of a woman as a „chick"

"Chick" is a derogatory term used for a girl or young woman in order to refer to her sexuality, attractiveness or, rarely, her intellect. The headline: *CHICK ACCUSES SOME OF HER MALE COLLEAGUES OF SEXISM* describes an affair of the lady whose actual surname is Chick, but the journalist's intention was to make it catchy.
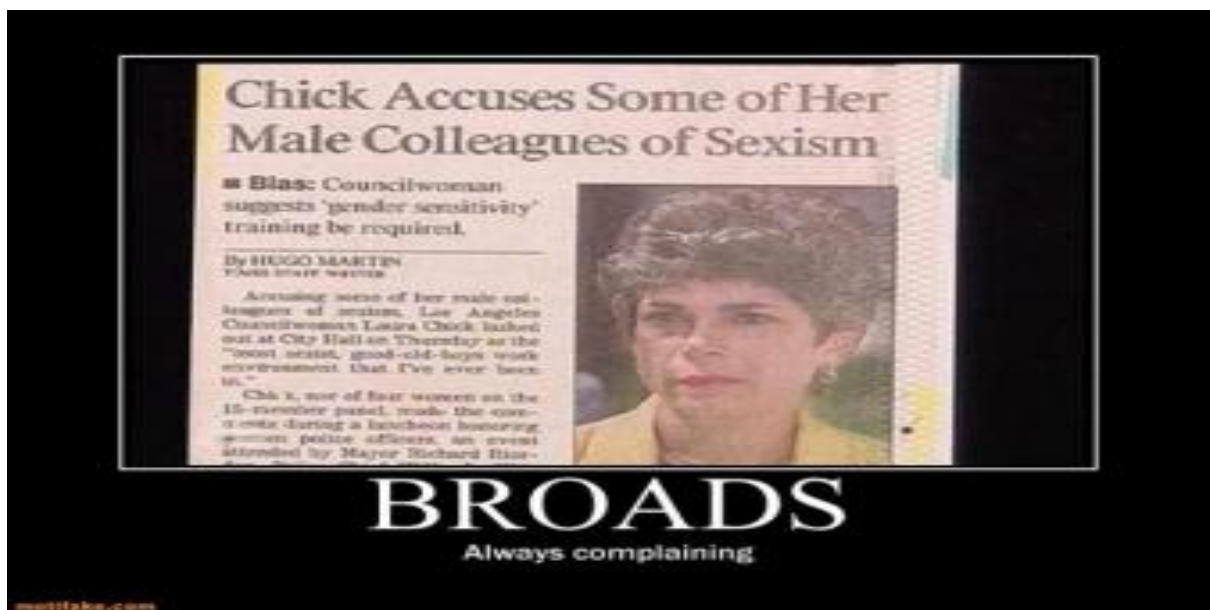
Picture 1 (Taken from: http://articles.latimes.com/1995-06-24/news/mn-23690_1_gender-sensitivity; the article published by The L.A. Times on June 24, 1995)

EXAMPLE 2: Representation of women as physically and mentally inferior to men/depiction of masculinity
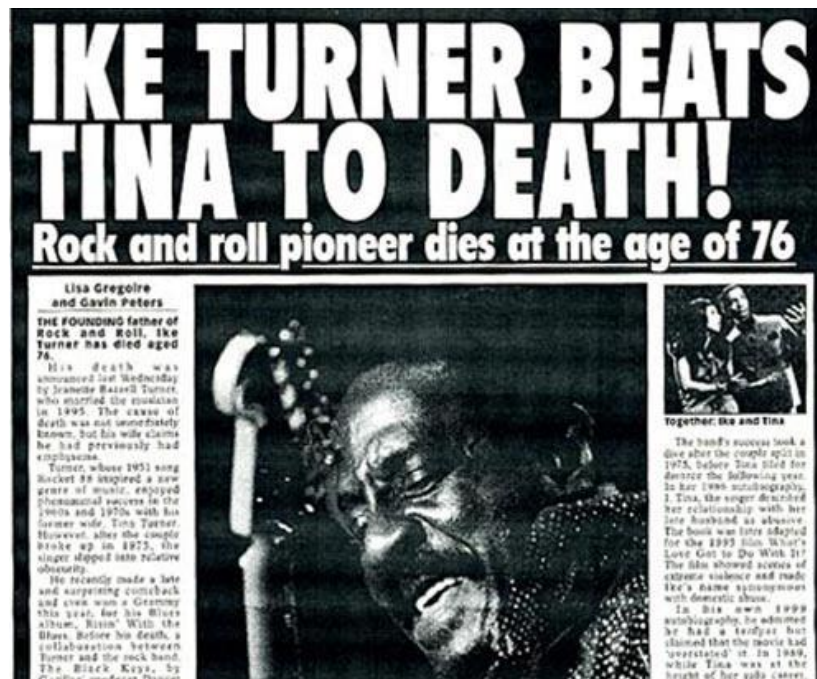
Picture 2 (Taken from: http://www.cartridgesave.co.uk/news/the-10-most-infamous-music-headlines-ever-printed/, the article was published by The New York Post on 13 December 2007)

