

Mediated and Discursive Readings of Argentine, American and Mexican Female Academics in the Coverage of Female Presidential Candidates

Lecturas mediadas y discursivas de académicas argentinas, estadounidenses y mexicanas en la cobertura periodística de candidatas presidenciales

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In the present study, ten focused interviews were conducted where female university professors from Argentina, the United States and Mexico read news articles in newspapers about Cristina Fernández, Hillary Clinton and Margarita Zavala, respectively. Seven ways in which journalistic messages were stylistically and discursively deconstructed were found, among which are the questioning of editorial decisions, as well as evidencing how the ideology of the newspaper generated a specific treatment with the intention of manipulating audiences.

KEYWORDS: Critical reception, mediated readings, discursive readings, focused interview, presidential candidates.

En el presente estudio se realizaron diez entrevistas focalizadas donde profesoras universitarias de Argentina, Estados Unidos y México leyeron noticias en periódicos sobre Cristina Fernández, Hillary Clinton y Margarita Zavala, respectivamente. Se encontraron siete maneras en las que se deconstruyeron estilística y discursivamente los mensajes periodísticos, entre las cuales están el cuestionar las decisiones editoriales del medio, así como evidenciar de qué manera la ideología del diario genera un tratamiento específico con la intención de manipular audiencias.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Recepción crítica, lecturas mediadas, lecturas discursivas, entrevista focalizada, candidatas presidenciales.

No presente estudo, foram realizadas dez entrevistas focalizadas onde professores universitários da Argentina, Estados Unidos e México leram notícias em jornais sobre Cristina Fernández, Hillary Clinton e Margarita Zavala, respectivamente. Foram encontradas sete maneiras pelas quais as mensagens jornalísticas foram desconstruídas estilisticamente e discursivamente, dentre as quais estão questionando as decisões editoriais da mídia, além de mostrar como a ideologia do jornal gera um tratamento específico com a intenção de manipular as audiências.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Recepção crítica, leituras mediadas, leituras discursivas, entrevista focalizada, candidatos à presidência.

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INTRODUCTION

In Latin America, of the total number of presidential candidates nominated from 2000 to 2018, only 11% have been women, 37% of those registered less than one percentage point of voting (Álvarez-Monsiváis, 2019). In the United States, the proportion is similar with 15% of women candidates in the same years, with Hillary Clinton as the only woman who has won at least one electoral vote, according to data from Ballotpedia (2021).

This situation can be understood as a result of cultural and institutional factors that have reinforced the prevalence of men in the political arena and women in the intimate space (Valcárcel, 2008). The media may in part emphasize these attitudes to the extent they present female presidential candidates through non-political factors, such as aspects of their private and domestic lives, to the detriment of their political ideas, which include proposals, ideological positions and trajectories (García Beaudoux et al., 2018). Given this, evidence has been found that women's actions in politics are covered as maternal or compassionate, and not as having competitive and leadership traits (Lemarié-Saulnier & Lalancette, 2012; Lünenborg & Maier, 2014; Meeks, 2013; Wagner et al., 2017).

Similarly, it has been recorded that the media prefer to frame the political agenda of women in education, health, and housing issues, and excludes hard issues such as security, foreign policy, and the economy (Bertrand Pearce, 2016; Fernández García & Tous Roviroso, 2012; Humprecht & Esser, 2017). Some research has found that the media coverage usually pays attention to their outfits and hairstyles (Conroy et al., 2015; Foster Shoaf & Parsons, 2016; Rincón Soto, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to find out how audiences made up of women academics could express critical positions on news items about how female presidential candidates are portrayed. The importance of the research is that it will allow us to record the ways in which it is possible to resist media messages, and this could be useful for future reception studies.

Previous research indicates that there is an idea among receivers that the political space is not designed to be occupied by women (Everitt

et al., 2016; Meeks & Domke, 2015). Likewise, the electorate does not have enough confidence in women being capable of taking on political issues like national security and foreign policy (García Jiménez et al., 2008). However, there is no evidence that the receiver has paid any attention to style and dress traits of women politicians (Hayes et al., 2014).

