

# Showing (off) violence against women

## Discursive constructions of violence against women and girls in an Austrian daily newspaper

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### *Abstract*

One of the many achievements of the second wave of the women's movement has been to politicize and publicize the seemingly intimate forms of violence against women. Critical psychology holds that psychology is also not a private matter, but deeply political. Thus, a core task of critical psychology is to expose the structural conditions of inequality and oppression that permeate human feeling, thought, and action. One place where power operates, especially in private, is in violence against women, and media discourse is one of the means by which these structures are maintained. Austria has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the European Union, not first, but especially since the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in early 2020: in 2021 alone, 30 femicides were committed in Austria. Since 2020, mass media coverage of violence against women has also increased sharply. While the most visible forms of violence have been the subject of much research, an analysis of the discursive reproduction of structural and symbolic violence in the context of mass media coverage of violence against women is still lacking. This paper aims to fill this gap by conducting a critical discourse analysis of media coverage of violence against women and girls in Austria's largest-circulation daily newspaper, the *Kronen Zeitung*, in January 2022. In order to investigate and show how structural and symbolic violence against women is discursively reproduced in a covert and subtle way, exemplary articles are analyzed and discussed against the background of poststructuralist and deconstructivist accounts of the relationship between discourse and power. In this way, the political impact of these seemingly apolitical discursive acts on the realities of women's lives will be shown.

### *Keywords*

violence against women, discourse analysis, power, structural violence, deconstructionism

## 1. Introduction

"Well-behaved husband commits atrocity" was the headline of an article in the *Kronen Zeitung*, an Austrian daily newspaper, about the femicide of a woman in Austria on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Reading the headline, questions and irritations arise: Why is it about the murderer and husband being well-behaved when he committed a femicide? How can someone who is well-behaved commit femicide in the first place? Why is it even mentioned that the murderer was well-behaved? What is happening in this sentence, in this article about a femicide? What do headlines like this suggest? To answer these questions, it is necessary to look at Austria's social structure on the one hand and violence against women\* and the discourse about it on the other. One structural condition is patriarchy, that is, the emergence of violence against women is supported and accepted by the social system of patriarchy.

In this paper, the term violence refers not only to the most commonly perceived form of violence, physical violence, but encompasses all forms of violence that occur in the greatest danger zone for women and girls: the social environment of the private sphere. When violence is referred to in this sense, it includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence as well as structural, discursive, and symbolic violence. It is important to note that violence against women is not perpetrated by anyone or anywhere, but most often by men within the context of intimate partnerships and family environments (see AÖF 2022; Russo et al., 2021). The most subtle and covert forms of violence are symbolic, structural, and institutional violence (cf. Russo et al., 2021), which can be perpetuated through discourse, i.e., hegemonically secured justifications that also find their way into media discourse.

There are now various laws to safeguard women from violence, but in everyday life, violence against women is still protected by social structures and is still mainly perpetrated by men. In 2014, a study by the *European Agency for Fundamental Rights* (FRA, 2014) highlighted that at least one in five women in Europe aged 15 and older has experienced sexual or physical violence by men, mainly in the private sphere. The problem is

in the tradition of Western political thought down to our own days, the way in which the distinction between the public and the private spheres has been drawn has served to confine women, and typically female spheres of activity (...) to the 'private' domain, and to keep them off the public agenda in the liberal state. (Benhabib, 1998, p. 85)

For it is precisely there, "at home", in the "private sphere", that most violence against women takes place, in the vast majority of these cases by (ex-)partners (cf. Russo et al., 2021). Therefore, these forms of violence are often framed as "domestic violence," which, however, obscures the gendered nature of the violent relationship.

These hegemonic phenomena are also (re)produced, (re)constructed, disseminated, and finally received again in discourse. Discourse, in this sense, both produces and mirrors social relations: In media discourse, for example,

women are fundamentally underrepresented both as subjects and as objects of speech and are mostly portrayed in a stereotypically female way. Violence against women also takes place in discourse, for example, when violence against women is reported from a male and androcentric perspective that relegates female voices into the discursive background (cf. Geiger, 2008). In discourse, sexual violence, and physical violence up to femicide are most often reported, and most research also focuses on these direct forms of violence. Cases of violence are portrayed very differently by different media genres, e.g., in quality or tabloid journalism (cf. Meltzer, 2021; Pernegger, 2019). Results of previous research on the reproduction and perpetuation of violence through discourse state that femicides, in particular, are exploited as an extreme form of violence, with many images, large lurid headlines, and stereotypical portrayals that frame the events as tragic individual cases and not structurally classified (cf. Meltzer, 2021; Pernegger, 2019).

Sadly, Austria is now one of the leaders in the *European Union* (EU), when it comes to femicides: "In 2021, there have been 30 cases of murders of women\* so far. 29 of them were allegedly committed by their (ex-)partners. These murders are to be understood as femicides: They are committed against women\* because they are women\*" (Russo et al, 2021, p. 6)<sup>1</sup>. Before femicide occurs, it is usually preceded by other forms of violence, for example structural and symbolic violence, which are the most invisible. However, this is rarely addressed, creating a distorted picture of the reality of violence against women. Neglected - especially in tabloid journalism - are the structural conditions for women suffering from violence. Femicides, in particular, are presented as tragic individual cases (cf. Meltzer, 2021). "Accordingly, such a form of reporting does not lead to social and political changes in the long run, but preserves violence against women as a private topic" (Meltzer, 2021, p. 6) - instead, it should be politicized and openly discussed. A structural and symbolic contextualization of the topic in the mass media, or in a representative of the high-circulation and high-reach tabloid journalism in Austria, as found in the case of the *Kronen Zeitung*, is therefore essential. I will therefore explore the question of how violence against women is discursively constructed in the *Kronen Zeitung*. Additionally, I will interrogate the constructions of violence against women and ask how structural aspects on the topic of violence against women are reproduced. In doing so, I address how reality and knowledge about violence against women is (re)produced through (institutionalized) ways of speaking and what is thereby made invisible and obscured – not only in the private, but also in the structural and thus in the political sphere. After reviewing existing work and findings on the topic and presenting theoretical and methodological perspective, I summarize the results of my critical discourse analysis of online articles in the *Kronen Zeitung*. After presenting the research findings, I reflect on my own research process and myself, for which I have provided a separate section.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelters (AÖF), 31 murders of women were committed in Austria in 2021, 30 of them presumably by their (ex-)partners, acquaintances or family members. The AÖF also includes so-called extended suicides by men, in which the suspect presumably kills the woman first and then himself.