This example is even more astonishing than the previous one considering the fact that one of the two authors is a woman. Huge bold letters announcing a terrible news about a famous musician beating his wife, also a famous singer, have served as a perfect eye-catcher and a guarantee for top-selling of the newspaper.

Semantic Macrostructures

The first to be analyzed in both of the examples above are the headlines as the semantic macrostructures which embody the most important information of the discourse. These headlines contain all the linguistic components needed to intrigue the reader: they are catchy, coherent and deal with a pretty delicate topic. Having all those characteristic, they provide the reader with a great deal of informativity.

Considering the main idea behind the texts, there is a difference between the first and the second of the events analyzed.

Namely, the Chick in the first example has really accused her colleagues of sexual harassment, while Ike Turner didn't really beat Tina to death. The journalists used the trick about him beating his wife to death only to attract the readers to buy the newspaper and find out that Ike Turner, who used to beat his wife while being married, died at the age of 76.

I must admit this was an interesting wordplay, but it was totally inappropriate and provided the authors of the article with mockery and critique of their colleagues and the public.

The mockery eventually went too far, so The New York Post removed the article from their web-page.

In addition, we must pay attention to the font of the headlines mentioned. They have been written in large, bold letters and the writers were very careful about the capitalization rules, which do not only imply grammaticality of the text but also the authors' emphasis.

These ere exactly the most important features considering the semantic components of the headlines because they announce the authors' intention to influence the reader's mental space, or, in other words, make the reader to create a mental representation about the discourse in progress.

This is totally obvious in the second example, in which the information about beating the wife has been written in huge letters only to serve as an eye-catcher, while the real news about a

famous person's death has somehow been hidden or made inferior by being written in smaller letters.

Local Meanings

Another important aspect of this analysis is certainly the concept of local meanings contained in the texts. According to Van Dijk, local meanings are the result of the selection made by speakers or writers in their mental models of events or their more general, socially shared beliefs. At the same time, they are the kind of information that (under the overall control of global topics) most directly influences the mental models, and hence the opinions and attitudes of recipients. [14, p.95-120]

At this level of local meanings, we will surely notice the word "chick" in the first headline which implies the ideological perspective of the journalist as a "he-man". This word depicts this particular woman as "one of the chicks" who provoked and eventually deserved to be harassed by "her male colleagues." At the same time, here we may recognize the positive self-presentation considering the mental image of a "male colleague", which implies an image of a fine gentleman, as opposed to that of a "chick", representing the woman as an inferior, less intellectual creature and degrading her to the level of promiscuity.

Furthermore, we cannot leave the word "sexism" out of this scheme because it functions as a perfect term with ideological implications and, in most cases, deals with masculine attitudes towards the objectification of women.

Sexism is defined as "the belief or attitude that one sex is inherently superior to, more competent than, or more valuable than the other. It can also include this type of discrimination in regards to gender. Sexism primarily involves hatred of, or prejudice towards, either sex as a whole, or the application of stereotypes of masculinity in relation to men, or of femininity in relation to women." [2, p. 236, 31]

The second headline looks even more shocking in this context. It is completely conveys the *application of stereotypes of masculinity in relation to men, or of femininity in relation to women*.

The discourse used in this headline is the core of media discourse. Why? Firstly, the authors put a famous rock-star and recorded abuser into the first plan, calling him by the full name, while his beaten wife was simply called Tina.

