Picturing Anonymity: An Empowering Method of Representing Gender-Based Violence

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ABSTRACT

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Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive global issue affecting one in three women worldwide (World Health Organization, 2021). Despite photojournalism's potential to expose injustices and shift public perceptions, mainstream media often reinforces stereotypes that contribute to the normalization or sensationalization of GBV. In Italy, media portrayals of survivors of GBV frequently result in secondary victimization, reinforcing their stigmatization as mere victims rather than recognizing their agency and resilience. This Research-Creation Thesis introduces an innovative approach to representing GBV, empathizing survivor collaboration and anonymity. The core of this work is a set of guidelines, titled "Empowering Anonymity: A Visual Method of Representing Gender-Based Violence" designed for photojournalists, journalists, and those seeking to challenge the stereotypical portrayal of GBV. These guidelines outline ethical practices for engaging with survivors and anti-violence organizations in Italy, focusing on visual techniques to protect their identities. The guidelines are exemplified by a prototype photo essay, "Fragments of Self", which demonstrates how picturing anonymity can convey fragments of a person's identity without fully revealing who they are. This prototype is conceptualized through trauma-informed journalism practices and Pierosara's theory of 'fragments of violence,' which suggests that presenting partial glimpses of a survivor's experience can convey the essence of their story while respecting their privacy and dignity (Pierosara, 2019). By implementing these guidelines and exploring the prototype photo essay, the thesis aims to contribute to ethical practices in photojournalism, inspire survivors of GBV to share their stories, and challenge stereotypes. Ultimately, it seeks to contribute to the empowerment journey of survivors.

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1. Introduction

Gender-based violence is an insidious social, structural, and universal phenomenon. It is a global endemic fueled by stereotypes, is a violation of human rights, and is an issue that affects us all, directly and indirectly (Council of Europe, 2019, p.16). A femicide[1] is not justifiable as a "raptus" of anger and jealousy, as an extreme act of love and avenge of passion, or as a consequence of a fictional provocation. The duty of journalists is to report on social phenomena and to shed light on the truth hidden under culturally structured circumstances: to be accurate, ethical, respectful, and to give voice to the victims of atrocities (Castano, 2023; Lalli & Gius, 2016, p. 86). The duty of a journalist is not to fabricate narratives that hide the truth for political convenience or personal beliefs (Ordine dei Giornalisti, 2024, para. 6); not to fuel violence by promoting stereotypes (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE], 2023, p. 4); not to attack the victim and defend the violence offender (Scelsa, 2022, p. 51; Zanotti, 2024); and not to cause further violence (Ingenere, 2023, para. 7).

In Italy, behind our celebrated ancient history, art, cuisine, and paradisiacal landscapes, lies, among many others, a subtle yet drastic truth: a significant issue in how gender-based violence (GBV) is represented in the media (Zanotti, 2024). Journalists use misleading language that blames the victim and justifies the perpetrator with words such as "raptus" or "crime of love" (Sobrero, 2014, p. 50). The images accompanying these stories are often taken from stock photo libraries like Getty Images (see, for example, ANSA, 2024; Balsamo, 2023; Ingenere, 2023; Istituto Beck, 2024; Rai News, 2021). In the case of "GBV", these images are often photos taken at protests or cliched scenes of

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[1] In Italy, a feminicide is not classified as an autonomous crime but is considered an aggravating factor in homicide cases. The term "feminicide", carries broader political significance, addressing not only the male perpetrators but also the state and judicial systems that perpetuate and normalize misogyny (Centro Diritti Umani, Università di Padova, n.d.). The Osservatorio di Ricerca Sul Femminicidio at the University of Bologna has clearly differentiated between the terms "homicide", "femicide", and "feminicide" (Osservatorio Femminicidio, Università di Bologna, n.d.). According to their classification, "homicide" refers to the act of murder without considering motive beyond its legal definition, "femicide" coined by Diana Russell (1992) is when male violent behaviors lead to the killing of a woman because she is a woman and the emphasis is on the culmination of the continuum of violence (Capecchi, n.d). "Feminicide" coined by Marcela Lagarde (1996) is any form of violence (physical/psychological) directed by a man against a woman because she is a woman (an intention of annihilation that can culminate in her killing) and it encompasses a wider societal context, addressing the systemic issues that contribute to the failure to prevent the killing of women (Capecchi, n.d.)

violence such as a stopping hand, a clenched fist, or a woman cowering in a corner (Ingenere, 2023). If we take a moment to consider the perspective of these stereotypical images, we notice that they are reflecting the eyes of the abuser and not the victim (Ingenere, 2023, para. 17). At times, images are even taken from the victims' social media profiles, further violating their privacy (Di Cristofaro, 2021). This problem is worrying given the plethora of resources available to contrast the unethical and stereotyped representation of women and the LGBTQ+ community. Even with new laws, advocacy fights, resources for better reporting, and increased national awareness, the problem of GBV and its inaccurate reporting persists. Pictures of atrocities remain a normalized, peripheral gaze in our everyday lives, as we numb ourselves by scrolling on social media between a daily femicide and a "what I eat in a day" post.

In the digital age, information is often presented without filters, or worse, misrepresented to appear real; with the development of AI technologies, we are experiencing an increase in cyberbullying and deepfake AI revenge porn, where public images are exploited for non-consensual pornography (see Castaldo, 2023; Gibson, 2023; Shankar, 2018). For survivors of GBV, this is particularly concerning as their images and testimonies circulate online. It is thus extremely important to consider how these individuals are portrayed—are they shown as victims, or as empowered women who have fought violence?

Photographs are timeless because they capture a unique moment of existence. Simultaneously, photographs depend on our perception which is constantly evolving, creating the illusion that we can freeze time and capture the essence of a subject by crystallizing them in that particular image (Sontag, 1973, p. 63). When a woman is depicted as a victim of abuse, this image can overshadow her multifaceted identity, reducing her to a single, traumatic event (Ingenere, 2023). Since photojournalists have an ethical responsibility for the impact that their photographs can have on both viewers and the individuals portrayed, it is essential to pay particular attention to the standards of ethical reporting (Prosser, 2012, p. 15). The objectification of women as victims demands a reevaluation of traditional photojournalism practices (Lester, 1991; National Press Photographers Association, n.d.). Some of the key codes of the NPPA could be reconsidered (see Codes 4 and 5 of the National Press Photographers Association, n.d.). The permission to "intrude on private moments

of grief only when the public has an overriding and justifiable need to see" must clarify that this does not imply focusing on morbid details of the violence to attract the public's attention (National Press Photographers Association, n.d). Moreover, the standards of immediacy and clarity cannot be fully applied to survivors of GBV due to privacy concerns and the need to avoid interfering with their trauma (Dire Controla Violenza, 2024). Even though photojournalists are trained to not stage photographs, they should be allowed to have a "creative contemplation" (Vroons, 2017, para. 6). This could, for instance, include experimenting with alternative ways of narrating a story without portraying the identity of a person. By revising the traditional codes of photojournalism ethics, we should find a balance between immediacy, clarity, and emotional impact with the need to protect survivors from the dangers of online stigmatization and persecution.

Photojournalism holds the power to capture the essence of historical atrocities and shape our collective memory. Often when people think of photography of violence, we see powerful images that testify to an atrocity: we see a little girl crying while going down a hill, a soldier falling on the ground, a mum of two hungry children staring at us, murdered bodies begging for our mercy, children full of blood and found under rubles of incomprehensible destruction. We know the importance of looking at those pictures because they confront us with the reality of suffering (Pierosara, 2019, p. 3; Prosser, 2012, p. 7). If we don't see, we won't believe. But we see and we cannot believe that such horrors are actually true. The power of documenting historical atrocities is in fact a double-edged sword. It does not just provide testimony of events; it can also traumatize or desensitize people. In our digital age, images of violence are often seen in between entertaining content, leading to a disturbing normalization of violence. What is more unsettling is how images of atrocity can fuel further violence (Ingenere, 2023). Representations of violence can be misinterpreted from their original context to become spectacles, performative, and even pornographic, causing further trauma to the survivors (Prosser, 2012).

The literature on picturing atrocity in photojournalism argues that the widespread presence of violent images on social media, what can be defined as the 'oversaturation of the visible', has led to the normalization of violence and often causes viewers to experience 'emotional anesthesia' (Pierosara, 2019, p. 12; Sontag, 2003, p. 80). This normalization, contextualized within our capitalist

society's image-based culture, can escalate to a fascination and celebration of violence (Sontag, 1973, p. 140). This represents a significant issue that both photojournalists and journalism scholars must confront and address by seeking resources specialized in trauma-informed journalism and covering GBV (see Gender-Based Violence Journalists Network, n.d.; European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.; Manifesto di Venezia, 2017; Thompson, 2021).

This Research-Creation Thesis introduces a potential alternative perspective in photojournalism for representing GBV. The project presents "Empowering Anonymity: a Visual Method of Representing Gender-Based Violence", a method designed for photojournalists, visual journalists, and editors in Italy to empower survivors through respectful and collaborative visual documentation that prioritizes their well-being and privacy. This collaboration is designed for those who have contrasted violence and wish to share their stories of empowerment. It explores how a photojournalist and a GBV survivor can collaborate to create photographs and descriptions that capture fragments of their experiences, offering insights into their stories without disclosing their full identities. This approach aims to protect their privacy, prevent stigmatization, and equip them by giving them control over how their narrative is presented. "Empowering Anonymity" focuses on two main points. Firstly, it suggests that the content of a survivor's story should emphasize personal empowerment and the journey within anti-violence centers, rather than solely on the abuse suffered.[2] Secondly, the visual method should be based on anonymity, meaning that photo essays or other types of visual documentation should not expose the identity of the survivors, and their information should remain confidential.[3]

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[2] Empowerment refers to a subjective process of personal growth, self-love, and self-discovery, aimed at achieving a sense of independence and freedom. It usually involves moving from a state of oppression or dependence—whether on other people, societal structures, or circumstances—to a position of greater control over one's life and decisions.

[3] Anonymity, from the Greek word "anonymos" (ἀνώνυμος), meaning "without a name" or "nameless", refers to the absence of identifiable information. In this thesis, anonymity means that visual documentation, such as photo essays, should avoid revealing the identity of survivors. This can be achieved by not showing their faces

The presented guidelines in this Research-Creation Thesis include a prototype photo-essay demonstrating techniques for creating such anonymous photographs. These focal points aim to reduce online stigmatization and provide positive examples of contrasting violence to inspire others. Overall, this method aims to promote accurate and respectful portrayals of survivors, highlight the journeys toward empowerment, and enable survivors to reclaim their agency and narrate their stories while maintaining anonymity. By adopting this method, media professionals could contribute to a more ethical representation of GBV, aiding in the healing process of survivors and fostering broader awareness and understanding. While this method mostly addresses Italian media and journalists, I hope that it can inspire anyone who is interested in empowering survivors and challenging the stereotypical representation of GBV.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Why do we take pictures of atrocity?

