Assoc. Prof. Dr. & Dr. Honoris Causa

Sabahudin Hadžialić

**Media ethics in professional journalism:**

**Tolerance and dialogue in media**

Mentioned titled we can watch within double context and understanding as “dialogue and tolerance in media” but also as well “dialogue and tolerance within media itself”.

1. Sociologically, “Dialogue and tolerance in media” can be watched as the possibility of understanding of dialogue and tolerance in media towards external factors of communication, while…
2. “Dialogue and tolerance within media itself” can be sociologically seen as the possibility of understanding and dialogue in media towards internal factors, but as well towards external factors of communication.

To be even more clear within this introduction, Media ethics of “dialogue and tolerance” is depending on many factors directed to ensuring, processing, distribution and understanding of placed information and news.

“Dialogue and tolerance in media” that can be, sociologically, seen as possibility of understanding of the dialogue and tolerance in media towards external factors of the communication.

Let us see example of insufficient shape of dialogue and tolerance towards external factors of communication: Young journalist come to know at the last Press conference organized by the police that young adolescent have tried to commit suicide, and he/she “jumped” on the news as mad having similar editor who sent him on the spot of the ground, to the girl’s house and to talk with her mother. Girl has gone, while they were having conversation with mother, in the bathroom, took a razor and in front of journalists shout: „You want a suicide? You want blood?” and cut up veins on her hand. Of course, they immediately called 911 which came and took a girl for psychiatry observation. But what we see here, at least when we speak about professional journalist ethics and communication with external factors of the communication with the aim of ensuring the information?

Girl was, as the majority of youth would, acting very sincerity, spontaneously and neatly reacted aiming directly to the essence of the relations of the media towards her and, as a matter of cat, gave them exactly what they had come for. So, in that case both, editor and journalist, are equally responsible for her attempt of suicide and that is an excellent message to the media to have responsibility for the decision about what and how they will report.

So, just few more words about the all participants of this story: Girl is certainly responsible for choosing, among many other actions within her big suffering, attempt to do suicide. She surely could have choose something else and the fact that she have chosen attempt of suicide speaks in support to the fact that everything what she has done before did not make result and/or her psychic balance was significantly rocked.

Having in mind that she is minor, her parents bears part of the responsibility that girl comes to the painful and radical status. Her mother is responsible that she agreed an interview with journalists in behalf herself and overstep integrity and responsibility of her daughter when she made decision for her also without asking her. Journalists, on other side, only worried to do their task good, to get the “story”, totally overlooked that fact and by that, together with mother, violated integrity of young person (who is, besides that, not in psychic balance as well) and took away her right for personal responsibility and behaved to her as an object and not as subject. So, for their (non)ethical behavior they bear responsibility, although that was from failing to observe of ignorance, but bear the responsibility. Also, we have a responsibility of the police who did not adequately protect identity of the human being who have tried to commit suicide (especially minor). Journalist is responsible for the decision about which issue he/she will report and how he/she will report. Journalist is responsible towards public and towards those about (and their closest ones). Also, he/she is responsible towards Editor in chief and the owner of the media.

 Professional journalism ethics promotes the concept of ethical journalism for public good, underling the central role of responsible journalism within society. The implications of media representation of ethnicity and race are significant not only because it emphasises the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ but because it fuels nationalism, spreading fear and tensions instead of promoting tolerance and compassion.

Codes of ethics, and individual news media’s editorial policies and guidelines position journalism as an important contributor to the wellbeing of society by fostering a climate of tolerance, and building a culture of understanding between different ethnic, cultural and religious groups in society.

The media’s tasks in this domain involve:

• Reporting factually and accurately on acts of racism and intolerance

• Being sensitive when writing about tensions between communities

• Avoiding derogatory stereotypical depiction of members of certain groups,

but also

• Challenging the assumptions underlying intolerant remarks made by speakers in the course of interviews, reports, and discussion programs.

However, moving from a normative media goal - combating racist discourse and creating a culture of tolerance - towards its application in practice is not a straightforward road.

Especially, when we are talking about female stereotypes, although journalists, like advertisers, claim to be reflecting the attitudes of society rather than shaping them, recent national and international trends indicate that, with respect to women’s lives, they lag behind dismally.