## 2. Research background

Since the seemingly private sphere of intimate relationships has been politicized by the women's movement, the political dimension of violence committed in private has also been made visible. Not least in the wake of #metoo, both public and scientific discourse on the diverse forms of violence against women and girls has also surged: "Research, as well as practice and policy on reducing gender-based violence, has undergone significant internationalization in the last 10 to 15 years" (Schrötte, 2019, p. 841). In 2014, *the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights* (FRA, 2014) conducted the largest study to date on gender-based violence with 42,000 women and shows as a result that "one in three women (33%) has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since she was 15 years old" and "out of all women who have a (current or previous) partner, 22% have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner since the age of 15" (FRA, 2014, p. 15). The authors finally state: Problematic in any case is that

the extent of violence in gender relations can only be approximated by dark field studies (violence prevalence studies), since due to taboos, sexualized violence and violence in couple relationships in particular are largely unreported and thus remain institutionally "invisible". Thus, about 95% of all forced sexual acts are not reported to the police, and the vast majority of cases of domestic violence are not disclosed to the support system or to the police and judiciary. (Schrötte, 2019, p. 835)

With the entry into force of the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, better known as the *Istanbul Convention*, which is "currently the most important legal instrument against violence against women" (AÖF, 2022), the issue received further considerable attention.

The fact that we can talk about violence against women and the different forms of violence stems from the strength and political urgency of the women's movement. Their demand that "the private is political" led to an openly public discourse about "demands for social change, new forms of political participation and the creation of free spaces" (Schulz, 2019, p. 914) - specifically, for example, the right to new abortion legislation. Feminist political engagement unfolded in this movement, expressed in university-based women's and gender studies, among others, which addressed rape and spousal violence (cf. Schulz, 2019, p. 915). "Feminist research exposes the following: violence against women\* is primarily violence by male\* relationship partners\* and ex-partners\*. It is mostly perpetrated in the domestic sphere, often systematically over a long period of time" (Russo et al., 2021, p. 24). Moreover, research shows that there are different types of violence - visible and less visible. For example, in their contemporary feminist work, Russo et al. (2021) divide violence against women into psychological, physical, sexual, economic/financial, symbolic, and structural/institutional (pp. 25 - 43). By differentiating the concept of violence or the different types of violence, it can now be researched in a more differentiated and precise way, which can also provide a starting point for psychological

research into different types of violence. As a result of the increased attention, there is a great deal of research on violence against women. For example, based on the representative EU study on this topic, Russo et al. (2021) conclude:

The consequences of violence are profound and far-reaching. Studies prove the sickening effect of violence. In addition to physical injuries and even death, the European FRA study mentions psychological injuries such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks, sleep disorders and chronic pain as a consequence of violent acts. To be added are: Concentration and memory disorders, psychosomatic complaints, lack of self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy, social problems, isolation and difficulties at work that threaten the existence of the victim. (p. 23)

Media discourse on violence against women influences and is part of the reality of violence against women, because discourse not only represents, but above all *constructs* reality. Against the background of such a perspective on discourse, different levels of the construction of knowledge about gender and the body can be identified: the level of representation and normalization (I refer to this as the symbolic level), following Foucault the "body as discursive-media object" (Michaelsen, 2019, p. 1368), and then following Judith Butler the "theory of a performative gender body and of the body as a perception- and reality-generating medium itself" (ibid.). The feminist critique of the representation of women invokes a difference between actual living women and 'the woman' as a (seemingly existing) symbolic image or ideal, thus pointing to the differences between media and political representations/representations and what is represented (cf. Michaelsen, 2019, p. 1369). Thus, there is also a difference between the factually existing violence against women and its representation in the media.

Media coverage on violence against women in Austria has been most exhaustively studied by Maria Pernegger (2022), who analyzed direct violence by means of a content-based text and image analysis of quality and tabloid media. By direct violence, Pernegger means physical, physical, sexual and economic violence. Results of Pernegger's study show that, in a comparison of media coverage, violence against women is reported very differently and that the focus of tabloid journalism is on the extreme case of femicide and that hardly any other forms of violence besides physical violence are included in discourse. Further findings were that even extreme acts of violence are downplayed and, at the same time, dramatized, and portrayed as individual cases and not in the context of structural patriarchal mechanisms of power and domination. Structural and symbolic violence was not examined in the study in the first place.

Another comprehensive study by Christine Meltzer (2021) analyzed discourse in Germany in the form of a systematic content-analytic study of print coverage of violence against women. From 2015 to 2019, Meltzer examined media discourse on violence against women, the study "was limited to physical violence, or threats thereof, coercion, and stalking" (p. 20). Meltzer also concluded that acts of violence against women, particularly femicides, are presented as "tragic individual cases" that must have a high violence component to be published at all. The extreme cases then take up most of the reporting and

lead - also through repetition - to a media bias in the portrayal of violent acts by men against women. Metzler concluded that “revealing patterns behind the (apparent) individual events could create greater sensitivity and thus protection, both for women in violent relationships themselves and for the social environment” (cf. Meltzer, 2021, p. 64). Meltzer thus calls to look at the structural patterns behind violence against women - no matter in which department.

As I have argued above, symbolic violence in the form of (media) discourse is itself a stabilizing factor for these structures. However, before diving into the data, it is important to contextualize the background of the *Kronen Zeitung*, as it occupies a specific position in the canon of Austrian newspapers, being one of the most widely read newspapers and at the same time representing a very specific paper line, which repeatedly points to a diversity of opinion representation, while showing quite strong conservative content.