This project begins with an inquiry into the reasons behind picturing atrocities and the subsequent ethical duties of photojournalists. Following, the literature will center on the representation of GBV in Italian media and how stereotypes contribute to the perpetuation of the violence. To understand why we take pictures of atrocity we first need to understand its meaning. A picture of atrocity is a representation of a situation of violence involving individuals who have suffered a disruptive and traumatic event in their lives. Representations of atrocities often involve people who have been oppressed and necessitate particular consideration, recognition of their vulnerability, and awareness of the potential harm that these images may cause. Prosser (2012), in *Picturing Atrocity,* uses the term 'atrocity' to refer to a violation of the body, such as death, massacre, burning, and amputations, but it can also indicate natural or accidental disasters, such as droughts, fires, tornados, oil spills, or mine explosions (Prosser, 2012, p. 10). Pierosara (2019) considers

or attaching names to their photos. When viewed by the general public, these images should ensure that the individuals cannot be recognized or identified.

representations of violence, such as photographs, to be an attempt to capture the vulnerability and irreparability of a situation of extreme suffering (Pierosara, 2019, p. 12). Both Prosser and Pierosara agree that the reason why we photograph atrocity is to make a violent situation present in the world: if we do not acknowledge them we are denying their existence (Pierosara, 2019, p. 3; Prosser, 2012, p. 7). The literature often refers to the Holocaust, the war in Vietnam, Abu Ghraib, the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and many more, as examples of those documentary photographs of atrocity that through their witnessing changed history (See Cati & Sánches-Biosca, 2015; Dean, 2015; Linfield, 2010; Prosser, 2012; Sliwinski, 1975). We also use pictures of atrocity instrumentally, as a medium for humanitarian actions to denounce human rights violations around the globe (Walsh, 2020, p. 263). Consequently, one goal of memorial museums, humanitarian groups, and exhibits that feature violent images is to encourage empathy for the victims (Dean, 2015, p. 239).

2.2 Responses to pictures of atrocity

Controversially, a possible downside to humanitarian instrumentalism is the exploitation of human rights and the creation of stereotypes of suffering (Walsh, 2020, Chapter 19). The use of photography in humanitarian aid has been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes due to the overuse of images of atrocity and the violation of human dignity (Walsh, 2020, p. 266). In Italy, for instance, campaigns aimed at preventing and contrasting violence against women (VAW) reinforce negative stereotypes such as women as passive victims. Despite their good intentions, these campaigns can inadvertently sensationalize violence (Capiotto, 2022, pp. 47-48). Consequently, it is reasonable to understand how the literature characterized the impact of pictures of atrocity as controversial (Prosser, 2012, p. 12). Empathy is in fact not the only response to witnessing pictures of violence. Dean (2015) presents two main currents of the responses to picturing atrocity; one being the complicity in the violence and the other the unrepresentability of the experience of traumatic events (Dean, 2015, p. 242). Dean (2015) describes the experience of images of atrocity as "inescapably real" as to cause the viewers to feel complicit in the violence: pictures of atrocity make us feel disturbed, hypocritical, and angry (Dean, 2015, p. 248). In contrast, Sontag describes how being sympathetic to a situation of violence does not necessarily make us feel like an accomplice, but rather innocent and powerless

(Sontag, 2003, Chapter 8). Overall, as Sontag claims: "photographs of an atrocity may give rise to opposing responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply the bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen" (Sontag, 2003). Because of the profound impact that photographs of atrocity can have, photojournalists hold a great ethical responsibility.

2.3 The Role of the Photojournalist

As viewers, we have a responsibility towards pictures of atrocity to acknowledge them (Prosser, 2012, p. 7). As photojournalists, we have an ethical duty to minimize harm by avoiding the potential to make photographs spectacles of bodily vulnerability and inducing oppression through power imbalances (Prosser, 2012, p. 9). There are no strict rules to follow when dealing with a situation of violence, but moral frameworks and specific training that journalists should rigorously follow (Kobré, 2017; Lester, 1991; Thompson 2021). Lester (1991) claims that truth is the "guiding guarantee of ethical journalism" and that ethical standards are necessary to follow since photographers are constantly defining reality (Lester, 1991, pp. 31-33). Many photojournalists are aware that their power to define reality, meaning determining what to document and how, is inherently subjective (Mäenpää, 2014, pp. 92 & 101). Photographs fail at being fully unbiased: the choice of the lens, the manual settings, the framing, and post-production edits, and even the choice of subject to cover is subjective (Mäenpää, 2014, p. 96). As journalists, our work is shaped by our own beliefs and prejudices, which might unintentionally affect the stories we choose to tell. In the context of GBV, unconscious biases can lead to a harmful portrayal of survivors by reinforcing stigmatized stereotypes about their role as 'victims' (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2021, p. 162). These ingrained assumptions favor the cycle of misrepresentation and normalization of gender inequalities (Ingenere, 2023). Photojournalists should thus receive training on the topics and contexts they cover to effectively adhere to ethical guidelines in both their linguistic and visual choices. They should also be encouraged to use alternative approaches that focus on the victim's perspective and to create a new data base of images that minimizes harm to survivors (see Comunicattive, n.d.; Novinarke protiv nasilja, n.d.). Overall, the role of the photojournalist is to navigate ethical responsibilities, minimize

harm, and engage with moral frameworks, while striving to capture and convey the essence of reality through their subjective interpretation of events.

2.4 Defining GBV

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive social, cultural, and political phenomenon of violence directed against individuals based on their gender. The roots of GBV lie in gender inequalities and stereotypes that control societal gender roles. Even if GBV affects individuals across the gender spectrum, including transgender, intersex, and non-binary people, GBV is most often associated with violence against women (VAW). The United Nations (1993) defines VAW as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (United Nations, 1993). GBV is thus manifested in different forms of violence which can escalate to homicides, known as feminicides. GBV includes verbal violence, physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, socio-economical violence, witnessed violence, and digital violence (Capiotto, 2022, pp. 13-14). Clearly, GBV is a severe global emergency and a violation of human rights (European Commission, n.d.).

One can just look at the global statistics to comprehend the gravity and the systematicity of GBV, described as "devastatingly pervasive" by the World Health Organization (2021), which has estimated that 1 in 3 (736 million) women experience physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner in their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2021, para. 1). The data at the European level are similarly tragic. Although there are various reports on GBV in Europe, the most comprehensive survey on GBV conducted at the EU level dates back to 2014, when the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published a report revealing alarming statistics (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). The survey, which included responses from 42,000 women across all 28 EU Member States, found that 33% of women had experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15 (Capiotto, 2022, pp. 14-15). Additionally, 18% reported being stalked, and more than half (55%) had encountered sexual harassment (Capiotto,

2022, p. 15). These figures illustrate the widespread and endemic nature of GBV, affecting a significant portion of the population, either directly or indirectly.

2.5 The Istanbul Convention and EU Data

In the past decade, the European Union has declared several advancements in human rights, particularly through the adoption of the Istanbul Convention, which targets VAW and domestic violence. Despite these efforts, the progress has been insufficient to create lasting change. One major issue is the severe lack of up-to-date and comparable data across EU countries. The available data often contains significant gaps, making it difficult to assess the true extent of GBV across Europe. Nevertheless, the Istanbul Convention has been a major European initiative to combat GBV (see European Parliamentary Research Service, 2018). It is a human rights treaty established by the Council of Europe, opened for signature in 2011, and signed by all EU Member States by 2018. The Istanbul Convention mandates the states to address all forms of VAW, protect victims, and prosecute offenders. It makes it clear that achieving true gender equality is impossible as long as women continue to face widespread violence and state institutions fail to act.

2.6 Italian Data on GBV

The 'Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità' (Department of Equal Opportunities) declared that the Istanbul Convention in Italy is seen as the first binding international legal framework specifically intended to contrast GBV, marking a national effort to contrast any forms of VAW (Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità, n.d., para 2). The Istanbul Convention, signed in September 2012 and authorized by August 2014, has brought the implementation of new laws, increased public awareness about anti-violence centers, and highlighted the ongoing neglect within Italian institutions to effectively address women's rights. Despite these advancements, the most recent national statistics date back to 2014, indicating a significant gap in the data necessary to fully understand and tackle the current situation of GBV in Italy (see Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2014). These figures show that 31.5% of Italian women aged 16-70 (around 6.8 million women) have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2014). Specifically, 20.2% (about 4.35

million) have faced physical violence, 21% (around 4.52 million) have encountered sexual violence, and 5.4% (approximately 1.16 million) have suffered severe sexual violence, including rape (652,000) and attempted rape (746,000) (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2014). The upcoming data, expected in 2024, will be crucial for assessing and addressing the ongoing challenges related to GBV in Italy.

2.7 Stereotypes

The persistence of GBV in Italy is deeply rooted in a patriarchal culture that internalizes gender stereotypes from childhood (Capiotto, 2022, p.34). As noted by Capiotto, stereotypes do not merely describe societal expectations but also enforce them, shaping collective perceptions and behaviors (Capiotto, 2022, p. 34). This is evident in the the 2019 Istat statistics on "Stereotypes about Gender Roles and the Societal Image of Sexual Violence", showing that conventional assumptions about gender roles are still widely believed. According to Istat (2019), 32.5% of respondents say men have a greater potential for success in the workplace than women, 31.5% believe men are less likely to take care of their households, and 27.9% believe men should be the family's primary financial providers (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2019, p.1). Additionally, these statistics indicate that controlling behavior in relationships is often normalized, particularly among younger generations (Capiotto, 2022, p. 39). For instance, 30.3% of men and 27.1% of women in the 18–29 age group think it is acceptable for a man to continually or sometimes monitor their partner's phone or social media (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2019, p. 1). Further, a disturbing amount of the population holds women partially accountable for sexual violence that occurs to them; 39.3% of respondents think that women can avoid sexual interactions if they choose not to, and 23.9% believe that women can partially incite sexual violence by what they wear (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2019, p. 8). In their 2020 final report, GREVIO, the group of experts responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, reported that negative gender stereotypes continue to be a significant concern in Italy (GREVIO, 2020). This research reveals how stereotypes are still deeply ingrained in Italian culture.

The chart shows percentages (0% to 100%) for responses to stereotype statements, with categories: Strongly agree, Somewhat agree, Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree, Not answered.

- Women can provoke sexual violence by how they dress
- Women who don't want to have a sexual intercourse are able to avoid it
- Serious women don't get raped
- If a husband/partner forces his wife/partner to have sex against her will, it isn't sexual violence
- Faced with a sexual proposal, women often say no but in reality mean yes
- If a woman suffers sexual violence when she is affected by alcohol or drugs, she is at least partially responsible
- Often accusations of sexual violence are false

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ Not answered

Source: ISTAT, Stereotypes about gender roles and the social image of sexual violence, 2018.