Some researchers have reached the conclusion that audiences do not feel the conditions for women's access to the public sphere are unequal (Chill, 2014; Magalhães et al., 2015; Santos et al., 2015). On the other hand, Boomgaarden et al. (2016) and Rheault et al. (2019) claim that the fact that the coverage of female candidates is larger than male candidates does not benefit them in the eyes of voters.

In terms of participant demographics, reception studies indicate that women were better able to detect depoliticization in news coverage of female candidates than in male candidates (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2014; Chill, 2014; Everitt et al., 2016; García Jiménez et al., 2008). Also that, despite expecting the opposite, professional level participants in careers related to social sciences failed to negotiate or criticize media messages (Boomgaarden et al., 2016; Everitt et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2015).

Since the intention of this paper is to record the most critical modes of reception, it was decided to work with women who teach social science related subjects at university level, since, based on the previous works, it is possible to consider them as potentially critical receivers.

MODES OF RECEPTION

Michelle's (2007) taxonomy of modes of reception considers four levels of readings. In the *transparent* mode, the receiver interprets the meaning of the contents as a mirror of reality, while in the *referential* mode the message is interpreted from personal experience. These readings lead to what Hall (1980) recognized as the *dominant-hegemonic* interpretation and the *negotiated* reading, respectively. The first occurs when the audiences decode the message in the same way it was encoded, while in the second the decoder interprets media content based on his or her immediate context and their sociocultural knowledge.

However, as far as this research is concerned, we seek to detect those readings that Hall (1980) recognizes as *oppositional*, in which the receiver detotalizes the message in order to reject it. For Michelle (2007), such readings can be found in the four modes of reception that she proposes, but they are located to a greater extent in the mediated and discursive modes.

The mediated mode

At this level it is deconstructed through the stylistic features of the message, since the receivers recognize that there were unobservable technical values in the configuration of the meaning of the text (Richardson & Corner, 1986; Schröder, 2000; Worth & Gross, 1974).

Mediated readings can be inscribed in what Neuman (1982) calls analytical responses, which are divided into: a) *general form*, where the story, ideas and characters are evaluated; b) *generic form*, in which the text is compared with others of the same genre; and c) *technical form*, where the script, symbols, performances, editing, among others, are judged.

The semantic and syntactic criticism of Katz and Liebes (1990) is part of the mediated readings in that the former occurs when audiences discuss the aesthetic construction of the message, while in the syntactic criticism the media genre of which it is a part is valued. Orozco Gómez (1991) registered these technical forms as video-technological mediations.

In this sense, audiences consider that the text they are exposed to was fabricated by producers and writers with particular agendas (Inzunza-Acedo, 2012; Palmer & Hafen, 1999). An example of this type of reading is the work of Livingstone and Lunt (2001) where participants were able to distinguish the production values of reality shows and wondered about what the rehearsals were like, the types of camera direction, budgets, editing, and the role of the host of the broadcast.

The discursive mode

According to Michelle (2007), audiences resort to the discursive mode when they detect that there is an ideology in the message. According

to Dahlgren (1988), at this level the receiver decodes the message in an alternative way; because of the identification of an ideologized discourse, an opposite message is presented. It can also happen that audiences evidence the political orientation of the message to explain the purpose of the media to reproduce it, that is, the pragmatic function of such discourse (Katz & Liebes, 1990).

In this mode it is possible to include the four types of oppositional readings of Hacker et al. (1991). According to the level of rejection, at the lowest level are comments on the content; then, the resistance, manifested in disbelief towards the data; third, the challenging or questioning the accuracy with which the facts are presented; finally, the deconstruction of the text through the identification of the proposed idea in order to hegemonize one vision and discourage others.

Michelle (2007) describes that audiences receive the message in discursive mode when they resist the preferred meanings of the text and comment on the ideas that the producers hope to instill. Thus, they speculate about the possible effect of the text on more susceptible audiences in an attempt to manipulate them (Richardson & Corner, 1986).

Considering all of the above, the research question is: In what way do female university professors generate mediated and discursive readings of press reports about female presidential candidates?