### **The *Kronen Zeitung*<sup>2</sup>**

Today's *Kronen Zeitung* has a long history dating back to 1900, of which only a small excerpt can be reproduced here. Today, the *Kronen Zeitung*, known as "Krone" for short, belongs to the *Funke Mediengruppe*, which unites 15 daily newspapers, 21 magazines, 11 radio stations, a weekly newspaper and a book publisher under its central editorial office and according to the *Funke Mediengruppe* website, the focus is on regional media, magazines as well as digital media. The company was founded in 1948 and reaches several million people a day. According to its own information, the media group employs 1,500 journalists and 4,000 "media makers". *Funke Mediengruppe* also owns *Mediaprint GmbH & Co KG*, Austria's largest newspaper and magazine publisher, and is active in advertising, printing and distribution. The managing directors of the *Krone* both sit on the supervisory board of the *Mediaprint* publishing house. There is only one woman on the Supervisory Board, otherwise eight men. Although the *Krone's* mission statement is "diversity of opinion of the editors and journalists" (*Kronen Zeitung*, 2022), the masthead lists no one except the aforementioned eight men and one woman from the supervisory board; moreover, two of them also head the publishing house in which it is published. Despite declining print figures, the *Kronen Zeitung* is the Austrian daily newspaper with the highest circulation (*Statista*, 2022b) - it also continues to expand digitally, in addition to a news channel that has existed since 2020. The *Mediaprint* publishing house, founded in 1988 when the *Kronen Zeitung* and *Kurier* - another Austrian daily newspaper - merged, dominates the market with the *Kronen Zeitung* and *Kurier*, especially in Austria (*Statista*, 2022c). *Kronen Zeitung* is owned by Christoph Dichand, son of founder Hans Dichand, and *Funke Mediengruppe*, while *Mediaprint GmbH* is also owned by *Funke Mediengruppe* and Hans Dichand's family, but additionally by *Raiffeisen Bankengruppe*, the largest banking group in Austria. *Mediaprint* represents the

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<sup>2</sup> "Krone" can be translated as "crown".

second largest media group in Austria after *Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF)*<sup>3</sup>. At the beginning of 2022, an estimated nine million people lived in Austria (see Statista, 2022a). According to a media analysis in Austria (Media Analyse, 2021), the printed *Kronen Zeitung* alone, at 23.3%, reaches almost a quarter of Austrians, especially people with a low level of schooling from lower social classes and especially older people. It is also published in regional editions for each of the nine federal provinces<sup>4</sup>. The *Kronen Zeitung* is not a member of the *Austrian Press Council*. The newspaper has had repeated conflicts with the Press Council and does not accept it, which is also not mandatory in Austria - but the latter issues guidelines for dealing with violence in reporting. In 2021 alone, the *Kronen Zeitung* violated the guidelines of the Austrian Press Council nine times (out of a total of 31 times in 2021, or 29.03%), and 111 cases (out of a total of 647, or 17.06%) were reported to the Press Council in relation to the *Kronen Zeitung* - the highest number of any newspaper in Austria (Presserat, 2021a). This means that around one-third of all violations of the *Austrian Press Council's* guidelines in 2021 were committed by the *Kronen Zeitung*. The violations in 2021 included coverage of a terrorist attack in Vienna, multiple uncensored publications of pictures of victims of terror and violence, details about the killing of a child, the unnecessary use of the migration background of a nine-year-old child, the publication of various accident videos resulting in death, the unlabeled advertisement for a casino, the designation of the unvaccinated as enemies of the people, violations of the protection of personality, and finally the publication of an uncensored photo of a femicide victim (cf. Press Council, 2021b). Due to its political power, high circulation and reach, and violations of ethical reporting, the *Kronen Zeitung* has a major influence on how reporting on violence against women spreads in Austria, and how violence is portrayed and perceived.

### 3. Discourse, knowledge, and power

In order to analyze the media reports and provide a theoretical framework for this work, I draw on poststructuralism. There is no single concept of "poststructuralism"; rather, it is a conglomeration of many different perspectives. Nevertheless, there are core characteristics of poststructuralism that I rely on. These can be described as a rejection of objectivity, including the conception of a single reality and truth. Poststructuralism is based on the social constructivist concept of meaning, which means that subjects construct "truth" or "reality" on the basis of larger structures and patterns of thought and (also) through language, which, bound up in discourses, carries knowledge in and with it, knowledge being interlocked with power. This gives rise to these three spheres: Discourse, knowledge and power, which socially construct and also structure our societies; they are construct and constructing element, structure and structuring element in

<sup>3</sup> ORF is a "public service program on television, radio and online. More than 90% of Austrians use one of ORF's offerings every day" (ORF, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Austria consists of nine federal states: Vorarlberg, Tyrol, Salzburg, Carinthia, Styria, Upper Austria, Lower Austria, Vienna and Burgenland.

one. Thus, subjects (e.g.: people, women) and realities (e.g.: violence against women) are also discursively produced and do not exist *a priori* - which makes poststructuralist theories especially useful for gender studies (cf. Kleiner & Dinsleder, 2017). In the context of this work, this means that violence against women also does not exist *a priori*, "just like that," but that violence against women is "the result of powerful knowledge politics that are subject to performative shifts" (Bublitz, 2019, p. 374). Before I briefly discuss *Critical Discourse Research* (CDR) as an instrument of power critique and as a methodological tool for analysis, I will take a closer look at the notions of discourse, knowledge, and power.

Discourse refers to the totality of all discursive practices (e.g.: performance) and thus can never be captured in its entirety; rather, it can be understood as a "discursive teeming" (Jäger, 2007). The poststructuralist concept of discourse is characterized by its dynamism. It vehemently argues against a reductionist, exclusively descriptive view of discourse; instead, it posits that discourse thrives on constant change and updating by participants and the discursive power that develops through context and speakers. Discourses are not unanimous or congruent: rather, they contradict, misunderstand, complement, disagree. Margarethe and Siegfried Jäger (2015) also refer to this as a "discursive struggle" (Jäger, 2015). According to this, it is a power struggle that is extremely dynamic, although it (seems) static-descriptive. However, discourse is realized through performance, which has implications for the discourse subjects, in this case the women who are or have been affected by violence and who are or have been reported on. Discourse also refers to what is not said - for example, who or what is given less space, who or what has - in other words - less power? Or, what doesn't need to be said at all, what is still understandable? And how are the topics (re)presented? Which structures of power play a role in this? What do the historical-concrete conditions have to do with it? In the sense of poststructuralism, our knowledge is historically produced, at a certain time in a certain place by certain people.