2.8 How Media Fuels Stereotypes

Media plays a significant role in perpetuating harmful stereotypes related to GBV and in gender differences. Particularly, the media has the capacity to circulate pictures that promote these stereotypes as well as raise awareness to prevent violence and support for survivors (Dominici, 2014, p. 55; Ingenere, 2023). Since journalists can influence public opinion, it is their professional responsibility, and moral obligation, to report accurately and to reduce stereotypes that perpetuate violence (Council of Europe, 2016, pp. 12-13). Italian journalists are part of the Ordine Nazionale dei Giornalisti and as such they have to strictly adhere to the 'Code of National Duties as a Journalist' (see Ordine dei Giornalisti, 2019). Among the codes, there is one specifically about coverage and representation of GBV, article 5 bis, in effect from 2021, which declares that "In cases of femicide, violence, harassment, discrimination, and news events involving aspects related to sexual orientation and gender identity, the journalist: a) Takes care to avoid gender stereotypes, as well as expressions and images that harm the dignity of the person; b) Uses respectful, accurate, and informed language. The journalist adheres to the essential facts of the news and maintains restraint, being careful not to sensationalize violence. They do not use expressions, terms, or images that downplay the seriousness

of the act committed; c) Ensures, considering the public interest in the news, a respectful narrative towards the families of those involved." (Ordine dei Giornalisti, 2019). Article 5 bis is of great importance because it tackles some of the most threatening issues of a stereotyped representation of GBV, which can undermine the problem or even fuel further violence.

2.9 Decontextualization, Normalization, and Sensationalization

Despite Article 5 bis of the Ordine Nazionale dei Giornalisti, news coverage still often portrays survivors of GBV in a stereotyped and demeaning way (Rossito, 2021, para. 2). A common issue is the tendency to downplay severe acts of violence by separating them from more culturally ingrained behaviors. For example, femicides are frequently described as isolated incidents driven by sudden jealousy or extreme passion, rather than as the culmination of ongoing, subtle forms of violence (Capiotto, 2022, p. 33). Capiotto explains that portraying femicide as the act of a "crazy" individual decontextualizes extreme violence from the less obvious forms of abuse, such as psychological harm, which is not always recognized (Capiotto, 2022, p. 33). This portrayal creates emotional and cognitive distance from the reality that GBV is a pervasive societal issue, leading to the acceptance and normalization of the problem. Additionally, this separation allows those who commit less visible acts of violence to avoid responsibility, believing they could never commit such a horrific crime. By detaching extreme violence from its root causes and the bigger context of other forms of violence, the media perpetuates the normalization and desensitization of GBV (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2021, p. 162). Moreover, the use of cliched photographs plays a critical role in this normalization. Images from Getty Images of women who appear weak, beaten, and defenseless aim to represent the emotional and physical state of someone experiencing GBV. Concurrently, they also reinforce stereotypes and often present the perspective of the offender rather than the victim (Ingenere, 2023).

Femicides and other cases of GBV are frequently reported with sensationalized, morbid details to attract attention through exploiting the victim's suffering. Sontag explains how photographs play an important role in turning reality into a spectacle for the masses (Sontag, 1973, p. 140). This misrepresentation can cause the viewers to feel a normalization or even celebration of violence (Pierosara, 2019, p. 12). When violence becomes celebratory and when it focuses on one marginalized group for entertainment purposes, we encounter the phenomenon of trauma porn. The term "trauma porn", introduced by Wayne Wax, originally refers to the media's hyperconsumerism of trauma in media coverage (Mesammedia, 2018). Additionally, Scafoglio (2023) characterizes trauma porn as a form of emotional exploitation, where suffering is glorified, potentially forcing those who are directly or indirectly affected to relive their traumatic experiences. This gives the idea of how certain stereotypes can control the narrative of a phenomenon and even fuel the problem itself.

2.10 Secondary Victimization

One of the most damaging consequences of the perpetuation of stereotypes in the media is secondary victimization (victim blaming). The European Institute for Gender Equality claims that "secondary victimization occurs when the victim suffers further harm not as a direct result of the criminal act but due to the manner in which institutions and other individuals deal with the victim" (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.). In Italy, it is frequently informed that when women report violence, institutions and the juridical system often fail to protect them adequately as they often question their credibility. An Italian News Service, Sky Tg24, reports that when women have finally the courage to denounce the violence suffered they soon have to face another fight with the institutions for the fear of not being believed, of being judged as "uncooperative", of seeing their children taken by social services or placed in an institution (Giuffrida, 2021, para. 2). In her contribution to "Guardiamola in Faccia: Mille Volti della Violenza di Genere", Daniela Niccolini (2020) describes how journalists often use phrases like "she wanted to leave him", "she had left him", or "she had a new partner" when reporting on femicides (Niccolini, 2020, p. 51). These phrasings shift blame onto the victim, suggesting that the person responsible is not the one who committed the act but

rather the one who supposedly caused it. This is the absurd mentality underlying those commonly used phrases of secondary victimization.

2.11 Under-Representation of Women in Media

Media not only reinforces oppressive stereotypes but also contributes to the invisibility of women. The Journalist Initiative on Gender-Based Violence (JiG) (2021) claims that women's voices are often not heard, but when they are, they tend to be "distorted and drowned by prejudiced, or even victim-blaming comments by law enforcement, male witnesses, relatives or acquaintances and, of course, perpetrators" (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2021, p. 163). Capiotto (2022) notes that the underrepresentation of women stagnates gender inequalities (Capiotto, 2022, p. 44). Italian newspapers and magazines reinforce these inequalities and often undermine the survivor's testimony, frequently using language that blames the victim and justifies the perpetrator's actions (Save the Children, 2022). A 2015 report reveals that Italian media disproportionately favors men in coverage, presence, and perspectives (see Celotti, 2015). The JiG also highlights that the under-representation of women in journalism, editorial, and expert roles can lead to insensitivity toward gender inequalities and GBV cases (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2021, p. 163).

Moreover, there is a notable underrepresentation of the different forms of GBV in media coverage, with most reports focusing solely on cases of femicide or stalking. As a result, articles that do address violence shift the focus to the socio-economic status of the survivors rather than addressing the fact that they are targeted because they are women, where the systemic issue lies (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 31). Research conducted by the University of Tuscia, in partnership with Associazione Differenza Donna ONG and with support from the Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità of the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, found that among the cases of violence reported by the press, stalking is the most frequently covered crime with a 53.4% of articles (Save the Children, 2022, para. 4). Cases of femicide follow at 44.5% (Save the Children, 2022, para. 4). Domestic violence, which represents the vast majority of crimes against women, only appears in 14% of the articles (Save the Children, 2022, para. 4). The Council of Europe (2016) has assessed that changing the structural organization of media outlets and increasing the presence and participation of women can positively

influence the media's role in preventing VAW (see Council of Europe, 2016, p. 28). For example, women's initiatives in media production, through networking and collective action, can significantly impact this issue (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 28).

2.12 Italian Movements to Deconstruct Stereotypes

To effectively deconstruct harmful stereotypes in the media, it is essential to adopt approaches that challenge fixed gender roles and redefine how both genders are portrayed. Violence should be understood in its broader context, recognizing its various forms and signs rather than focusing solely on its most extreme manifestations. Survivors should be seen as more than just victims; they should be given the space to be strong, empowered, and supported in telling their stories from their own perspectives, free from victimization and sensationalization. Over the past couple of decades, the persistent efforts of Italian women's movements, advocacy groups, journalism initiatives, and anti-violence centers have led to significant advancements (Capecchi & Gius, 2023, p. 83). Among the most influential journalism platforms addressing gender issues are InGenere, La 27esima Ora, and GiULiA (Giornaliste Unite LIbere Autonome). [InGenere](#) is a web magazine that centers on Italian and international policies and discusses economic and social issues that challenge gender inequalities. [La 27esima ORA](#) is part of the national newspaper Corriere della Sera and it focuses on amplifying the perspectives of women and the LGBTQ+ community in news. [GiULiA](#), founded in 2011, is a national association of professional and freelance women journalists who address the underrepresentation of women by promoting language free of stereotypes and advocating for equal opportunities for women journalists in the workplace. For example, they support the idea that harmful gender stereotypes and inaccurate reporting on GBV can be minimized by organizing mandatory language and sensibilization training in undergraduate journalism studies (Castano, 2023, para. 8).

In 2017, GiULiA, with Cpo Fnsi, Usigrai, and the Veneto journalists' union, contributed to the Manifesto di Venezia, which promotes accurate reporting on GBV and opposes all forms of discrimination (Manifesto di Venezia, 2017). This manifesto urges media professionals to adopt language and practices that avoid offensive or detrimental portrayals of gender-based crimes and femicides. Moreover, a major advancement in Italian legislation was the introduction of the Codice

Rosso (Red Code) in 2019, which brought new laws and modifications to the penal code (Corsini, 2019). Nevertheless, the Codice Rosso was insufficient to implement concrete advancements because of a lack of funding (ActionAid, 2021). Funding is indeed necessary for training the police officers and judicial personnel who are responsible for taking statements from the victim who is often not believed or even blamed (ActionAid, 2021). Additionally, there should be dedicated resources for prevention and awareness programs in schools, for media and communication specialists, including journalists (ActionAid, 2021). This is also encouraged by Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention which urges the active participation of the media in preventing VAW (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 7). Additionally, Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Council of Europe advocates for media organizations to adopt self-regulatory measures and develop standards that promote gender equality, avoiding stereotypes and discriminatory content (Council of Europe, 2013).

Despite these advancements, much work remains to be done, particularly in empowering survivors who have the right to be listened to, to be believed, and to share their experiences from their perspective (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2021, p. 164). This Research-Creation Thesis proposes an alternative way of representing and picturing GBV. The project proposes "Empowering Anonymity" a set of guidelines mainly designed for photojournalists, journalists, and editors when covering a story of GBV in Italy which aims to give visibility to the story of the survivor while protecting and collaborating with them to minimize stereotypes, sensationalization and further harm. Moreover, a prototyped photo-essay entitled "Fragments of Self" will be presented to show possible techniques of picturing anonymity that can lead to an empowering work of self-narration.

3. Theoretical Framework

The set of guidelines "Empowering Anonymity" and the prototyped photo-essay "Self in Fragments" are developed and informed by academic research and by weaving together the insights from experts in photojournalism, ethics of representing violence, phototherapy, and anti-violence centers.