Secondly, *beating a woman to death* is one of the most bestial things a man could do, but *beating a woman to death* in a newspaper headline means selling the newspaper and make a profit out of it.

Thirdly, Ike is represented as a *macho-man*, and not as an abuser, which actually deprives the reader of the empathy for Tina's situation.

Finally*, practice makes perfect*, and sensation makes money. This is the only relevant law in the world of mass media and their discourses are only practical aspects of the law.

Formal structures

Considering the formal discourse structures, Van Dijk distinguishes between "global" and "local" discourse forms or formats. "Global forms" consist of "typical genre categories, as is the case for arguments, stories or news articles", while the "local forms" imply "formal relations between clauses and sentences in sequences."

Both of the titles ("Chick Accuses Some of Her Male Colleagues of Sexism" and "Ike Turner Beats Tina to Death") have been written in the active form of the Simple Present Tense, which means that the authors wanted to send a clear and direct message to the readers.

"*Chick Accuses…*" are the key words in the first article because they actually present the agent of the action in a negative way.

The use of the slang term "chick" also implies the intentional non-formality of the title used by the author in order to approach to the readers.

The situation in the second example is totally different. The agent of the action is not represented in a completely negative sense due to the fact that beating of the wife has served as the eye-catching information. Unfortunately, Ike Turner in this context depicts masculinity. He almost

appears to be a hero, while his beaten wife has been represented as a poor, unimportant and unsightly woman.

Context

CDA studies the discourse strategies and structures within the framework of a certain context, which is divided by Van Dijk into the "local" and "global" context.

"Local" context includes "properties of the immediate, interactional situation in which a communicative event takes place." These properties are: the "overall domain of the situation, an overall action, participants in various communicative and social roles, as well as their intentions, goals, knowledge, norms and other beliefs." This means that "what we say and how we say it depends on who is speaking to whom, when and where, and with what purposes."

"Global" contexts might be understood through the prism of social, political, cultural and historical structures in which a communicative event occurs.

Van Dijk joins these notions under the common term – *context models*, which are the actual "mental representations that control many of the properties of discourse production and understanding, such as genre, topic choice, local meanings and coherence as well as speech acts, speech style and rhetoric."

Thus, the overall domain of the situation in the example above is that of journalism or the media space, and the overall action- that of accusing several men of sexism. The local setting of the first communicative event is one of the pages of the *LA Times* published on June 26, 1995, while the local setting of the second communicative event is a page of the *New York Post* published on December 13, 2007.

The communicative role includes the author and the readers, while the interactional roles include the "chick" and "her colleagues" in the first example and Ike and Tina Turner in the second example.

Another notion to be mentioned is that of the current communicative actions, which are presented in publishing the articles in the particular newspapers. These actions are being performed by the author's direct addressing to the readers in order to inform them about the particular case.

The cognitive dimension of the context is presented through the complex mental structures including the ideologies, attitudes and opinions discussed in the previous sections.

Finally, we could say that mental models actually present discourses as a sum of personal and social properties, which means that each discourse is different in the same social situation. Van Dijk says that CDA focuses on these complex series of links. According to him, "there is no direct link between discourse and society.

Social Condition

The notion of social condition implies "social representations" of power, domination and social inequality among groups, organizations and institutions. As Van Dijk defined, "this means that CDA also needs to account for the various forms of social cognition that are shared by these social collectivities: knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values." These representations control the production of discourse, i.e. text and talk, and they may be expressed directly and indirectly. [14, p. 95-120]

All of the representations mentioned above will be discussed within the notions of knowledge, attitudes and ideologies exhibited through the discourse.

Knowledge may be personal, which means that it is represented through the personal mental representations or images of certain social situations. These are personal interpretations of social events.

On the other hand, group knowledge presents a system of beliefs of certain social groups, including the ways in which they are represented through the properties of discourse like metaphors, topics, coherence, intretextuality and similar.

Finally, we should define ideologies "as the basic social representations of social groups." [17, p.9]

Thus, ideology might be considered as a study of ideas. It tends to refer to the people's general opinion about the world and their *ideal* concept of living. We could even say that

ideologies are clusters of knowledge, attitudes, norms and values shared by certain social groups and ehxibited through discourse.