Margarethe and Siegfried Jäger also describe discourse in the tradition of Foucault as the "flow of knowledge through time" (Jäger, 2007, p. 15). Discourse is thus what connects us when we transport knowledge (through language) through our (social) discursive networks - as a simple example, consider a newspaper like the *Kronen Zeitung*. Behind a newspaper, there are historical-structural conditions, a socio-political attitude or way of thinking, also the financiers have influence and those responsible have power. Within this framework, knowledge is constantly negotiated - for example, what is considered true or normal and what is not. On the one hand, the negotiated knowledge itself is drawn from the discursive web; on the other hand, the processing and negotiation of knowledge constantly creates new (knowledge) that circles back into the discursive web. However, knowledge is not de-contextual but follows power structures and knowledge politics that already exist and are discursively reproduced.

In the context of this paper, patriarchal structures are understood as such. Like discourse and knowledge, power does not exist in a decontextualized



manner but requires the exercise of someone or something over someone or something. The maintenance of power in this context can be achieved through disciplining, rules, prohibitions, controls, and punishments, that is, through the exercise of force. However, even when there is no structural or institutional punishment, social values and norms are permeated by the force field of power. According to Foucault, power structures become visible where they generate resistance (Foucault, 1982, p. 243). This resistance, in the poststructuralist sense, also enables the new, enables the change of existing relations. When a discourse is examined, this always allows conclusions to be drawn about social power structures. Discourses are thus specific spaces of the sayable and knowable. "The power effect of discourses is generated from the containment of sayability and knowability, speaker subjectivity, as well as the coupling surfaces to action" (Link, 2008, p. 118). These meta-theoretical considerations are relevant in relation to the problem area of violence against women insofar as

Violence, and especially violence against women\*, is embedded in a thoroughly patriarchal social system. Patriarchy represents a form of social organization and a value system that favors men\* in the state, family, and other institutions and gives them the more powerful position - over women\* and non-normative gender identities (Russo et al., 2021, p. 8).

In the course of the analysis, I will therefore repeatedly refer to the hegemonic and thus gendered distribution of violence against women.

#### **4. Research process**

*Critical discourse research* (CDR) is to be understood as an instrument of power critique that contributes to deconstructing discourses and making the interwoven structures of discourse, power and knowledge comprehensible. Originating with Foucault, CDR was further developed - among many others - by Siegfried and Margarethe Jäger (cf. 2007; 2015), finding its way to an increasingly elaborated form to become more accessible to academic researchers. Central to CDR is that its research questions are situated in social problem areas, that it asks decidedly about disadvantage and discrimination, and that it seeks to pursue a critique of power and domination. Thus, because of the many different streams in CDR, the researcher can assemble a toolbox (cf. Jäger, 2007) to the best of their ability to conduct research according to desired characteristics, as CDR operates in an interdisciplinary field. Thus, CDR does not begin with the initial macro-analysis, but with the preliminary thinking of the entire research. The research process is then divided into different steps.

A total of 114 articles finally found their way into the macro-analysis. In the end, only those articles explicitly dealing with violence against women were considered. After the macro-analysis of the 114 articles, 30 of them were selected for micro-analysis, 23 of which were short news stories that were only a few lines long. Therefore, I selected seven main articles, all of which were about a total of two femicides in Austria, three of the articles about the first femicide, and

four articles about the second femicide. These are also the articles that are seen or read most quickly and create a bias in terms of (stereotypical) portrayal of violence against women. These seven articles were about two femicides, both committed by male relatives in January against a woman and a girl, respectively. The first femicide occurred on January 8<sup>th</sup>, and was covered in three articles; the second femicide occurred on January 12<sup>th</sup>, and received 4 articles. The articles range from one page to three pages. In these seven articles, different authors report on the femicides and especially on the background. To better understand the findings, I will briefly introduce the two femicides here. The first femicide of a woman was committed in the shared apartment, in the living room, by the husband. The killer shot his wife in the back of the head with a pistol, while she was sitting at the dining room table and the children were nearby. The second femicide of a girl was committed by the girl's father on railroad tracks. The perpetrator forced her to go with him on the tracks and then murdered her. The killer had already been known to the judiciary, as he had threatened to kill his daughter and had stalked the girl's mother in the past.

## 5. Results

In the newspaper, a distinction is made between domestic and foreign countries; domestic means Austria, foreign means all other countries. Results of the macroanalysis reveal that there was also reporting on violence in other countries, especially Great Britain and the United States of America, in connection with Jeffrey Epstein, Ghislaine Maxwell and Prince Andrew<sup>5</sup>. The Church and the Pope were also key social actors that were reported on.<sup>6</sup> Otherwise, articles related to femicides, cases of violence, or new information on old cases that had not yet been solved. The topic of stalking was also covered. Articles about violence against women in Austria appeared most frequently in the form of small articles that are only a few sentences long and usually do not contain pictures. Most dealt with physical violence, often with knives or firearms, or with threats of violence or femicide; they also addressed economic violence and police measures; the large articles then dealt mainly with domestic femicides - in the past as well as in the present. A structural understanding of femicides is sometimes found in separate supplemental articles on the site that feature experts and present statistics. These articles were not, as in the many short and few large ones, about the act or the course of events from the male point of view, but about the social context of the topic and the fact that Austria is such a negative pioneer.

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<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Epstein was a sex offender and maintained a sexual abuse ring of underage girls with his girlfriend and accomplice, Ghislaine Maxwell. The allegations range from human trafficking, sexual exploitation and coercion into prostitution to rape. Prince Andrew of England is also alleged to have had sex with a minor but, like Epstein before him, was able to settle out of court with the victims and/or the prosecution (Der Standard, 2021a)

<sup>6</sup> Pope Emeritus Joseph Ratzinger has made a false statement about his knowledge of abuse in the church. An abuse report states that there were at least 500 cases of sexual abuse in the Catholic Archdiocese of Munich/Freising. The expert report concludes that Pope Benedict, then Cardinal Ratzinger, attended a meeting in which it was decided that a pedophile priest could continue to work as a pastor, whereupon he continued to abuse children (Der Standard, 2022).