3.1 Trauma-Informed Journalism

The theoretical foundation of this project lies in trauma-informed journalism practices. According to the Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policies and Practices (CTIPP) trauma-informed journalism "views (living) "victims" as "survivors," and it approaches each situation from "what happened" instead of "what's wrong" (and includes "what's strong," when possible)" (CTIPP, 2023, para. 4). Essentially, journalists are encouraged to adopt a survivor-centered approach, focusing on empathy and a good understanding of how trauma affects individuals (CTIPP, 2023). Moreover, recognizing the potential impacts that a journalist's work can have on both the subjects and the public is a necessary component of practicing trauma-informed journalism (Miller, 2022). As the literature has shown, photojournalists have an ethical responsibility to visually document situations of violence while being aware and cautious of the potential negative consequences of their reporting. A practice that lacks trauma-informed training risks re-traumatizing survivors and other people impacted by violence. For this reason, photojournalists need to be actively informed about trauma-informed journalism standards, which can also support their mental health in addition to helping them report ethically (Becker & Shontz, 2023, p. 205).

3.2 Trauma-Informed Journalism Guidelines

Among the resources available, two platforms on trauma-informed journalism have been particularly significant for my research: the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma and the Journalism Initiative on Gender-Based Violence (JiG) (for more see Canadian Journalism Forum on Violence and Trauma, n.d.). The Dart Center started as a project of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in New York City and it has become a fundamental resource for journalists when covering stories related to trauma or atrocities. Their trauma-informed style guide informs journalists on the most accurate and respectful language to use, what news to select, and the ethical considerations when covering the effects of trauma on individuals, families, and communities (Thompson, 2021). For instance, they claim that people who have suffered sexual violence may not wish to be described as a "victim" unless they choose the word themselves. Many prefer the word "survivor" (Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, 2011, para 4). In addition, they have specific

resources for covering sexual violence and detailed guidelines on sexual violence in conflict, some of which can also be applied to more general cases of GBV (Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, 2011; Covering Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, n.d.). According to these guidelines, reporting on GBV requires a special level of ethical sensitivity as well as knowledge of the traumatic effects of the abuse, its various forms, and the laws governing the country in which one is reporting. As a result, conducting effective interviews that prioritize the survivor's well-being is essential (see Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2021, p. 41; WITNESS, n.d.).

Similarly, the JiG brings together a wide range of viewpoints and information to assist established journalists, media professionals, and beginners (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2021, p. 5). They emphasize how essential it is for journalists to embrace a survivor-centered approach, recognizing survivors' agency and accurately portraying the "infinite range of their suffering, their experiences, and their perspectives" (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2021, p. 14). They advocate for a balanced reporting which contextualizes the violence by showing the holistic story of the survivor and not only a small part of their lives, by giving them the opportunity to be seen as "whole human beings who can regain control of their lives, and even become agents of change". (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2021, p. 15) The Dart Center and the JiG's guidelines suggest that photojournalists should review the available resources while deciding how to frame their projects. In the case of reporting on GBV, it is thus suggested to focus on a survivor-centered approach that includes the often untold stories of those who have contrasted violence, by narrating their journeys of empowerment to inspire others. With "Empowering Anonymity", I hope to contribute to these guidelines into concrete visual strategies for photojournalism projects that aim to protect and empower survivors of GBV.

3.3 Techniques of Picturing Anonymity

The photographic techniques I analyzed and proposed in the guidelines "Empowering Anonymity" are inspired by the work of other photojournalists and photographers. I believe that while conceptualizing a project, photojournalists should take inspiration from the insights of other photojournalists' works and recognize the importance of collaboration. Working with experts can

provide valuable insight into their ideas, techniques, and methods. After all, by building on the work of others, we honor their creation and acknowledge that striving for change is inherently a collective effort.

The project "Segni" is an exemplary work promoted by the Cortile dei Gentili Foundation and the Consulta Femminile del Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura, in collaboration with photographers Ilaria Magliocchetti Lombi and Simona Ghizzoni with the Lilith Anti-Violence Center of Latina. This project portayed the experiences of survivors of GBV while protecting their identity. I contacted Alessandra Mauro, who conceptualized and curated the project and she put me in contact with the photographer Simona Ghizzoni. Ghizzoni used the technique of self-portraiture to reinterpret the experience and the testimonies of survivors of GBV through a symbolic representation of common and subtle signs. The visual suggestions to achieve anonymity in the guidelines I propose is definitely inspired by Ghizzoni's approach. Another inspiration comes from the thesis "La Casa di Marianna" by Isabella Sannipoli (Sannipoli, 2008). The photographer demonstrates the power of anonymous visuals by choosing to represent Marianna's identity, a Romani woman in Italy who could not be photographed because she was undocumented, by photographing all of her belongings (Sannipoli, 2008). In addition, I incorporated techniques from street photographers who frequently employ strategies to maintain anonymity. Some of these inspiring photojournalists have kindly allowed me to reference their photographs for this project.

3.4 Photographs as Representations

One key concept of "Empowering Anonymity" is the idea of representing violence in a non-traumatizing way but rather focused on the empowerment of the survivors. This has been conceptualized through the theory discussed by Silvia Pierosara in her article "Ethical Issues on Narrating and Representing Signs of Violence" (Pierosara, 2019). Further, conversations with the social cooperative and anti-violence center Cerchi D'acqua in Milan, encouraged me to adopt this perspective, aiming to provide an alternative narrative to the stereotypical, victimizing portrayals often seen in mainstream news.

Pierosara starts to illustrate the controversies of representing violence by explaining the term 'representation'. Pierosara (2019) defines a representation as an act of making present events by having the possibility to negotiate their meaning (Pierosara, 2019, p. 3) In the case of photographs, we automatically interpret them through the predispositions of our ingrained biases. By constantly interpreting images we risk projecting our unconscious stereotypes onto them, thereby reducing their meaning into what we expect them to be. Pierosara discusses this by saying that "representation runs the risk of domesticating violence, since it can act as a configuration" (Pierosara, 2019, p. 5). In the case of representations of GBV, cliched images of victimized and defenseless women, reinforce the interpretation that victimhood is an inherent trait of being a woman (Ingenere, 2023, para. 7). However, portraying more empowering images of individuals who have survived and resisted violence can start to shift the stereotypical understanding of GBV. While it is fundamental to recognize the reality of violence, it is equally important to include narratives of resilience and healing. In addition, survivor-centered projects that demonstrate the possibilities of recovery can also encourage individuals who are still trapped in the cycle of abuse to recognize that it is possible to contrast it and ask for help.

3.5 Violence in Fragments for an Ethical Representation of Violence

When narrating an experience of someone who has been oppressed, victimized, and their autonomy stripped away, how can a photograph truly capture their experience? Cati and Sánches-Biosca (2015) illustrate that since the 1930s other researchers have discussed how the power of testimony and preservation of a moment does not capture the essence of the moment passed (Cati & Sánches-Biosca, 2015, p. 9). Sontag (1973) seems to agree that the intention and emotional charge of a photograph is lost with time when she states that photographs are consumed in the "pathos of time passed" (Sontag, 1973, p. 16). This implies that pictures of atrocity can have an ethical impact in the historical moment of its representation, but with time their meaning dissipates and their "aesthetic distance" between signifier and signified grows (Sontag, 1973, p. 16). Pierosara further argues that a significant challenge in representing violence is the risk of its unrepresentability (Pierosara, 2019, p. 17). She agrees that there is an obvious gap in between what has been lived and what is told, which

she defines as a "resignation to the unspeakable" (Pierosara, 2019, p. 5). She disagrees instead that violence should be unrepresentable since that can become an excuse to hide the injustice that caused it (Pierosara, 2019, p. 17). Nonetheless, there is a way to narrate violence which does not fall into the risk of unrepresentability: creating alternative indirect ways of picturing atrocities (Pierosara, 2019, p. 7). Pierosara believes that a narrative based on ethical sensitivity and empowerment should consist of "fragments and incoherencies that are audible as mitigated cries" (Pierosara, 2019, p. 7). The term "fragments" is not used to suggest that the narrative around GBV should be told in fragmented and isolated pieces, taken away from their context. Instead, "fragments" refers to the representation of a person as a multifaceted individual, allowing their image to encompass various aspects without being reduced to one stigmatized stereotype.

The concept of fragments suggests photojournalists to capture a story through glimpses, signs, or indeed fragments without attempting to enclose the entire story in only one image. Since a photograph cannot capture the whole essence of the trauma and impact of violence, the use of fragments of a story can provide a sense of what happened by minimizing its potential for exploitation and re-traumatization. By only revealing fragments, observers are given the opportunity to connect the pieces and seek new meanings through the faculty of imagination (Pierosara, 2019, p. 7). Imagination, in this context, allows for a new interpretation that transcends stereotypes and preconceptions, viewing violence as a moment of interruption within a larger context that cannot be captured in a single shot. Therefore, when representing the story of a person who has survived violence, a fragmented narrative serves two purposes: it protects their identity from being fully disclosed, and it prevents them from being permanently stigmatized by a single image. Fragments imply that these are only moments in time, not eternal or fixed states of being. This approach gives photojournalists the chance to equip survivors of GBV to be seen not just as victims, but as agents of change with the power to transform their lives.

4. Method

For this Research-Creation Thesis, I put together a set of guidelines entitled "Empowering Anonymity: A Visual Method of Representing Gender-Based Violence", to which I also refer to as "Empowering Anonymity", and a photo-essay entitled "Fragments of Self". My project was reviewed and approved by the College of Ethics Reviewers with protocol number *30020185*. These suggestions are the result of bringing together different sources, by doing back-research, and gathering advice from experts in women's rights, anti-violence advocacy centers, photojournalists, and therapists. "Empowering Anonymity" is designed for journalists, editors, photojournalists, and anyone interested in alternative GBV representations. The method consists of an introduction, six main guidelines, and additional resources. The guidelines are the following:

- *How to do research:* Presents the idea of focusing on anonymity to respect the strict privacy policies in anti-violence centers. It also gives resources for trauma-informed journalism and an overview of the key aspects of GBV.

- *Who to contact:* Offers advice on reaching out to advocacy groups, anti-violence centers, and organizations to gain insight and support.

- *How to collaborate:* Outlines in detail the procedures for proposing a project, recruitment of a participant, and respectful ethical collaboration.

- *How to take photographs of survivors of GBV:* Gives recommendations on which photographic techniques to use to achieve anonymity. Exemplary photos from other photojournalists and the prototype photo-essay are included.

- *How to use non-violent langauge*: Emphasizes the importance of using inclusive, gender-sensitive language to fairly and accurately portray survivors.

- *How to contextualize the story:* Advices on how to give the story a truthful context that respects the participants' intentions.