METHOD

Focused interview

In this research, we chose to use the focused interview technique of Merton and Kendall (1946), which consists of offering a stimulus to the participant, in this case, a news item to read and interpret (Berger, 1998; Merton et al., 1998). However, it is possible to consider this exercise as a semi-structured interview, since a questionnaire that had this structure was carried out in order to go deeper into the answers (Berg, 2009; Flick, 2007).

We selected this technique because it allows organic and personal answers, which would not be possible with focus groups (Morgan, 1998). In addition, it offers a new way of exploring the thematic of

news reception about women politicians, since previous works have generated conclusions from focus groups (Magalhães et al., 2015; Santos et al., 2015), surveys (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2014; Boomgaarden et al., 2016; Chill, 2014; Everitt et al., 2016; García Jiménez et al., 2008; Hayes et al., 2014; Meeks & Domke, 2015) and analysis of comments in social media (Chill, 2014; Rheault et al., 2019).

Characteristics of the interviewees

The strategy used consisted of a purposive sample, that is, selecting the participants according to the cases in which greater depth of information is expected (Emmel, 2013). In this sense, one of the choices made was that the interviewees should be women, since it has been documented that they tend to detect to a greater degree than men the depoliticization of female candidates in the media (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2014; Chill, 2014; Everitt et al., 2016; García Jiménez et al., 2008).

Another characteristic the interviewees had in common was that they teach at the university level in areas of social sciences, such as political science, communication, journalism, humanities, and gender studies. This was meant to prove what was found by previous researchers, that is, that having academic preparation was not a clear referent to generate critical readings (Boomgaarden et al., 2016; Everitt et al., 2016; Hacker et al., 1991; Santos et al., 2015). It should be noted that this study was not an interview exercise with experts, since rather than recording their knowledge on the topic, what was explored was the ways in which they interpreted the texts.

To gather multiple points of view on the social phenomenon explored, the research was carried out in Argentina, Mexico, and the United States (Izcara Palacios, 2014). The plan was that nine focused interviews would be carried out, distributed among three interviewees for each country, with the possibility of adding more in case theoretical saturation was not achieved (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2006). A larger number was not stipulated since we did not seek to generalize the results of the group but to explore the different readings that can be found individually; however, it was a number close to the one Kuzel (1992) and Guest et al. (2006) consider as sufficient to understand the experiences and perceptions of individuals with relatively

homogeneous characteristics. In addition, it is the most convenient one for phenomenological studies that analyze the subjective aspects of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A pilot test was conducted in person with a Mexican professor from the city of Monterrey, Nuevo León, with the purpose of: a) calibrating the interview script consisting of 78 questions; b) verifying whether the three-session plan was optimal to cover the questionnaire; c) defining whether the news should be read before or during the session, and; d) verifying the functioning and scope of the audio recorder. Since the findings of this test were considered appropriate, we decided to include it in the analysis of results. In this way, we studied four interviews in Mexico, three in Argentina and three in the United States.

The conditions of being a woman, a university professor and a citizen at the time of the elections were the features shared by the interviewees. These characteristics do not necessarily make them part of a social group in which they are in constant contact, but they were researcher dispositions to homogenize the sample and formulate findings from them (Ruiz Olabuénaga, 2012).

The age of the informants ranged from 28 to 71 years. Eight of them had postgraduate degrees; half of them had a doctorate. There was an equal proportion of professors who taught in private and public schools. In the case of Argentina, they all belonged to government institutions in Buenos Aires and Córdoba; in the United States, they were affiliated with universities in Texas and Michigan; while in Mexico they were part of a private higher school in Nuevo León.

Stimulus specifications

The professors read news items on Margarita Zavala, from Mexico; Cristina Fernández, from Argentina; and Hillary Clinton, from the United States. What unites these three cases is that they were candidates for the presidency of their country and also served as first ladies during the mandates of Felipe Calderón, Néstor Kirchner and Bill Clinton, respectively. Their selection was justified on the grounds that the coverage in the two capacities shows two faces of the same female politician: one focused more on protocol linked to women's traditional actions (Winfield, 1997) and the other focused on the political aspect,

in which experience, credentials and addressing hard policy issues are required (Widlak, 2017).