Topics of the articles that structurally classify and reflexively deal with violence against women were mostly women's protection, the "Million Violence Protection Package"<sup>7</sup>, femicides committed by men last year ("Chronology of Horror")<sup>8</sup>, interviews with experts<sup>9</sup>, political protest, statistics on the topic and research projects. The murders were not usually referred to as femicides; only once (in one of the structurally classifying articles) was the word "femicide" used. Apart from this instance, they were referred to as "acts of blood," "horrific explosions of violence," "marital dramas," "acts of madness," etc. In the cases covered in the *Kronen Zeitung*, the perpetrator usually came from the immediate environment of the woman affected by violence or ultimately murdered. In the articles, the emphasis was often on describing the act as "dramatic," "inconceivable." The "ethnic origin" of the perpetrator was regularly mentioned. In some cases, "origin" was also mentioned for the women involved, but much more frequently for the perpetrators. Almost as important as origin was occupation - again, that of the perpetrator, not that of the murdered person. Separation or divorce were often stylized as the "reason" why women were threatened, stalked or then subjected to physical or economic violence by their (ex-)partner. This was also reflected in the headlines, for example: "Infidelity with nasty consequences", "Love whispering", "Love whispering led to illegal weapons".

Several characteristics emerged during the subsequent microanalysis. The results are divided into commonalities and differences, followed by a brief summary.

For ease of reading, I first list the articles by title and coding, and then at the end of each section I provide selected representative quotations from some of the articles from whose analysis I drew my findings.

#### Femicide 1

1. Article 1 (Fem1/Art1, 10/01/2022): *Forester shoots woman at kitchen table*
2. Article 2 (Fem1/Art2, 11/01/2022): *Woman shot dead: Family wanted to emigrate to Sweden*
3. Article 3 (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022): *The cruelty of a good husband*

#### Femicide 2

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<sup>7</sup> The government in Austria adopted a violence protection package for women in 2021 which includes mandatory work with and an automatic weapons ban for dangerous persons, an increase in the number of trained prevention officers, and the strengthening of police case conferences for high-risk cases - with 24.6 million euros.

<sup>8</sup> According to the AÖF, 31 murders of women were committed in 2021, 30 of which were allegedly committed by the ex(partner), an acquaintance or a family member. "In the last ten years, according to Raab (Federal Minister for Women, Family, Integration and Media, note), there were 319 murders and 458 attempted murders of women. The peak was in 2019 with 43 murders" (ORF, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> For example, with Maria Rösslhumer, the managing director of AÖF and head of the Women's Telephone Against Violence and board member of the Austrian Women's Ring, who was awarded the Austrian Human Rights Award 2020 for her extraordinary commitment to women and children affected by violence.

1. Article 1 (Fem2/Art1, 13.01.2022): *Father threw himself in front of the train with daughter (6)*
2. Article 2 (Fem2/Art2, 14.01.2022): *"We are at the end of our rope".*
3. Article 3 (Fem2/Art3, 01/15/2022): *Put on rails with daughter (6): Perpetrator stalked family for years!*
4. Article 4 (Fem2/Art4, Jan. 25, 2022): *Justitia now has a lot of explaining to do*

## Similarities

### The murderer

The perpetrator is rarely if ever named as the perpetrator or the murderer or the guilty party, but always as a private person who is a father, likes to play tennis, is a forester and so on. In this way, the perpetrator is normalized via profession and hobby and not via the core of the matter, namely that he committed a woman's murder. Moreover, the act and the perpetrator are often discursively separated: the perpetrators in the text are perpetrators by the attributions of action, but they are not named as such (perpetrator, murderer, guilty), e.g.: "good husband commits atrocity." The murderer, his perspective and narrative are given more space than the woman or girl. He is mostly connoted positively, constructed with "good" qualities. Examples include these or similar descriptions:

1. The former forester - who until recently was employed by the Federal Forests - took his Glock 17 registered to him and shot his wife, who was sitting at the dining table, in the back of the head." (Fem1/Art1, 10.01.2022).
2. Farmer Josef R. (88) was friends with Daniel S.: "He was a pleasant, quiet person. He came from northern Germany, originally learned gunsmithing and then changed professions because he had no future. We often talked about forestry things. She [the murdered woman] learned forest education some time ago and worked in schools" (Fem1/Art1, 10.01.2022).
3. Well-mannered husband commits atrocity (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
4. [...] as reported, the 38-year-old amateur tennis player had thrown himself and his own daughter in front of an express train on Tuesday evening not far from the southern railway station near Sollenau (Fem2/Art2, 14.01.2022).

### The murdered woman or girl

The woman and the girl are very passive in the text and are therefore presented as less relevant than the murderer's narrative. They are often constructed stereotypically, in a way that has negative connotations. While the murderer is often associated with his profession, the woman or girl is constructed as a mother or daughter, that is, only in relation to and dependent on the man. The victim might be described in the following ways:

1. So, she was a single mother when she looked for a partner on an Internet platform in 2006. There she came into contact with Daniel S.. A German, a gunsmith by profession (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
2. Sometimes the woman's voice could be heard from the estate. When she scolded, "probably with her daughters and sons, but with a mother of five children, sometimes the nerves can be on edge" (Fem1/Art3, 16.01.2022).
3. Apparently, the enthusiastic amateur tennis player and his beautiful ex-partner (33) - she once won a beauty contest and also took part in the competition for the most beautiful woman in Austria - had separated. (Fem2/Art1, 01/13/2022).