Van Dijk explains the connection between ideology and discourse in a very simple way: "Much of our discourse, especially when we speak as members of groups, expresses ideologically based opinions. We learn most of our ideological ideas by reading and listening to other group members, beginning with our parents and peers. Later, we ' learn ' ideologies by watching television, reading books at school, advertising, the newspaper, novels or participating in everyday conversations with friends and colleagues, among a multitude of other forms of talk and text." [17, p.9]

The sample texts above indicate some social peculiarities considering the relationships between men and women:

THE FIRST EXAMPLE
a) the word *chick* is used not only to underestimate the particular woman but also women in general
b) men are referred to as *male colleagues,* which means they are treated with respect
c) the headline implies that an accusation made by a simple *"Chick"* is not very relevant.

THE SECOND EXAMPLE
a) Ike Turner is presented with his full name, while Tina Turner is only "Tina".
b) A tragic event of beating a woman by a violent, drug-addicted musician should not serve as a means of selling the tabloids whose journalists (ab)use the English language only to get attention.

In addition, sexism is explicitly mentioned in the first text, but the other, and even worse, ideology hiding behind this headline is the masculine chauvinism of the worst kind, wrapped into an everyday men- talk phrase like *Chick accuses.*

The second headline is also full of hidden masculine chauvinism and is totally tasteless and disrespectful towards women.

Ideologies in general present sets of principles and instructions which guide and control the attitudes, beliefs, norms and values of the members of certain social groups. Thus, sexism and masculine chauvinism may affect masculine attitudes about women's mental abilities, body images and women's place in society leading to discriminative practices like underestimating women in business and education, giving them less respect and making them underpaid in relation to men.

The Relationship between Discourse and Society

This relationship will be analyzed according to Van Dijk's notion of 4 categories connecting discourse and society: social situations, actions, actors and societal structures.

In our examples the communicative situations are similar. Both of the articles were found in the Internet and both of them were published by famous daily newspaper in the USA. Both of them are directed to the readers that read these newspapers in order to change their image of the world around them.

Considering the category of action, there is an evident difference between the two articles. The first is about a chick accusing her male colleagues of sexism and the other one is about the death of a violent rock-star who used to beat his wife, also a famous rock-star.

However, ideologies hidden behind these articles are the same: sexism and masculine chauvinism and the authors tend to persuade their readers about men –power and the simplicity of women in every sense.

The actors of the first article are a Los Angeles Councilwoman Laura Chick and her colleagues and the actors in the second one are Ike Turner and Tina Turner. But, they are not the only actors of these communicative events. They also include the authors of these articles as the "main" communicators in the discourse, who transfer the information or the message, and the readers as recipients or the addressees influenced by the things they read in the newspapers.

Societal structures refer to the structure and functions of the discourses presented in the articles above. CDA analyzes these discursive aspects in terms of social power and dominance. We have seen through the previous analysis how the ideologies of sexism and chauvinism are implemented in social relationships between men and women affecting their mental representations of the world in which men are empowered and women are inferior.

5. Concluding remarks

According to Global Media Monitoring Project research in 108 countries coordinated by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), women are still significantly underrepresented and misrepresented in news media coverage. Thus, "76% of the people heard or read about in the world's news are male. This figure transcends geography and culture." [9]

CDA is a discourse analysis in terms of social relationships, especially considering the notions of power and dominance in society and their implementation within discursive strategies in general.

This particular research referred to abuse of social power and dominance via the print media and the peculiarities of the discourse used by the media in order to shock the readers or make a sensation in order to sell the newspapers.

This research implies that the print media are still in male's domain, even in great democracies like the USA.

The image of women in society has certainly undergone many changes during the past fifty years in the sense of emancipation and raising their spirits but they are still far away from being equally treated in relation to men.

This is evident when reading the headlines that we have chosen to analyze in this work.

Unfortunately, women still tend to be represented as weak, inferior and "chicks", seen primarily through body images and sexual connotations produced by the mass media ruled mostly by men.

The New York Post's headline about Ike and Tina Turner was culmination of humiliating women in the men world . It was a rather unprofessional and crude way of reporting the death of Ike Turner via a cocaine overdose which deserved every public condemnation and raised a lot of questions on representation of women in society. The aim of this research is to contribute to the efforts of changing and improving images of women in the media, which underrepresent them "as victims or in outdated, stereotypical roles." [9]

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