Additionally, I created "Fragments of Self": a prototype photo-essay intended to exemplify the techniques of picturing anonymity. This visual documentation illustrates an alternative way of

representing someone's identity based on self-discovery and empowerment. The idea of the photo-essay was conceptualized by integrating Pierosara's theory of fragments of violence with trauma-informed journalism principles and techniques of anonymity. The photo-essay aims to capture glimpses of the model's self through fragments of their thoughts, body, and memories, without ever revealing their full identity. The model's identity is kept confidential; their location, age, and name are not revealed in alignment with the guidelines that prioritize anonymity. I acknowledge that some images may reveal details that could be recognizable to individuals familiar with the model. To address this, I ensured that the model provided explicit consent before selecting these images. Additionally, the informed consent document, attached as Appendix 1, confirms that the model was fully aware of the potential risks. Throughout ten meetings, we discussed the project, explored the model's perspective, and determined how they wished to be represented. Together we chose what techniques to utilize: blurring images, close-ups, slow-shutter speed, reflections, selective focus, silhouettes, and indirect representation through objects and places. We conducted five sets of photoshoots around one hour long each in different locations to experiment with different settings and lighting. Then, together, we selected the final photos and decided on the edits, such as the choice of light and color. The model, with some of my suggestions, also chose the accompanying text for each image. What is presented is hence the result of a strong collaboration that equipped the model with a new perspective to understand and value themselves.

5. Outcomes

A. *Empowering Anonymity*

The first outcome of this project is a set of guidelines entitled "Empowering Anonymity: A Visual Method of Representing Gender-Based Violence". These guidelines aim to achieve three key objectives: minimize the traumatic consequences of picturing violence by focusing on the journey towards empowerment; challenge gender stereotypes in Italian media coverage by promoting a more accurate and respectful portrayal of survivors, potentially leading to the creation of a new database of non-stereotypical images of GBV; and empower survivors to reclaim their agency and narrate their

stories from their own perspectives, which can serve as an inspiration to prevent isolation for those who have not yet denounced violence or left anti-violence centers. Empowering Anonymity is an innovative project due to its focus on specific visual guidelines for photojournalists to cover GBV. While there are many resources on the ethical coverage of GBV, this project is novel in providing specific visual guidelines and practical examples for photojournalists. In doing so, I hope to address a gap in photojournalism reporting methods that has been previously underexplored. Moreover, these guidelines gather specific resources for media coverage in Italy, aiming to encourage journalists to consider them before their reporting, influencing their language choices, angles of coverage, and overall approach to their work. To access the full guidelines, please follow the link provided: [Empowering Anonymity](#).

B. Fragments of Self

The second outcome of this project is the photo essay entitled "Fragments of Self". It includes a short introduction, 19 photographs, and accompanying texts. The photographs have been selected by the model. Together we chose which images to keep in color and which in black-and-white. The accompanying text guides the narrative to the model's journey of self-empowerment. The photo-essay invites viewers to engage with the story by both observing the images and reading the text, which contextualizes and reveals the intention behind each photograph. As one progresses through the essay, the narrative becomes increasingly personal, unveiling profound emotions. We hope to leave viewers with a sense of both knowing and not knowing who this person is, promoting empathy and understanding by withholding any judgment. This photo-essay is a prototype for a possible collaboration with a survivor of GBV, and as such it aims to create an alternative representation to the stereotypical narratives of GBV, consciously avoiding victimization, sensationalization, and normalization. The choice of 'fragments' both in the title and in the choice of photographs recalls Pierosara's (2019) theory of representing violence through capturing glimpses of the story. The choice of fragments also suggests that since a person's self is constantly changing, there is no need to encapsulate who they are in a single image. A person is made of different aspects and by recognizing this, we do not stigmatize them into who they were in a particular moment. By presenting images that

protect the subject's identity, this approach offers individuals the opportunity to share their stories while remaining anonymous, ensuring their privacy is respected and safeguarded. To access the photo-essay, please follow the link provided: Fragments of Self.

6. Reflections on Empowering Anonymity

As someone passionate about philosophy, I find paradoxes particularly fascinating. While studying photojournalism, I realized that the practice involves interesting inherent controversies. One of the most intriguing is that photographs are essential for documenting events and exposing current atrocities. However, the same images can have negative consequences for the people portrayed, even potentially exploiting their human rights. Therefore, the choice of which photographs to take depends substantially on the photographer's moral subjectivity. I found this concept particularly compelling, which is why I decided to explore it in my thesis. From this idea, I shaped my research-question: How do we tell the story of a survivor of violence while safeguarding their identity and empowering them in the process? The answer to this question came from reading the paper by Pierosara (2019) on "Ethical Issues on Narrating and Representing Signs of Violence". She suggests to represent violence by "fragments and incoherencies that are audible as mitigated cries" (Pierosara, 2019, p. 7). I perceived this as illustrating a story through glimpses rather than striving to capture it all in one image. This approach allows us to convey someone's journey without imposing a stigmatizing image, which can be particularly challenging for survivors of GBV.

During the process of gathering information for the method "Empowering Anonymity", I learned about the potential limitations of my research. One of the key aspects of my thesis is understanding how to get access to working with survivors of GBV. Initially, I planned to work with survivors of GBV to create an empowering photo-essay using photo-therapy techniques. However, after receiving feedback from the Ethics Committee at Concordia University and discussing it with my supervisor, I realized that since I do not possess adequate training, recruiting participants who have experienced trauma might cause them to feel re-traumatized. Since one of the main factors I investigated was how to avoid causing re-traumatization to survivors, I assessed that it was too unsafe

for this research. Similarly, I decided to exclude any activity related to photo-therapy since only licensed therapists should practice these techniques (Weiser, 1999, p. xv). I now believe that consulting with a therapist or phototherapy expert, who has plenty of experience working with survivors, is fundamental for any photojournalist covering GBV. This realization motivated me to work with a model to produce a prototype photo-essay instead.

Another reason for choosing the prototype was the difficulty in contacting GBV survivors through anti-violence centres, which I thought would be the safest and most ethical option. Talking with Giusy Laganà, the director of FareXBene, an association advocating against discrimination, including GBV, I learned that approaching individuals who are still in anti-violence centers might be harmful since it can potentially interfere with their recovery progress. As examined in the literature review, journalists also tend to have a bad reputation due to the frequent secondary victimization or exploiting information they do to draw the public's attention. Following this conversation, I concluded that looking for survivors who felt prepared to share their stories of empowerment after completing their journey with anti-violence centres would be more appropriate and safer.

That said, this also proved to be challenging. Anti-violence centers are prohibited from disclosing the personal information of those seeking assistance and have rigorous privacy regulations. Additionally, these centers do not maintain contact with individuals who have exited their programs, whether they interrupted their recovery or completed it. The staff at the social cooperative of Cerchi D'Acqua, an anti-violence center in Milan, helped me understand this. They also agreed that a survivor-centered approach focused on the healing journey could be beneficial, both for the survivors themselves and for others who may feel inspired to speak out or recognize their own similar circumstances.

The second major challenge was understanding how to find potential GBV survivors to participate in a visual project like "Fragments of Self". To address this, I contacted Simona Ghizzoni, who shared her experience working on the project "Segni" in collaboration with the Lilith Anti-Violence Center of Latina. For the project Segni she was asked to use her expertise to work with survivors of GBV. Ghizzoni told me that for her other projects, she conducted thorough research and reached out to organizations interested in her ideas and method (see

https://www.simonaghizzoni.com). I believe that a possible approach could be to conceptualize a well-defined project and propose it to advocacy groups and anti-violence organizations as a form of collaboration. The photojournalist shall also be supported by a therapist who can follow the projects and assist when necessary. Another possibility could be asking anti-violence centers to propose the project within their existing community.

The final significant challenge I faced was the terminology I used. Through the ethics review of my project, I realized that I should have used the term "confidential photography" instead of "anonymous photography". This is due to the fact that collaborating with a participant and photographing them implies knowing something about their identity, such as their appearance, contact information, and possibly even their name. Moreover, one might question whether any photograph can ever be considered anonymous, as even if the subject's face is not visible, the photographer who is portraying them will always know how they look. Even if precautions are taken to safeguard their privacy, personal information might still be unintentionally revealed during conversations. Therefore, the photographer must maintain strict confidentiality. For this reason, the project I am proposing revolves around confidentiality rather than anonymity. Nonetheless, I chose to keep the terms "anonymity" and "anonymous" in the titles to highlight the importance of striving for privacy.

Working on this project made me aware of the importance of re-evaluating traditional standards of photojournalism ethics. According to the NPPA: "While photographing subjects, do not intentionally contribute to, alter, or seek to alter or influence event" (National Press Photographers Association, n.d.). I find this statement quite idealistic and somewhat detached from the reality of photojournalism. As Lester (1991) notes in 'Photojournalism: An Ethical Approach', photographers constantly define reality (Lester, 1991, p. 33). Our choices—what to photograph, the settings, framing, and angles—are inherently subjective. Thus, whether intentional or not, photojournalists inevitably influence events through their perspective. Acknowledging the subjectivity in each journalist's work does not negate the pursuit of truth and accuracy. Instead, it allows us to explore more creative approaches to balance the impact of the story with the need to protect survivors. This is why, in "Fragments of Self", the model and I collaboratively discussed what kind of photographs to create and which techniques to experiment with ahead. We discussed their metaphorical meanings and

explored various interpretations. By involving individuals in their own representation, we give them an opportunity to contribute to their empowerment and offer a platform for sharing their side of the story. This could be particularly beneficial for survivors of GBV often oppressed by secondary victimization of the press and societal engrained prejudices (see Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2019).

Doing research for 'Picturing Anonymity: An Empowering Method of Representing Gender-Based Violence' has been an incredible opportunity to channel my creativity and studies into work that could potentially have a positive impact on the literature of photojournalism ethics and coverage of GBV. Although working on such a sensitive topic was challenging, I was encouraged and inspired by the many initiatives and kind people who offered me guidance and help. This project also allowed me to better understand my country, revealing both its sides of neglect and resilience. Additionally, this experience deepened my understanding of what it means to be a good photographer: to listen, create space for dialogue, and allow others to challenge and help you grow.

7. Conclusion

Overall, this research has examined the impact of depicting atrocities in the context of GBV in Italy. It was argued that images of atrocities play a key role in recording unchangeable events in history. As argued by Prosser (2012) and Pierosara (2019), the reason why we take pictures of atrocity is indeed to acknowledge them (Pierosara, 2019, p. 3; Prosser, 2012, p. 7). While photographs may not capture the complete essence of events, they can convey the irreversible impact of violence. Accordingly, depicting atrocities should not be dismissed as unrepresentable; failing to do so could risk normalizing and justifying violence (Pierosara, 2019, p. 17). After addressing the necessity of depicting atrocities, this thesis explored the ethical responsibilities of photojournalists.