### **The search for meaning or the production of meaning**

In addition, the "search for meaning" or "the question of why" was a common feature: a narrative is created through marginal information, certain parts are particularly staged or emphasized. Speculations from close people are often used to create a meaningful narrative. It became apparent that the narrative of femicide - albeit constructed from the perspective of the perpetrator - served as a kind of explanation for the femicide in order to be able to classify the act in such a way that it made "sense." The more "sensible" and "normal" the perpetrator and the course of events appeared, the easier it was made for the readership to understand and thus ultimately (socially) process. The "search for meaning" became implicitly and explicitly visible: Either all means were used to try to establish (speculative) connections of meaning, or the "why" was explicitly asked. Furthermore, it could be observed that the narrative took over the supporting role for normalization processes: Through the narrative, justifications and linkages could be created and legitimized. Depending on the narrative, the act of femicide was justified by different aspects and made comprehensible for the readers or not. In this work, normalization contrasts with dramatization: the more dramatized through word choice and stylistic devices, the more "abnormal" the narrative and the femicide were classified.

The search for meaning could take these or similar forms:

1. In front of the entrance of the neat house in Weißenkirchen im Attergau are candles, next to them are flowers. The testimony that something terrible must have happened [...]. In this family, which - according to the neighbors - had been considered a "model family". Nevertheless, from time to time the voice of the woman could be heard from the estate. When she scolded, "probably with her daughters and sons, but with a mother of five children, sometimes the nerves are on edge." They were considered a "perfect couple." And otherwise? "No, there was nothing noticeable." No one wants to have heard anything about quarrels between the couple. And besides, the two would have been a perfect match in their contrasts: She, the extrovert. He, the quiet one. And then the incomprehensible: HE killed HER at 2:44 p.m. on January 8." (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
2. "My relationship with Simone was not as happy as everyone thought," the 46-year-old said when asked, "especially in the last few weeks it was conflictual." Why, why, why? (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).

3. When officers arrived on the scene shortly thereafter, he was already standing in front of his house with his hands up. Why? Why this terrible crime? (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).

### **The psychological**

It was also apparent that mental impairments or incidents were presented in a stigmatized way. In two cases, mental illness was brought into play and stigmatized: Either it was directly interpreted as a weakness - this was the case with the murdered woman - or it was seen as abnormal and a possible reason for someone to commit a crime - this was the case with the murderer who killed his daughter:

1. A plan that sent Simone S. into a panic. Like the first trip to her "dream destination" when the family's van got "stuck" in a tunnel due to a traffic jam, she then completely freaked out, jumped out of the car and hysterically screamed for help. (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
2. Alex V. probably deliberately drove his little girl to her death. Now, piece by piece, what can be called a collective failure is coming together. The psychogram of a stalker that makes you shudder. (Fem2/Art3, 01/15/2022).

### **Other**

Moreover, femicides were not named as such; they were called "acts of blood," "atrocities," and "acts of madness." The articles were often characterized by the tragic individual case portrayal (cf. Meltzer, 2021), which failed to classify femicides structurally or even to place them in a larger than private context. Moreover, facts were often constructed dichotomously, i.e., in two ways: normal vs. abnormal, good vs. bad, right vs. wrong. The balance between these dichotomies then becomes either inadequate or one-sided. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that an act can be abnormal, but the perpetrator normal: this leads to a narrative conflict ("good husband commits atrocity") that becomes irritating: How can a good husband commit an atrocity? Examples include the following:

1. Because the couple has five children aged seven to 18 years, who were present at the bloody deed! Saturday afternoon around 4.45pm ends an apparently for years smoldering relationship dispute of the married couple Daniel (46) and Simone S. (42) in any case in a terrible explosion of violence. (Fem1/Art1, 10.01.2022).
2. They still wanted to emigrate to Sweden together - but instead it came to a bloody marriage drama: the forester Daniel S. (46) is reported to have literally executed his wife Simone S. (42) at the kitchen table in the smart house in Weißenkirchen im Attergau. (Fem1/Art2, 11.01.2022).
3. And besides, the two of them would have been a perfect match in their contrasts: She, the extrovert. He, the quiet one. And then the incomprehensible: HE killed HER at 2:44 p.m. on Jan. 8. In front of her eldest son. The high school student was

sitting at the dinner table. His mother stood next to him and prepared a snack. Suddenly, Daniel S. came into the room and reportedly yelled, "You destroyed my life!" - Before putting a bullet in the back of his wife's head with a handgun. (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).

4. Father throws himself in front of train with daughter (6): drama at the tracks of the southern railroad. (Fem2/Art1, 01/13/2022).

5. HORROR ACT: Put on rails with daughter (6): Perpetrator stalked family for years! (Fem2/Art3, 01/15/2022).

## Differences

### (Female) experts

The two femicides and the articles about them differ quite clearly in the appearance of experts and thus in the structural classification of the femicide. While in respect to the first femicide, not a single expert appears in the three articles, in the articles about the second femicide, two experts are given space in two articles. The inclusion of (female) experts had the effect of drawing attention to structural conditions, thus moving the femicides away from the "tragic individual case" to a social, systemic problem. The appearance of neighbors, friends, acquaintances, and confidants had the opposite effect: this gave great weight to individual accounts, and the narrative could be further expanded with regard to the significance of the crime from the perpetrator's point of view. Experts thus had great influence and power in the text. Examples of the latter include the already cited quote by farmer Josef R. (88) and the following:

1. But it was obvious that there was a crisis behind the perfect family façade: the couple would have shouted at each other again and again. Daniel S.'s evening ritual: He came home, sat in the trunk of his car, listened to music and drank beer. He had probably been unemployed for about three weeks. Maybe the final trigger... (Fem1/Art1, 10.01.2022).

2. "No, there was nothing to notice." Nobody wants to have noticed anything about quarrels between the couple. (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).

Examples of experts include the following:

1. Now the public prosecutor's office checks not only whether the requirements have been met, but also whether a report has been made to the guardianship court. "With this," knows Sabine Matjeka, chairwoman of the association of judges, "a change in custody is currently only made upon request, usually by one parent." Since the courts are not networked with each other, automatic endangerment notifications do not take place - for "data protection reasons"! However, according to the Federal Child and Youth Welfare Act, employees of courts and public prosecutor's offices are obligated to "immediately report in writing to the locally responsible authorities if there is a reasonable suspicion that children are being abused, tortured, neglected - or otherwise endangered in their well-being" (Fem2/Art4, 25.01.2022).