The media from which this news were derived were the main local newspapers with national circulation; this was verified in the rankings of each country (Instituto Nacional Electoral [INE], 2019; Instituto Verificador de Circulaciones [IVC], 2019; Misachi, 2017). In addition, because the research background singled it out as an important variable in news reception (Cassidy, 2012; Meeks & Domke, 2015), the information was collected from newspapers with opposite political positions. According to studies that classify the media by political orientation (Brussino et al., 2011; Durán Gracia, 2009; Ho & Quinn, 2008; Lawson, 2002; Rodelo & Muñiz, 2017), the conservative or right-wing newspapers were *Reforma*, from Mexico; *La Nación*, from Argentina; and *The Wall Street Journal*, from the United States; its liberal or leftist opponents were *La Jornada*, *Página/12* and *The New York Times*, respectively. The news items selected as stimuli showed which newspaper published them and which journalist wrote them.

According to Merton et al. (1998), it should be taken into account that the stimuli have the variables and patterns to be studied. The research background pointed out four variables in the reception of women politicians: the personality of the politicians (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2014; Everitt et al., 2016; Meeks & Domke, 2015), their agenda (García Jiménez et al., 2008; Magalhães et al., 2015; Santos et al., 2015), their visibility in the form of direct quotes (Boomgaarden et al., 2016; Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2019; Humprecht & Esser, 2017; Rheault et al., 2019; Wagner et al., 2017), and attention to aspects of style and physical appearance (Chill, 2014; Hayes et al., 2014).

The design of the stimuli was three by two; that is, three variables by two news items. The variables of personality and thematic agenda were divided into feminine and masculine, based on various authors (Fernández García & Tous Roviroso, 2012; Humprecht & Esser, 2017; Lünenborg & Maier, 2014). The third variable was a note with the voice in direct quotations from the candidate and another without quotations. Finally, a seventh note was incorporated whose coverage was directed toward appearance and style. Since there were three countries, there was a total of 21 news items. The stimuli, therefore, were not random, but

selected by the researcher in order to promote different cases that could trigger as many critical readings possible (Robinson & Mendelson, 2012).

Interview phases

The interviews were conducted face-to-face (either at their homes, offices or library cubicles) or remotely via Skype and they took place between June and November 2019. Each interview consisted of two or three sessions lasting between 40 and 90 minutes. In total, 24 sessions were conducted, representing 23 hours of audio recording. All interviews were conducted in Spanish since informants had knowledge of the language. Although some of the interviewees knew each other, the interviewer did not tell them who was participating in the study, so there is no evidence that they interacted between sessions.

The same script was used during the individual interviews, consisting of 78 questions, divided into four phases based on Merton and Kendall's (1946) method. In the first, called *pre-test*, they were asked about the way in which they get information on a daily basis and their knowledge about the candidate in question. The second phase consisted of the application of the stimulus, where the participants read a first news item, which they could do aloud or silently; most of the professors made some comment about the content while reading it. In phase three or *post-test*, they were asked what aspects seemed most relevant, what was newsworthy, what topics were covered, what was the profile of the candidate, among other unstructured questions that allowed them to express their appreciation of the text to which they had just been exposed to (Berg, 2009). Phases two and three were repeated for each of the seven news items. Finally, phase four or appendix was about the interviewee making a final statement or reflecting upon the topics discussed.

The ten interviews were transcribed and analyzed in NVivo software. Responses were grouped into *transparent*, *referential*, *mediated*, or *discursive* readings (Michelle, 2007). The purpose of this was to implement a model or paradigm that helped answer the research question (Kvale, 1996).

FINDINGS

Mediated readings

After reading the news items, the interviewees described and commented on the aesthetic and production characteristics of the message. Three categories of mediated readings were formulated:

Newsworthiness and depth: The professors offered their views on whether the events narrated in the news pieces really merited coverage in order to offer something useful to the reader. Regarding the question: “Did any aspect of how the article in *La Nación* (Alconada Mon, 2006) is written catch your attention?”, Yoana answered the following:

It seems too... too simple, that is to say, very much in line with the logic of our journalism, very little analysis... it is not news because it doesn't report anything, it doesn't say how it was resolved, what will be done, or anything (Yoana, Argentina, 44).