Since photojournalists use their moral subjectivity when reporting, they should be particularly sensitive when portraying violence. Photographs of atrocity risk to desensitize viewers due to their normalization and de-contextualization, or re-traumatize the individuals portrayed. This is especially harmful to survivors of GBV, who often experience secondary victimization when images of them—whether taken from their personal social media or clichéd stock photos—are used in ways that

reinforce stereotypes, reducing them to nothing more than victims. This misrepresentation remains a significant problem in Italian media, despite the European advancements in addressing VAW with the Istanbul Convention. Statistics from Istat (2018) reveal that in Italy certain harmful stereotypes are internalized since childhood. It was assessed that to change the stereotypical representation of GBV, we must address the stereotypes on gender inequalities and the media's invisibility of women. To do this, it was suggested to focus on alternative ways of narrating violence, which challenge traditional photojournalism standards (National Press Photographers Association, n.d.). Initiatives like GiuLia Giornaliste and the Manifesto di Venezia, along with guidelines from organizations such as the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma and the Journalism Initiative to Cover Gender-Based Violence, address and contrast these issues.

Despite the plethora of resources on picturing atrocity and ethical coverage of GBV, the resources focused on visual techniques that could aid photojournalists in coverage of GBV were still not gathered into a concrete method. This Research-Creation Thesis addresses this by presenting "Empowering Anonymity: A Visual Method of Representing Gender-Based Violence." This method offers guidelines based on trauma-informed journalism practices and Pierosara's theory of violence in fragments. The guidelines provide a framework for collaborating with GBV survivors, focusing on empowering storytelling through their journey of resilience and self-discovery. It recommends to work with participants who have been involved with anti-violence programs, with the support of a therapist. The focus of these guidelines include photographic techniques that strive to protect their identity, as demonstrated by the prototype photo-essay "Fragments of Self". This photo-essay, created in collaboration with a model, illustrates their journey of empowerment while aiming to maintain their anonymity, thus avoiding stigmatization and stereotypes. The final aim of this approach is to inspire more people to speak out and gradually transform media representations of GBV.

Overall, I hope this research has highlighted three key aspects. First, photojournalists must recognize their ethical responsibility and continually strive to improve their practice. This includes pursuing specialized training and thoroughly studying the jurisdictions and regulations of the countries they are working in, to fully understand the complexities of issues like GBV, rather than

relying on stereotypes. The profession of photojournalism carries a significant responsibility—to serve as a voice for the oppressed while minimizing harm—and should be valued as such. Moreover, future studies in photojournalism could examine the concept of anonymity: whether it is indeed conceivable to achieve anonymity in a photograph or whether this possibility is intrinsically excluded by the very nature of photography. Second, it is crucial that photojournalists avoid imposing their interpretation on someone else's story. Instead, they should allow survivors to speak for themselves, adopting a survivor-centered approach, as outlined in the guidelines. Utilizing the power of visual documentation as a means of empowerment should be one of the core values of the profession. Lastly, I want to leave readers with the idea that challenging harmful representations is not just a right, but a duty. If our duty is to be accurate and truthful, we must also challenge mainstream stereotypes and envision new ways to represent GBV. These new representations can gradually accumulate and help create a narrative that empowers survivors to speak out. Through this research, I hope to inspire more students of journalism and photojournalism to adopt survivor-centered approaches, and perhaps to use my method of empowering anonymity to begin shifting how GBV is represented.

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INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Picturing Anonymity: An Empowering Method of Representing Gender-Based Violence

Researcher: Marta Malvina Mostardini, Master student in Digital Innovations in Journalism Studies

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+1 (514) 848-2424 ext. 5175,   david.secko@concordia.ca.

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

This research aims to create a photo essay that serves as a prototype, demonstrating photography techniques to maintain a participant's confidentiality. The photo essay will not be a direct work on gender-based violence but will be included in a set of theoretical guidelines. These guidelines are designed to provide suggestions to photojournalists, journalists, editors, and others involved in visual documentation when covering stories about gender-based violence, specifically in Italy. The photo essay will exemplify collaborative work between the photographer and the participant, who will be a model. The focus will be on effectively concealing the participant's identity while emphasizing empowerment. The ultimate goal of these guidelines, including the photo essay, is to offer an alternative representation of gender-based violence that avoids stereotypes and prioritizes the perspective of empowerment.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to work on your self-image and decide how you would like to be photographed. You will choose which aspects of yourself to highlight, select any symbols you wish to include, and be photographed accordingly. The final selection of images will be part of a photo-essay consisting of 10 to 30 photographs.

1. First, I will present the project, explaining its aims and the rationale behind it. I will then provide you with this informed consent form, which I kindly ask you to read carefully. If you agree to participate, I will ask you to sign the form.

2. Secondly, we will meet to discuss the project in detail and allow you to share your concerns and opinions. We will organize when and where to do the photoshoots. We will create a safe and supportive space where you can express your thoughts freely.

3. Next, we will talk about how you want to be represented and any symbols you would like to include. We will explore the best ways to tell your story visually while ensuring your identity remains confidential.

4. Then, I will take pictures of you with my camera. Depending on your availability we can meet five times for the photoshoot. Each photoshoot will take around one to two hours maximum. I will always check with you to see how you feel, ensure you agree with the kinds of pictures taken, and that you are satisfied with the results.

5. We will look through the photographs together and you will be asked to select your favorite photos, and together we will reflect on how they represent you.

6. Finally, we will decide the outlook of the photo essay, which photos to include and in which order. We will also collaboratively think of complementary short texts to accompany each photo. These texts will provide context without divulging detailed information such as names or specific locations. Only these photos will be disclosed to the public and accessible on the internet. Before such images are published I will make sure once more that you are aware of the risks and benefits of the publication of the photo-essay.

Participating in this study will span approximately one to two months and will include ten meetings. Five of these meetings will involve photoshoots, each lasting no more than two hours. The remaining meetings will cover the other steps previously outlined.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include the possibility of experiencing discomfort or emotional challenges while discussing self-image and being photographed. Although the photo essay will aim to hide your identity as much as possible, there is still a potential risk that some of your characteristics might be recognizable.

Potential benefits are feeling empowered through visual exploration of yourself. The collaborative process of creating the photo essay aims to enhance your self-image and contribute positively to how you perceive yourself. The resulting images and guidelines may also inspire others to use techniques of confidentiality and help shift the visual narrative around gender-based violence to one that avoids stereotypes and prioritizes empowerment.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research:

- Photographs of you made with a digital camera
- Short complementary text to each photo

This information will be used as part of my academic Research-Creation Thesis with Concordia University. The selected photographs for the photo essay will be published online on a public website and thus available for everyone to see, including academic platforms of Concordia University and other possible academic publications. The rest of the photographs that will not be included in the photo essay will be password protected and will not be accessible to anyone but you and me.

The information gathered will be confidential. This means that I will know your real identity, but I will not disclose it. There will be no mention of names, specific locations, times, or any other details that could potentially reveal your identity. Nevertheless, there is still the chance that some of the pictures will have recognizable features.

We will protect the photographs in a password-protected file on my computer.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to trace back to you in the published results.

    ☒   I agree to not publish the photographs on my personal account.

Please note: if you do not check this box, you will not be eligible to participate in this research. This condition is essential for maintaining the confidentiality and integrity of the project.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your photographs, you must tell the researcher before October 2024.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

SIGNATURE _____

____

DATE

___14-08-2024_____

____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Empowering Anonymity: A Visual Method of Representing

Gender-Based Violence

Introduction

"Empowering Anonymity" is a set of guidelines and suggestions on how to use visual documentation to empower survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), prioritizing their well-being and their privacy.

This method is a reference guide and it is specifically designed for use by photojournalists, visual journalists, and editors when covering a story and working with a survivor of GBV in Italy. These guidelines exist to support those who desire to share their story visually and engage in a work of empowerment. In general, "Empowering Anonymity" is created for all those who want to change the stereotyped representation of GBV.

By referring to this method, photojournalists are encouraged to narrate stories involving GBV in a way that is respectful and sensitive, avoiding stereotypes that fuel violence, minimizing trauma

exploitation, and desensitization to violence. To achieve this, the method emphasizes a strong collaboration with survivors and anti-violence organizations. It proposes a visual method based on anonymity that aims to keep the identity of the person photographed confidential.

The goals of this method are threefold:

- **Minimize** the traumatic consequences of picturing violence and focus instead on the journey towards empowerment.
- **Challenge** gender stereotypes present in media coverage in Italy and promote a more accurate and respectful portrayal of survivors. This could lead to the creation of a new database of non-stereotypical images of GBV.
- **Empower** survivors to reclaim their agency and narrate their stories from their perspectives. This empowerment can become exemplary and help prevent isolation for those who have not denounced violence or left the anti-violence centers yet.

We acknowledge that each reporter holds their moral subjectivity and values when deciding how to cover a story of violence. Nevertheless, we hope that by adopting this method, media professionals will contribute to a more ethical and respectful representation of GBV, ultimately supporting survivors in their healing process while promoting awareness and understanding.

Guidelines

Suggestions on how to do research

Privacy in Anti-Violence Centers: Accessing anti-violence shelters, organizations, and social cooperatives can be challenging due to strict privacy and protection protocols. Respecting the privacy and anonymity of survivors of violence is one of the priorities of these organizations. Requesting consent from someone currently receiving protection could undermine the fundamental trust relationship that is crucial to the support methodology and overall recovery process provided by anti-violence centers. Therefore, gaining access to someone currently inside an anti-violence center is

not possible due to privacy reasons. [Violenza sulle donne. In che stato siamo? Raccolta dati e anonimato](#)

Anonymity of Participants: According to Italian data protection laws and the Penal Code, the media must not disseminate information that could make a victim of sexual violence identifiable, even indirectly. Even if GBV can be manifested in various forms of abuse, not limited to sexual violence, it is advised to handle all cases with the same level of confidentiality. Therefore, when proposing a project about GBV, one could focus on a visual collaboration with individuals who have already completed their path in an anti-violence center or with a therapist and who want to share their stories by keeping their information anonymous. The reporter shall change details such as name, age, and location, to ensure the person is not easily recognizable.

Understand GBV: It is necessary to gain a thorough understanding of GBV, including its various forms, signs, and legal context in Italy. One could take online training from organizations such as [Telefono Rosa](#), on-demand with [InvisibleFarm,](#) or attend training offered by anti-violence associations, some of which offer specific sensibilization for journalists. The journalist who wants to propose a project related to GBV shall get acquainted with the laws, data/statistics, declarations, and initiatives present in Italy to be able to understand the context better (see 'Resources')

Key aspects of GBV:

- GBV is a subtle social phenomenon that is undermined by its decontextualization, secondary victimization, normalization, and sensationalization.
- GBV is shaped by gender differences which are influenced by sexual and cultural stereotypes.
- GBV can affect anyone based on their gender, gender expression, gender identity, or perceived gender.
- GBV includes sexual violence, physical violence, verbal violence, psychological violence, socio-economic violence, digital violence, and witnessing violence. Femicides are only the peak of violence.

- GBV is manifested in a repetitive cycle of abuse of four phases: tension building, explosion of violence, love bombing, and reconciliation.