2. "Many questions remain unanswered; the public prosecutor's office Wiener Neustadt will now take care of the answers. Investigations are underway, but first, says spokesman Habitzl, they want to wait for the final report of the police. There is even a threat of charges against the court staff." (Fem2/Art4, 01/25/2022).

### Language

Finally, the narrative was significantly influenced by dramatizing elements that were found in every text without exception. These were not only speculative links, but also incomplete sentences ("Why, why, why?"), work with capital letters ("HE killed HER at 2:44 p.m. on January 8<sup>th</sup> "), and the frequent use of punctuation:

1. And then the unbelievable: HE killed HER on January 8 at 2:44 pm. In front of the eyes of THEIR oldest boy. The high school student was sitting at the dinner table. His mother stood next to him and prepared a snack. Suddenly, Daniel S. came into the room and reportedly yelled, "You ruined my life!" - Before putting a bullet in the back of his wife's head with a handgun. (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
2. And when officers arrived on the scene shortly after, he was already standing in front of his house with his hands up. Why? Why this terrible crime? (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
3. "My relationship with Simone wasn't as happy as everyone thought," the 46-year-old said in the interrogation, "especially in the last weeks it was conflictual." Why, why, why? Co-witnesses of the couple believe they have explanations for the drama. (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).

### Space and images

Either very large pictures of the house, the family with children, the murdered woman, the murderer, and the place where the femicide occurred are shown, taking up most of the space allocated for the femicide, usually half the space or more, or small or no or few pictures are combined with a smaller text or space in general. The larger the space and images were, the more dramatic (linguistically) the text was.

## 6. Discussion

On the one hand, the discourse analysis was able to replicate earlier findings and, on the other, to gain new insights. The demand of the second women's movement is still highly topical, as can be seen from the results. Both femicides were committed in private settings and were also subsequently presented in the *Kronen Zeitung* predominantly as tragic individual cases and not placed in a political context. One article - (Fem2/Art4, 25.01.2022): "Justitia now has a lot of explaining to do" - clearly stands out from the others, though: In it, two (female)



experts have their say, classifying femicide structurally. The feminist critique of the (re)presentation of murdered women and girls also applies here: they are strongly underrepresented and disappear in the discursive background in favor of the male perspective. Moreover, they are stereotypically portrayed, which creates a difference between the media portrayal of violence against women and the violence actually perpetrated by men. If these very mechanisms are not made visible, violence against women cannot be adequately explored and received in the context of power. In the texts, this was almost never the case: instead of illuminating the patterns and structures behind men's acts, the authors opted for idiosyncratic, male perspectives or created narratives based on them that were offered to the readership. However, discourse analysis allows us to understand these articles not as expressions of individual authors' perspectives but as text through which a social order and power structures are manifested and, at the same time, perpetuated.

It is paramount to understand how this (re-)production of existing social relations is achieved discursively. Most significant in this regard, in my view, is the normalization of the perpetrator on the basis of neighbors, friends, acquaintances, etc., to whom it seems unimaginable that a "normal" man would do something so "unimaginable." In this way, what is common in (discursive) reality happens: if something does not fit the socially shared values and norms, it is more difficult to understand and must be made understandable accordingly. This psychological effect is also very clearly evident in the search for meaning in the act or in the perpetrator himself, but not - which would be much more complex - in the structural-institutional reality, which is much more confusing and complicated to understand and present than a subjectively based individual perspective. This tendency of "simplification" can also be observed in dealing with the "psychological". Either psychological characteristics have been declared in a reductionist way as weakness (in the case of women) or as a reason to become and be violent (in the case of men) - which is clearly stigmatizing and also stereotyping.

Very important is the realization in relation to the (female) experts who speak in the articles. Although this idea is so simple, it shows a strong effect: as soon as female experts appeared, the femicides, but also what had happened before, were structurally classified, placed in a decided context that could make comprehensible where and at what point what had to be done. In favor of the expertise, the narrative with its many speculations took a back seat, so that the influence on the overall picture and thus also its inherent political power became clear. The results on the "structural" aspect show that it is difficult to grasp, understand and describe complex structures linguistically and intellectually. Even experts refer to institutions and laws when they speak of structural conditions. Since it is not really possible to grasp what "the structural" actually is, it makes sense to reduce the complex reality and prefer simpler ideas and solutions. However, this effect also leads to an individualization of such cases. At the same time, violence against women is also individualized, leading to less acceptance that women are structurally disadvantaged, and this is one of the reasons why so much violence against women can go unchecked. This also includes the symbolic

violence that is exercised and reproduced here in the *Kronen Zeitung* and the portrayal of femicides, under the protective cloak of the powerful newspaper in the powerful publishing and printing house by predominantly men. The symbolic violence here is reinforced by the underrepresentation of the "structural," by the use of male narratives and stereotyping. The two indirect forms of violence, the structural and the symbolic, are thus constructed, represented, disseminated and received via Austria's daily newspaper with the highest circulation and reach. The study shows that the (very simple) use of female experts already makes a major contribution to improving the representation of violence against women in the media. At the same time, the results show that - despite its unbroken relevance - it is important to shift the focus from the much-cited direct violence to indirect violence, as this is, among other things, the basis for how people perceive violence against women in the media in the first place, which can then result in cognitions, emotions and behavior - which is then either structurally trained or individually shaped. At the same time, the article shows that it is also important in discourse research to find clear ways to study phenomena that are very difficult to grasp cognitively and linguistically; in this case structures, that are also practicable for less experienced researchers.