Clearly, the professor noticed the lack of depth of the information, considering that the news should have detailed facts to be complete, its journalistic thoroughness was put into question. The same thing happened in the case of Tina, who expressed the following when questioned about what was newsworthy about the *Reforma* article (Bucio & Cid de León, 2011):

I think that what was newsworthy for me would have to be the event and its objective, because... from the title of the event I can deduce that they wanted to make room to present intellectual women in the 21st century... I would have liked to know about the event, what was the purpose, who was invited and what was said (Tina, Mexico, 28).

Regarding newsworthiness and depth, it was not assumed that what was reported in the news was the whole truth, but rather a part of it that each of the newspapers considered more important to publish to the detriment of another angle or information.

Style and composition: The female professors gave their opinion about the structure of the news and highlighted certain aspects of

writing and composition of the elements that made up the story. Thus, the interviewees detected typographical errors, corrected the writing of characters' names, expressed lack of readability, highlighted the repetition of words or phrases, questioned the location of news events, and discussed uncommon styles of journalistic writing.

Some of these responses were motivated by the question "Did any aspect of the way the piece is written catch your attention?", and others were expressed while reading the text. In the following answers about the articles of *Página/12* (Tagliaferro, 2006) and *The Wall Street Journal* (Barret & Entous, 2016) it is evident that the informants were alert to the correct writing and legibility of the information:

It's not Negre, it's Negrete (Irene, Argentina, 59).

The language, sometimes, is a bit awkward... Who are "these people"? It's not clear to me who they talked to: someone with the FBI? But who in the FBI? Someone who has power? Someone who has the information or does not have the information? I don't know who "these people" are. So, generally, what we want to see in the media is: "according to this person, who occupies this position and says this" (María, United States, 53).

Sinuhé was struck by the fact that the article in *The New York Times* (Kaplan, 2016) repeated certain words irregularly, which she interpreted as an intention of the media to emphasize that Hillary Clinton was being investigated by the FBI. In addition, she noticed that the candidate used terminology contrary to her party:

...the repetition... In the seven paragraphs there is FBI, FBI, FBI, that is, obviously one does not want to be the focus of the FBI's investigation... Well, basically the use of the term *American exceptionalism*, ok; she uses it about four times, I think it's actually a terminology used by Republicans (Sinuhé, United States, 71).

Unlike Michelle (2007) who used technicalities in television programs to encompass mediated readings on the script, lighting, costumes and production, in this exercise on the reception of news,

the mediated readings were based on style, wording, grouping of elements, readability and the like.

Journalistic routines and editorial decisions: These interpretations were based on thinking about how the news stories were produced and who were the people involved in their publication. The participants recognized that, in addition to the journalist, there were other positions in the media which participated in editing the news. While Andrea was reading the note from *La Jornada* (Le Duc & Castellanos, 2018), she realized that the editors of the newspaper collaborated in the process adding their own agendas and interests, different from those of the one who wrote the note:

Here, look, it's weird because the title of the piece normally must be complemented by the lead paragraph and here the story begins with something very different, that is, who wrote the title of the item? Obviously it's never the reporter, the editor is the one who decides to highlight this, the cost... I feel that the reporter, in some way, wanted to remain neutral, but you notice that the one who wrote the title put "The INE notified"... I don't know why he did so, in truth, because this topic was more important (Andrea, Mexico, 55).

The interviewees also analyzed how the information was collected. Reading the same news item, Leticia explained how the interview with Margarita Zavala was conducted and why reporters sometimes prefer to address their interviewees in this way:

...here, perhaps, I think that this interview where she talks about the *papelazo* is a sidewalk interview... this is done because sometimes journalists do not have access to events or because events sometimes seem to the reporters that they do not (contribute) anything that they can sell, that can attract the reader's attention (Leticia, Mexico, 46).

In this category, the scholars described why they think unobservable events occurred in the publication process. Therefore, they interpreted the section in which it was published, discussed the editors' decisions, and deduced the context of the interview on which the story was based.