- GBV can cause long-lasting psychological and psychosomatic problems.

Trauma-Informed Journalism Guidelines: There are extensive resources and guidelines that support ethical coverage of GBV, which should be considered before starting a visual project on the subject matter. The *Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma* ([Dart Center](#)) and The *Journalism Initiative on Gender-Based Violence* ([JiG](#)) of the Center for Women's Global Leadership ([CWGL](#)) provide thorough guidelines on governing GBV and trauma.

The CWGL proposes these general guidelines:

- Prioritize the needs and interests of survivors

- Protect the identity and dignity of survivors

- Focus on the purpose of the story

- Learn from survivors' perceptions of journalistic practices

- Avoid retraumatizing or disempowering practices

- Address survivors' quest for justice and redress

- Avoid raising or reinforcing false expectations

- Write/produce and edit positive news stories about changing attitudes and efforts to advocate against acts or patterns of violence

- Write/produce and edit follow-up stories that address the long-term impact of gender-based violence on survivors

Suggestions on who to contact

Anti-Violence Centers: A reporter should engage with centers and social cooperatives that specialize in supporting GBV survivors. In Italy, you can use the following mapping to check the list of

anti-violence centers in each region: Mappatura. These centers do not disclose information about individuals who have contacted or received assistance from them and do not maintain contact with individuals who have exited their programs, whether they interrupted their recovery or completed it. Contacting these centers is however fundamental for understanding the multifaceted challenges of GBV, both in its content and representation. These centers can provide valuable insights into the difficulties of breaking stereotypes and addressing the justified fear that survivors have of speaking up. They offer help, raise awareness, and provide training. Moreover, they might be able to collaborate with reporters to ensure accurate and sensitive coverage of GBV issues

Advocacy Groups: Collaborate with advocacy groups and educational organizations dedicated to GBV awareness. Such organizations offer expertise in raising awareness, providing support services, advocating for policy changes, promoting education and training, and empowering victims.

Suggestions on how to collaborate

Proposing a Project: when proposing a project, it is advised to follow these steps.

> *Conduct thorough research* on GBV to understand its complexities and the potential challenges involved in visual documentation; familiarize yourself with the relevant laws and regulations in the geographical area where you plan to conduct your research; review past projects on similar topics to learn from their successes and challenges (see 'Resources').
> *Consider* being supported by *a therapist* or *photo therapist* throughout the project. This professional support can help manage the emotional and psychological aspects of working with survivors and handling sensitive material.
> *Reach out to anti-violence organizations* and *advocacy groups* for feedback and potential approval of your project idea.
> *Arrange* initial meetings with these organizations to discuss potential *collaboration*.

Initially, do **not** seek ***direct contact*** with the survivors but propose your project through anti-violence organizations.

Obtain informed consent from participants before starting any interviews or discussing personal experiences.

Familiarize yourself with the [JiG](#), the [Dart Center](#) and [*WITNESS*](#) ***interview guides*** with Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and the Dart Center [guidelines](#) for reporting on sexual violence in conflict (CRSV), especially [Article 8](#).

Focus on their ***path toward recovery*** rather than asking for details of their experiences of violence and trauma.

Ensure that all participant information remains ***confidential*** throughout the process.

Participant Selection: Find individuals who have completed their recovery journey, rather than those who are still participating in a program within an anti-violence center, to avoid disrupting their healing process. Note that anti-violence centers typically do not maintain contact with individuals after they have completed their program, making it challenging to find someone willing to share their experience. Alternatively, consider collaborating with supporting organizations and have them reach out to survivors who may be willing to participate in your project.

Informed Consent: Obtain consent without personal information, allowing participants to withdraw at any time. Before any interview or inquiry involving the participant's experience, make sure to have obtained meaningful and informed consent regarding the project details, risks, and benefits.

Photographic Process: Develop the story together, focusing on the participant's preferred narrative. Utilize techniques that strive for anonymity and respect participants' wishes. Ensure the person you photograph is a co-author of the final images, not merely a subject.

Respect the Subject's Self-Perception and Emotional Boundaries: Recognize that each person has a unique relationship with their self-image, and one cannot predict how they will react to being photographed, especially when the project involves reflecting on a traumatic experience. To ensure the process is sensitive and supportive, consider collaborating with a

therapist or photo therapist. They can help assess the participant's comfort level and provide guidance if any discomfort arises during the project

Final Presentation: Ensure the final photographs accurately reflect the participant's story and the collaboration, by including them in evaluating the final results.

Suggestions on how to take photographs of survivors of GBV

Anonymity: Prioritize protecting the identity of participants to prevent stereotypes, trauma exploitation, and the perpetuation of stigmatized images of them on social media. You can see who you are photographing, so make sure their information remains confidential and use photographic techniques that do not clearly reveal their identity. I created a prototype photo essay, "Fragments of Self", in collaboration with a model to experiment with techniques of picturing anonymity. You can see it here: Fragments of self

Trauma-Informed Photography: Always try to ensure that the person feels safe and comfortable, ideally with the assistance of a therapist. Check with them regularly and never assume that just because they seem comfortable, they truly are. Even when you are being respectful and ethical, discussing their empowerment related to a traumatic experience can still be retraumatizing and distressing. If they feel uncomfortable, interrupt the photo session immediately and offer assistance. Keep in mind that this is a collaborative project; we are telling their story, not ours.

Creative Techniques: Explore various methods to achieve anonymity. Some inspirational ideas and techniques are as follows:

- **Indirect representation** (see exemplary work of Segni):
    - **Self-portraits:** Simona Ghizzoni reinterpreted survivors' testimonies emphasizing recurring fears, emotions, and patterns by taking self-portraits. To achieve better anonymity, the survivors' names, ages, and locations were changed.

- ○ **Objects and Places**: Ilaria Magliocchetti Lombi photographed the story of survivors by capturing meaningful and evocative places, objects, and possessions. Objects and places thus become parts of an extended self.

Image credits to: Simona Ghizzoni in Segni.
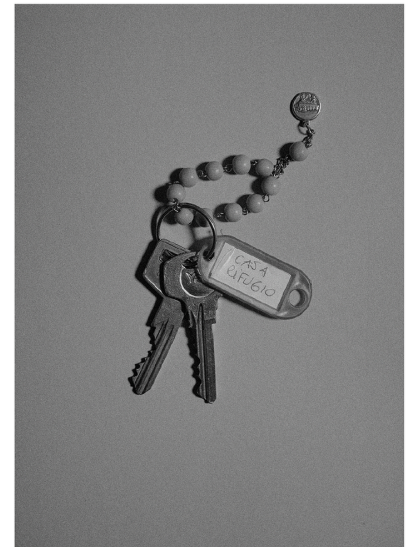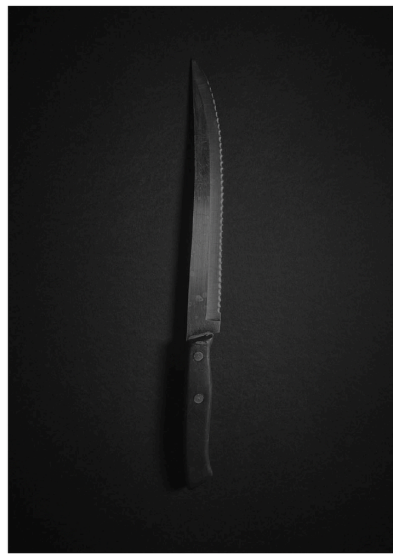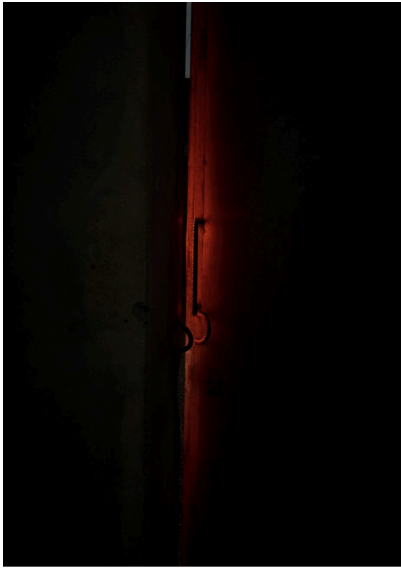
Image credits to: [Simona Ghizzoni](#) in [Segni.](#)

Image credits to [Ilaria Magliochetti Lombi](#) in [Segni.](#)

Street Photography Techniques: one could take inspiration from techniques used by street photographers to hide the identity of bypassers for their privacy.

>   *Backlighting*: by manually focusing on a transparent glass pane during a rainy day, the interplay of external and internal light sources generates a silhouette effect. Utilizing black and white enhances the contrast, producing two hazy, ethereal figures.

Image credits to Zahyr Caan.

>*Window Photography:* In window photography, the subject can be seen through a window or
>transparent panel and the focus can be on either the subject or the surface, depending on the
>intention; for anonymity, it is suggested to prioritize focusing on the panel to obscure the
>subject. It is thus advised to use manual focus. Depending on the surface, one might need a
>polarizing filter to reduce reflections or glares. A narrow aperture can be used to fixate the
>gaze on the details of the window, and a wide aperture to focus on the subject beyond the
>panel.
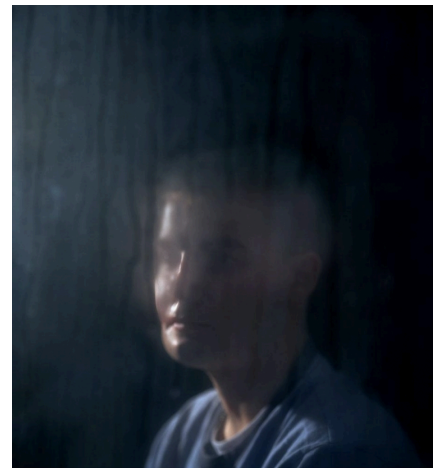
Image credits (left) to Tommi Viitala; Image credits (middle) to Billy Dinh; Image credits (right) to
Nina Berman's Purple Hearts.

Silhouettes: Silhouettes are achieved by placing the subject in front of a bright light source (e.g.,
sunset, window, or light installation), set a narrow aperture (e.g., f/8 or higher) and a low ISO (e.g.,
ISO 100) to reduce light intake. The focus can be adjusted on either the subject or the background
depending on the intention. The shutter speed should be adjusted depending on the background light.
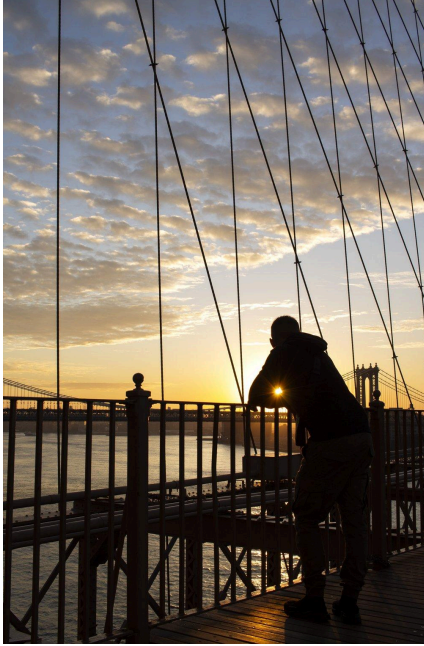
Image credits (left) to Marta Mostardini [Canon EOS 1100D with 24mm lens, ISO 100, shutter speed 1/160 and aperture f/6.3. Image credits (right) to Tommi Viitala.