## **7. Leveled structural conditions I feel in my own body: from where I speak. An autobiographical self-reflection.**

Throughout the project researching violence against women, I was involved in regular meetings where we also had the opportunity to reflect and exchange ideas. In the beginning, I was so excited about the great team and the exciting work that I left my own experiences of violence out of it, as I preferred to process them myself. However, as time went on, I became physically and psychologically worse, which had other causes, such as a move, the death of a loved one, severe pain in my abdomen due to various triggers. After my condition worsened significantly, it became more and more difficult for me to continue working on this stressful issue. For the macroanalysis I had to carefully read, record, categorize and analyze in detail the articles about violence in the *Kronen Zeitung* - which turned out to be very difficult when confronted with this mass of violent cases, especially since I had already experienced sexual and physical violence myself, which was also the topic of most of the articles. At some point I could not and did not want to continue, which made me feel guilty as a researcher because the topic is highly relevant and I wanted to write this paper, which is my first. Moreover, my three colleagues were already further along in their research, so I imposed additional pressure on myself to perform in the neoliberal sense. I was trapped in powerful structures.

The "solution" soon became apparent: at some point I could no longer hold back and hide, and at one of the meetings I blurted out that I felt bad and why. We talked for over an hour and began to think about how the psychological (protective) processes might have prevented us from addressing stressful issues ourselves. We began to discuss how to protect ourselves and how to deal with the

emotions that came up during our research as women about violence against women - including what coping strategies we developed. These were mostly action-oriented: from political activism to shouting out anger, to speaking up and engaging in discourses that were uncomfortable, and even more so, going into research about it. These are just some of them. I, too, as a student, as a scholar, as a human being, as a woman, am implicated in powerful structures that I reproduce and try to reflect through this work. After the macro- and microanalysis, I have additionally written two reflections that also shed light on the work I did during the Corona pandemic - completely isolated, from home, behind the laptop - and what that can mean for research on social problem issues. Especially with the ("self-evident") scientific claim to be neutral and objective, there were inner conflicts, although I reflected on this from a socio-critical perspective. Emotions rose in me, especially anger, but also bewilderment and above all helplessness in the face of these powerful structures that produce so much violence, that often seem so unchangeable and rigid. At the same time, this "outing" as a scientist is difficult because it could diminish my own qualifications. Nevertheless, I decided to include this reflection section and reflect on my point of view or situatedness. Away from the research world, I also noticed other changes in my behavior toward men in my personal life when they approached me or physically touched me, even if only on the arm. I noticed that my emotions became stronger depending on how much and how intensely I had engaged with the many articles due to my research. The more I was "in," the harder it was for me to distance myself and keep my emotions under control. The more I was "out", the more the strong focus on the negative emotions gave way. So in the end, this work took much longer than I thought it would, because it was important to keep distancing myself from the material, reflecting on it, and communicating with someone about it. From the microanalysis on, when I was allowed to immerse myself in the material, it was much easier for me to (continue) working, because I was no longer hit by this sheer mass of violent cases, all reported in a similar way, which had created this powerlessness in me. Especially when you are sitting alone behind a computer, have little social contact and are not supposed to have it due to a global pandemic, the direct exchange with fellow researchers about issues you need to reflect on and communicate as if you were affected yourself suffers. Considering that research results show that at least one in five women older than 15 has already experienced physical or sexual violence, I conclude that many women researching on violence against women have also had to experience violence themselves, which must be reflected on in any case - in the optimal case - also to protect the researcher and offer her a safe framework to research socio-critical topics out of her own affectedness and thus participate in a dynamic process of change. Unfortunately, this can also lead to the fact that (especially) as a woman in a male connoted field (the sciences) the competences (seriousness, objectivity - male connoted attributes) are denied, should one bring one's own subjective experiences into the scientific process, e.g., by reflecting on the circumstances and one's own situatedness. With this I would like to give an example for doing it anyway.

## 8. Conclusion

As this paper shows, research on socio-critical and politically embedded content is always also research on the self and the social environment, and therefore cannot be artificially separated from the embedding in the environment. This is exactly what natural science demands - thus also a part of psychology, the institutionalized natural scientific psychology. It is required to be neutral and objective, to control the experimental conditions, to experiment in artificially produced settings, and then to generalize the results as well as possible to the environment.

In contrast, it is important to support people in their research who are interactively connected to their socio-critical research object through their own potential discrimination mechanisms, i.e. who conduct research out of their own concern. Based on the self-reflexive reappraisal of one's own resistances, it becomes clear how much work still needs to be done with regard to the perception and awareness of one's own situatedness and the emotions, cognitions, and behaviors associated with it in research on violence against women. It is not only important to learn about one's own situation - that is, psychoeducation with regard to structural conditions - but also to be able to apply this knowledge in practice under guidance or supervision. For this purpose, it would be more than desirable to establish a platform or a network that on the one hand collects the necessary knowledge about (e.g. one's own situation or psychological mechanisms of women affected by violence), but on the other hand also connects younger women with already more experienced affected women in order to generate an interactive, supportive network out of one's own affectedness - an act of empowerment. This could also result in regular meetings or gatherings with specific agendas. This would be desirable not only with regard to the intersectional discrimination category "gender", but also for researchers who are affected multiple times or by other discrimination structures. As in any other social field, it is important in research on violence against women in psychology to have role models, i.e., women who have experienced violence themselves, who can communicate openly about it and thus become visible to other younger and subsequent researchers and encourage them to participate. Another practical step that can be derived from this paper is the targeted use of (female) experts. Here, too, it is important to show that what happened is not subjectively classified as an individual case, but that an attempt is made to place it in a broader and generally structured socio-critical context through female experts. It would also be desirable here to have female experts, since they are underrepresented in the media. Unfortunately, what this work could not do is a broader and deeper analysis in terms of structural and symbolic violence, its construction, reproduction and very importantly: reception. An intriguing question in this context would be, for example: How do women affected by violence respond to the structural and symbolic components of violence when confronted with articles about violence against women? In summary, violence against women is a highly topical political problem that should by no means remain hidden, which is why more research on it should be encouraged or

decidedly guided. In addition, it is necessary to subsequently bring the research to the public in an understandable form, so that it does not remain only in the academic sphere. It would also be important to increase the involvement of the public and private media landscapes, so that there is regular reflection on violence against women in all media, led by experts and those affected. The majority of reporting on violence against women must not be done by people who are untrained (in relation to the topic of gender-based violence), but on the basis of professional, networked, affected women and researchers. This is because public perceptions and discourse about violence against women also contribute to violence against women, as this paper makes clear.

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