Discursive readings

The responses classified in this type of readings described the ideology of the media portrayed in the message and its possible impact on the audience. The interviewees referred to four types of discursive readings:

Ideology of the media: The professors interpreted the political position of the media to conclude that this had relevance in the configuration of the message. Some of the responses in this category were motivated by a final reflection in which they were asked to compare all the items read in one newspaper with the ones read in the other one. However, throughout the interview and before they were asked to compare the news items from opposing newspapers, the professors had already detected the ideological bias.

In the Mexican example, Nidia commented that the leftist *La Jornada* (Le Duc & Castellanos, 2018) made the message detrimental to Margarita Zavala; while the tendency of the *Reforma* article (Cervantes, 2018) had a neutral approach due to its ideological affinity with the female candidate:

...but the fact is that *La Jornada* is super *chaira*²... here they try to screw her, that is, they are ridiculing her... the bias is ideological... it would be very strange if they didn't make a taunt or said something spiteful... (*Reforma* is) already trying a little to be more objective and, furthermore, they did not want to antagonize the Calderóns, perhaps they owe them something (Nidia, Mexico, 57).

In the case of the American professor Sinuhé, she explained that conservative newspapers, which she considers *The Wall Street Journal* to be (Barrett & Entous, 2016), are usually in favor of Republican political platforms; while the *The New York Times*, which she considers liberal (Kaplan, 2016), favors the Democrats:

... *Wall Street Journal*, being a little more conservative, obviously starts saying there is a FBI investigation, then, it connects the FBI to her (Hillary), because it is an attack, obviously... that is, they are calling it a scandal, and

² Editor's note: Leftist, in an informal and/or pejorative manner.

saying she put classified information at risk... the *Wall Street Journal* is emphasizing the investigation and *The New York Times* is going to report on her political perspective (Sinuhé, United States, 71).

In Argentina, professor Irene identified the newspaper *La Nación* (Alconada Mon, 2006) as opposed to Kirchner's government, which is why it focused its description of Cristina Fernández in trivialities such as her hair and clothing, while *Página/12* (Friera, 2004), with Kirchnerist roots, did not use these issues, instead it reported her political work:

It has to do with the issue of... *La Nación* being a newspaper quite opposed to what were the populist or Kirchnerist policies, so, you are always going to find that disqualifying remark... it seems to me (*Página/12*) has a much more impersonal approach... It is evident that between one news piece and another, the first (that of *La Nación*) has a scent of opposition, let's say; in the second one (*Página/12*), which is a newspaper favorable to the government, at the time, Kirchnerist... seeks to favor the image of Cristina Fernández or, at least... it shows her in a totally impartial way, without emphasizing certain aspects, let's call them, typically feminine, like her hair, her clothes, her heels, her purse (Irene, Argentina, 59).

The professors demystified that the media fully follow the imperatives of objectivity to conclude that, on the contrary: If there is an ideological disagreement between the candidate and the newspaper, the media will tend to damage her through a negative tone and coverage of trivial aspects; on the other hand, if their political orientations coincide, the tendency will be to present her in a neutral tone and cover exclusively political issues.

Gendered discourse: The professors expressed that being a female political candidate influenced the way newspapers covered their campaigns. Leticia concluded that because to the candidate's gender, Zavala's coverage focused on topics about science and culture, to the detriment of other types of hard-core issues, which the press covers more in men. When asked what most caught her attention in the *Reforma* article (Bucio & Cid de León, 2011), she answered the following:

The emphasis on how women are dedicated to soft topics, because we are talking about science, we are talking about poetry, literature; here I don't see anything about national security, here I don't see anything about the economy, here I don't see anything about immigration... (Leticia, Mexico, 46).

When Irene was asked how was the profile of Cristina Fernández presented in *Página/12* (Jorquera, 2007), she identified that the news item emphasized the physical image of the candidate, which, in her opinion, has intrinsic stereotypes of women:

... it shows her in a totally *decontracté* way... with an image, let's say, more frivolous of women, let's say, elegant who cares about fashion, about makeup... I think it is a news item that, in some way, tries to show a stereotype of a woman dedicated to makeup, fashion, gallantry (Irene, Argentina, 59).