Moving away from treating females like less important members of society (having in mind that in certain countries that do that still), we have to start even from vocabulary (as basic as “chair” instead of “chairman”) a completely different impression can be given. Association of journalists worldwide recommend a guideline, and it is strongly, ethically recommended to journalists, so is a change in focus of subject matter, and this applies to heavier papers and tabloids alike. Of course, politics, economics and commerce are woman’s concerns – and health, family matters and relationships are men. None of these subjects are gender-specific, and as society changes and develops, so should modern journalism. Main ethical point that promoting equality can just help us of better understanding of our background to be able, in better way, to be faced and work on a brighter future of us all.

***Sexual orientation and stereotype representation & Senior citizens***

Just an announcement that Disney (in May 2016) had a first gay princess presented in the animation movie, asked a question – are we ready for that? Maybe, even closer than we think. While gay and lesbian characters are standard players in movies and TV shows for adults, they remain a fleeting or barely acknowledged presence in children’s entertainment. A kids’ movie may seem like the last place to be talking about sex. But advocates note that in almost every gaudy princess film or action-packed superhero cartoon, there are relationships — moms and dads, aunts and uncles, princes and princesses — that, thus far, have quietly reinforced a very traditional standard for romantic love.

Yet Disney and other giants of children’s entertainment have evolved over the decades to reflect changing norms — from including characters of many races to ditching the trope of helpless damsels in distress. Could creating a hero with two dads, or giving a princess a girlfriend, be the next step?

Some Disney fans argued on Twitter that it would have been a huge help for them to see gay characters in movies when they were young — that they might have become more sensitive and accepting towards gay peers, or better able to grapple with their own sexuality. Studies have suggested that seeing gay characters in popular entertainment can decrease prejudice towards those groups.

“*There is no doubt that kids seeing positively portrayed gay characters could have a significant effect that would contribute to such children’s learning about the world and who is in it*,” said [Edward Schiappa,](https://cmsw.mit.edu/profile/ed-schiappa/) a professor of comparative media studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

But doing so is a risk for children’s entertainment companies, who have a financial incentive to make movies as widely accessible — and therefore as non-controversial — as possible.

Pop culture geeks have long swapped theories about cartoonish characters who maybe-sort of gave off a gay vibe, including cross-dressing Bugs Bunny, high-pitched-voiced SpongeBob SquarePants and best friends/roommates Ernie and Bert. “Sesame Street’s” production company was even compelled to put out a statement on the latter topic some years ago: “They are not gay, they are not straight, they are puppets.”

In the past, gay and lesbian were not present in the news. Lack of the shows about these groups of the society has resulted that the media dealing with news could not make influence for the change the wrong stereotypes. Epidemic of AIDS has finally put a full stop on this plot of silence in media. Celebrities, who became a victim of AIDS, like Rock Hudson and Liberace, have contributed that this disease came on the headlines of the news. Moral scruples, without any doubt, were putting on fire attitude of the community towards homosexuality way of life as “deviant” behavior, but today, in XXI century when we have even Mayors and/or Prime ministers of certain countries as members for LGBT population, we cannot talk any more about “disease” and we have to face with the reality that even the Pope Francis on April of 2016 stated. And I quote from [CNN headlines](https://edition.cnn.com/2016/04/08/europe/vatican-pope-family/index.html): “*He urged priests around the world to be more accepting of gays and lesbians, divorced Catholics and other people living in what the church considers "irregular" situations.*

*This is, after all, the Pope who said, "Who am I to judge?" when asked about homosexuality....* *But he calls much more for tolerance and mercy than for judgment in the paper.*

*"There is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems," he writes.*

*"Every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration.“...* End of quote.

So, could you imagine these words just 7-8 years ago?

The way how individuals are forming their stand about the society also influence on forming of public opinion. Obligation of ethical, professional journalist is to provide context and shows understandings, so that stand of the citizens should be based on facts. Media has widened, within the last decade, their horizons through reporting about the movements for gay rights around the world and legal initiatives that should reckon with discrimination related to sexual orientation. From ethical point of view, values about which we are talking here are the truth, accuracy and justice, so continuance in returning back on inaccurate stereotypes deprave media efforts to provide comprehensive picture and truthful picture about one of the loudest minority community in the society.

Picture about Senior citizens in media for decades were in a sense that they are category of population who is passé and have been most often showed as powerless, childish and dogged. As many other stereotypes, twisted picture in media about senior citizens now is under some changes and media has started showing more positive pictures and stories about senior citizens having in mind that professional journalism is mainly about accuracy, truthful and honesty and senior citizens were the ones who provided us foundations to develop our further achievements. Respect is the word that ethically should be more implemented as well.