Reflections: To capture reflections, one should position themselves strategically near reflective surfaces such as windows, metal structures, mirrors, or bodies of water. A wide aperture creates softly blurred reflections, while narrower apertures, provide more details to be visible. For anonymity, it is advised to focus on the reflection panel for intentional blurring of the subject.

Image credits (left) to Marta Mostardini [Sony a7iii and SOny 50mm Lens, Iso 250, shutter speed 1/160, and aperture f/3.2]; Image credits (left) to Inna Lisovskaya.

*Shadows***:** Shadows can be utilized as an effective technique to photograph subjects without revealing their identity, often achieved with low-key lighting, narrow apertures (e.g., f/8 or higher), and placement of the subjects with the source of light. Shadows can also be used to convey a metaphorical meaning.

Image credits to Tommi Viitala.

Shooting through: The subject can be photographed through a light-textured veil such as a curtain or sheet to create the effect of a silhouette. A silhouette by shooting through can be achieved by having a strong light source behind the subject, by focusing on the veil or sheet, and by using a narrow aperture.

Image credits (left) to Billy Dinh; Image credits (right) to Inna Lisovskaya.

*Blurry Images***:** To take blurry photographs that convey the impression of a subject without revealing their clear identity, use manual focus to deliberately keep the image out of focus, capturing the curves and the way light reflects on their body to suggest form and presence while maintaining anonymity.
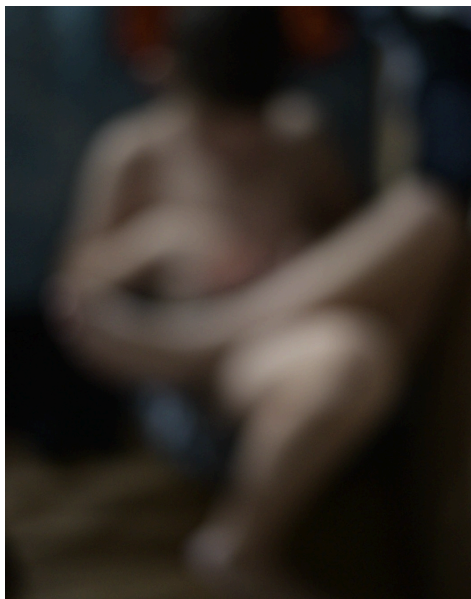
Image credit (left) to Ralph Gibson; Image credit (right) to Inna Lisovskaya.

Selective focus: By using manual focus is possible to keep the environment sharp while the subject remains blurry. Selective focus can also be achieved by using a wide aperture to highlight a specific detail while leaving the rest of the scene out of focus.

Image credits to Billy Dinh.

Slow Shutter Speed: Using a low shutter speed (e.g., 1/30s or slower) can create motion blur, effectively conveying the idea of movement while obscuring distinctive features to maintain the subject's anonymity, an effect that is even more effective in black-and-white.
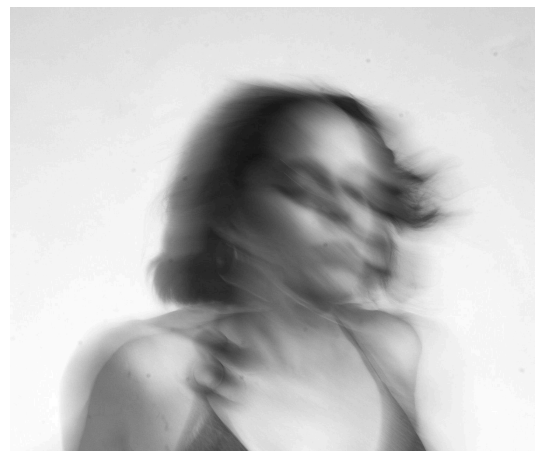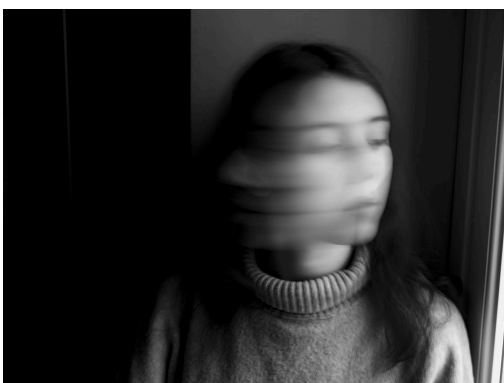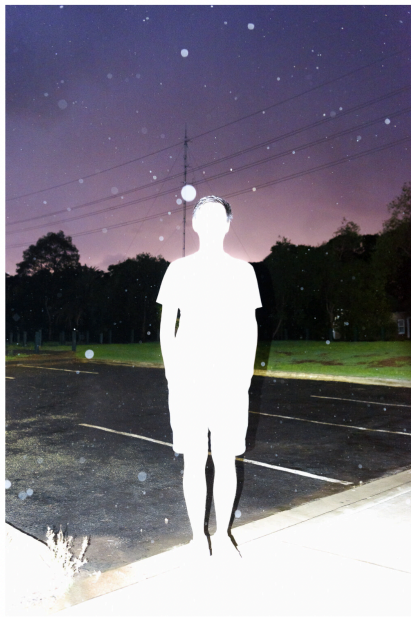
Image credits to Marta Mostardini [picture on the left: Sony a7iii and Sony 50mm Lens, Iso 100, shutter speed ⅛, and aperture f/5; picture on the right: Sony a7iii and Sony 50mm Len, Iso 50, shutter Speed ⅓, and aperture f/22].

Light Framing: Natural or artificial light can be used to frame the subject. To achieve this, it is suggested that the location be studied ahead of time to understand the light dynamics. One can also utilize reflectors or artificial lighting to enhance highlights and shadows.

Image credits to Billy Dinh.

Spotlight Photography: To achieve spotlight photography, whether utilizing an external flash or natural light, one can strategically manipulate the light source to illuminate a targeted area while obscuring others, a technique referred to as flash compensation (resembling a white silhouette). When using flash, adjust the flash exposure for intensity (higher for increased brightness and a pronounced over-exposed effect, lower for a more subtle appearance) and zoom settings (higher in mm for a narrower beam of light) to precisely direct and control the illumination, contingent upon the specific lighting conditions encountered. Post-production edits can also increase the highlighted area/subject.

Images credits to [Starry Kong](#).

Close-ups: Close-ups are achieved by using a zoom lens or physically moving closer to the subject, focusing on fine details and textures, either sharp or intentionally blurred; One could also crop the image in post-production.

Image credits to Marta Mostardini [settings picture on the left: Sony a7iii and Sony 50 mm lens, Iso 125, shutter speed 1/400 and aperture f/3.5; picture in the middle: Sony a7iii and Sony 50 mm lens, Iso 50, shutter speed 1/1250, and aperture f/1.8; picture on the right: Canon EOS 1100D and Canon EFS 24 mm lens, Iso 200, shutter speed 1/100, and aperture f/3.2.

Contextualization: Accompany photographs with ethical and respectful text to provide context without revealing identities. If you need to include names, locations, and ages, consider using aliases instead.

Suggestions on how to use non-violent language:

Language Awareness: Recognize that language can perpetuate gender biases and be the first form of violence. Avoid terms that reinforce stereotypes or victimization.

Check out Resources: Utilize existing resources to ensure the language used is appropriate and respectful.

Laws and Guidelines: As an Italian journalist/photojournalist, respect the laws of the 'Ordine dei Giornalisti (ODG)', especially Article 5 bis on gender differences.

Manifesto Di Venezia: Adhere to the guidelines for respectful and gender-equal media coverage as outlined in the Manifesto Di Venezia by Italian journalists.

Correct Representation of Women: Refer to the manual Tutt'altro Genere di Informazione for contextual data, analysis of journalistic practices, and recommendations for inclusive and respectful reporting.

Cultural Sensitivity: Be aware of how gendered language influences cultural perceptions and strive to use inclusive and neutral terms. Use non-binary pronouns and neutral adjectives when referring to

non-binary individuals. Refer to guides on speaking about the queer community to ensure respectful gendered language use (see Italian Guide, or request Counseling).

Suggestions on how to contextualize the story

Storytelling: Contextualize photographs with narratives that explain the empowering process of the participant rather than the specifics of the violence experienced. By offering an alternative approach to discussing violence—one that emphasizes healing, empowerment, and breaking the cycle of violence—we can reshape the conversation and bring value to narratives of overcoming violence rather than fixating on the details of atrocity.

Exhibition Context: Consider the setting in which the photographs will be displayed, ensuring the participant's comfort and consent. Reflect on the perception of the audience and the impact of the story being told.

Ethical Presentation: Always seek consent from participants regarding how and where their stories will be shared. Ensure that the final presentation respects their wishes and maintains their dignity.

Additional Resources

Reports

- (Istanbul Convention) Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210): Report (English) or Report (Italiano)
- GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report on Legislative and Other Measures for the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Italy: Report
- BROKEN RAINBOW? Domestic Violence and the LGBTI Community in Italy: Report
- Italian civil society organizations for CEDAW12: Report
- Istat Statistics on the Investigation into the performance and delivery of services offered by Anti-violence Centers: Report

Guidelines for Ethical Reporting

- Testo Unico dei Doveri del Giornalista
- Manifesto Di Venezia
- Tutt'altro Genere di Informazione
- Dart Center Style Guide for Trauma Informed Journalism
- Reporting on CRSV
- Short Guide (Italian) about how to speak and talk about the LBGTQ+ community
- Una Libellula Oltre gli Stereotipi (E-Book)
- Consulenza sul Linguaggio di Genere
- Planning a Survey on Gender-Based Violence
- Law Measures to Address GBV from Camera dei Deputati (Parliament)
- Prohibitions for the Publication of Personal Data of Victims of Sexual Violence
- Statistics and Data on Gender-Based Violence in Italy over the past five years
- Training to Avoid Secondary Victimization

- [Gender-Sensitive Communication of the European Institute of Gender Equality](#)

- [The Journalism Initiative on Gender-Based Violence](#)

Advocacy Associations in Italy

- [NonUnaDiMeno](#)

- [ArciGay Rete Donne Transfemminista](#)

- [FarexBene](#)

Anti-Violence Centers in Italy (list per region)

- [Mappatura](#)