Yoana realized that in the article of *Página/12* (Tagliaferro, 2005) Fernández's political credentials were hidden: The note didn't emphasize her political position as senator instead the discourse placed her in her role as the president's wife:

... they put this thing about the first lady again, when she is not representing that at the moment, let's say, she is not participating as first lady... Discursively it is wrong because, I insist, although she is the first lady, this note refers to an action of hers as senator... it is not "the first lady accompanied the president in such an official act", let's say... they were discussing very strongly what had to do with the Council of the Magistrature and this is done in the scope of the Senate (Yoana, Argentina, 44).

The professors, therefore, concluded that gender was relevant in the writing of the news. This could have happened because of the gender of the reporter who wrote the piece, but also according to the place that women have occupied in society.

Informative bias: Interpretations criticizing the lack of a balanced coverage in the news items were present, since they were merely

negative in nature and lacked the voices of other candidates. When the question was put to Nidia, whether she missed any information in the article of *La Jornada* (Muñiz, 2018), she mentioned that the article was unfavorable to the candidate, since it presented information against her without giving her the opportunity to defend herself and create some counterweight to the negative tone of the journalistic message:

What did she answer? What was the answer? Because everything is, if you look closely, they put, even with minute details, what the woman told her, “Margarita: we call them children, this is Roy”, as if (Zavala) said it was collateral damage. I mean, they didn’t put in what she said, she doesn’t say anything, just all the complains directed towards her... (I would say to the journalist) balance it, I mean, put this in, yes, that’s fine, it’s your piece, but give me something positive, because it’s all negative (Nidia, Mexico, 57).

For her part, the American María detected informative bias in the news item in *The New York Times* (Flegenheimer, 2016) from the collection of the data, since the same reporters did not ask questions about Clinton’s political platform but rather wanted to know what she thought about her Republican counterpart, Donald Trump:

They are asking her (Hillary) about the type of leader that Trump can be, they never ask her what type of leader she is going to be or about her method of leadership... that was always the whole campaign... always asking about Trump... They (the media) had the opportunity to support her and say what her leadership would be like in the White House and (how she would deal with) Isis and many other issues (María, United States, 53).

In this sense, the readings on the informative bias focused on the lack of space given to the voice of the female candidates, either because there were no printings of their quotes nor paraphrasing of their opinions or because the journalists did not ask them questions about their political platform. In addition to this, according to the female professors, the news items recounted accusations against the female candidates or presented the platforms of other candidates.

Manipulated audiences: The interviewees detected that the message of the newspapers was addressed to a niche audience that received information according to their political and personal preferences. For example, María highlighted that the news from *The Wall Street Journal* (Meckler & Rubin, 2016) could be negative for Hillary because she describes her proposal to increase taxes on the rich, who are precisely the target audience of the newspaper:

Lower class people aren't the ones reading *The Wall Street Journal*. People with money are... People with more resources, conservative people... So, that doesn't really help Hillary because... The rich may say "Ah, look, taxes for the rich!". They are going to feel that it is a socialist economy... In this sense, it doesn't help Hillary, if you consider who reads *The Wall Street Journal* (María, United States, 53).

The article in *Página/12* (Tagliaferro, 2006) narrates what Professor Luisa considered a false anachronistic analysis by Cristina Fernández where she compared the institution (the Supreme Court) of 1800 with the present. This mistake in her speech could have generated two types of interpretations depending on the type of audience who read the item, the professor commented the following after she read the piece:

In other words, to the people who do not understand the whole picture, that can't analyze this the way you and I can, which is the majority of those who vote; people... who don't realize that they (politicians) will say anything just to give the impression that they know, so, a lay person, even a college-level student will not know the difference, that an institution from 1800 is not the same as now... Someone with these characteristics who is reading it is going to say... "Well, she was wrong, no problem"; and then someone who doesn't love her, hates her, is going to say "Of course, look how she makes mistakes, she's so ignorant, she doesn't know anything, look how she always does the same thing"... (Luisa, Argentina, 45).

The discursive interpretations of the female professors went beyond the content of the news, since they deconstructed the meaning of the message through the political orientation of the media, the intrinsic

gender stereotypes, the lack of balance in the reporting and the type of audiences of the newspapers.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of mediated and discursive readings made it possible to categorize the ways in which it is evident that a receiver resists or opposes a message, this contributes to studies on critical audiences. Using Michelle's (2007) model, three categories of mediated readings were found. In terms of newsworthiness and depth, the professors resorted to Neuman (1982) general way of reading and Katz and Liebes' (1990) semantic-criticism to interpret the general idea of the text and express whether, in their opinion, the publication of the news item was necessary.

In the category of style and composition, the interviewees criticized the legitimacy of the text due to the fact that it contained typos and mistakes, that is, they revised its technical form (Neuman, 1982). They also emphasized that stylistic features are intended to generate a specific informative treatment based on the placement and repetition of words and phrases, which led them to demystify the objectivity of the text (Dahlgren, 1988).

The category of journalistic routines and editorial decisions included readings in which the interviewees distanced themselves from the message as an objective fact to reveal that there were unobservable processes in the fabrication of the message (Inzunza-Acedo, 2012; Worth & Gross, 1974). The purpose of these readings was to reflect on the context of the collection of information, to classify which journalistic genre was used, to question in which section the text should have been published and to explain how the editors, directors, heads of information, among other gatekeepers intervened.

If mediated readings deconstruct from the technicality of journalistic activity, discursive readings do so through the ideological meaning of the message (Palmer & Hafen, 1999). In the category of media ideology, the professors noted that the political orientation of the newspaper favored or disfavored female candidates. Therefore, they recognize that the particular interests and agendas of newspapers

are intrinsic in the media discourse (Schröder, 2000). However, this did not necessarily lead them to develop an oppositional discourse (Hall, 1980) or an alternative decoding (Dahlgren, 1988); rather, it functioned as a reserve for the female professors to infer why the media approach is configured in such a way.

During the informational bias category, the professors used all four levels of oppositional readings from Hacker et al. (1991). The *comments* pointed out that the article was missing information. During the *resistance* they showed disbelief that what was presented was the only reality on the issue. On *challenge or questioning*, they showed that the media resorted to unverifiable data for the elaboration of the news, while in the *deconstruction*, the audiences evidenced informational imbalances that hegemonized one vision and discouraged others by hiding the voice of the female candidates.

The third category of discursive readings was manipulated audiences. The professors stated that the producers of the content tried to persuade an average audience (Richardson & Corner, 1986), since certain information was missing so that any recipient could understand the message in its context. Likewise, they highlighted that there is a communicative reciprocity between the media and niche audiences: The media present information for a specific audience, and these choose only the content matching their political point of view.

Finally, in the *gendered* readings, the interviewees stated that the gender of the candidate or reporter affected the configuration of the message. In this way, the professors evaluated how the normalized discourse on the role of women in society became evident in the agenda of topics discussed, on the participation of female candidates in the news, on the emphasis on their clothing and the concealment of their political credentials. Thus, it differs from works that did not find critical readings about gender in journalistic discourse (Magalhães et al., 2015; Santos et al., 2015).

In general terms, female university professors in the areas of social sciences generated a large number of critical readings, something that did not occur in previous studies (Boomgaarden et al., 2016; Everitt et al., 2016; Santos et al., 2015). However, it agrees with the previously cited works in that audiences emit a greater number of readings about

the ideology in the message than *gendered* readings (Hayes et al., 2014; Meeks & Domke, 2015).

The current case contributes to reception studies that critical audiences seem to overcome the idea that journalistic texts reflect the reality of a fact, but rather that they contain one of various possible realities about a fact. This was evident when the interviewees noticed the ways in which the newspapers presented and hierarchized information and by interpreting the messages based on the interests, political perspectives, reputation and cultural context of the media.

However, it is important to limit the study findings to the sociodemographic conditions of the interviewees and the context in which the research was conducted. For example, one of the limitations of this work is that it is not possible to see if these critical readings were motivated by being part of an interview and not so much because it is the way in which they usually interpret messages on a daily basis. Further work could generate new methodologies that allow study subjects to be in more organic contexts, as well as record whether critical postures are usually socialized.

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