***People with disabilities and People with special needs***

***& Strategies against media stereotypes***

The use of respectful terms for people with disabilities is a special ethical challenge, because disrespectful language can cause a feeling of exclusion.

Words are important! Journalists should know which term they should use to denote a community. The best test of this is whether the community wants to be denoted with such a term? If the term is derogatory, it must not be used regardless of the arguments that may seem valid or typical to you.

All journalists are obliged to respect the human dignity and the human rights of all people, including the members of marginalized groups. Journalists should be particularly careful when using terms to denote discriminated communities and groups, as one of the most widespread forms of discrimination is the negative and disparaging linguistic identification.

The use of respectful terms for people with disabilities is a special ethical challenge, because disrespectful language can cause a feeling of exclusion.

***Use of the terms "invalids", "invalidity", "invalid"***

In general, journalists should not use the archaic term "invalid" (literally meaning "incorrect”, "faulty"). In practice, we come across the ethical dilemma:

How can we avoid the use of the terms "invalids", "invalidity" and "invalid" when they are an integral part of the existing laws, institutions and associations?

How can we avoid the use of the term "invalids" when writing about the government’s "Department of Veterans and Invalid Veterans Affairs" which includes a “Department for soldier and invalid protection” responsible for realizing the rights to “Military invalidity” “Family invalidity”, “Invalids allowance”...? How can we avoid the use of the term “invalid” when reporting on issues related to the “Pension and Invalid Insurance Fund of Macedonia” or the Law on Pension and Invalid Insurance, the Law on invalids organizations, the Law on employment of invalid persons...?

Finally, how can we avoid the use of the term "invalids" when this term is included in the names of several civic associations?

How can we resolve these ethical dilemmas? Undoubtedly, journalists don’t have the right to change the names of existing laws, institutions and associations. However, they have an ethical obligation not to knowingly produce or process information encouraging discrimination and to defend the human rights, dignity and freedom. In addition, journalists also have a responsibility to avoid generalization based on disability.

If certain NGOs still use the term "invalids" to denote themselves, this does not mean that the same term should be used to denote the whole discriminated group. If some institutions and laws still use the term "invalids", this should be a reason for journalists to bring up the following question:

Why do the laws and institutions protecting citizens’ rights still use outdated terms that violate their right to dignity and respect?

Journalists should avoid the "invalid" adjective even when it comes to widely accepted expressions such as "invalids pension", “invalids home", "invalids commission", "invalids wheelchair". Instead of the description "people bound to a wheelchair", the expression “people using a wheelchair" should be used.

***Use of the terms "handicap", "people with special needs", "people with disabilities"***

„Colorful legislation at the expense of invalids" is a typical news article using many different terms. The subheading of the article uses another expression "Colorful legislation at the expense of the rights of persons with developmental disabilities".

The article cites the recommendation of the experts:
"It is best to avoid the term ‘handicap’ and use ‘people with disabilities’ instead".

If journalists prefer to use legal terms, it is best to use the terms "people with (mental and physical) disabilities", having in mind that mental and physical disability is recognized as a discriminatory basis in the "Law on Prevention and Protection against

Discrimination". The same law includes a definition of what constitutes discrimination against people with mental and physical disabilities, including cases when "no measures are taken to remove the restrictions, or to adapt the infrastructure and space for using publicly available resources or participating in the public and social life".

Originally, the word stereotype was a printing term that referred to the plate that printed the same image over and over. A sociological or psychological stereotype is a fixed impression of a group of people. Everyone has stereotypes—images of national groups, religious groups, or racial groups or perhaps of criminals, teachers, or plumbers. Consider, for example, if you have any stereotypes of, say, bodybuilders, the opposite sex, a racial group different from your own, members of a religion very different from your own, or college professors. Very likely, you do. Stereotypes may be negative (“They’re lazy, dirty, and only interested in getting high”) or positive (“They’re smart, hardworking, and extremely loyal”).

If you have these fixed impressions, you may, on meeting a member of a group, see that person primarily as a member of that group. Initially this may provide you with some helpful orientation. However, it creates problems when you apply to that person all the characteristics you assign to members of that group without examining the unique individual. If you meet a politician, for example, you may have a host of characteristics for politicians that you can readily apply to this person. To complicate matters further, you may see in the person’s behavior the manifestation of various characteristics that you would not see if you did not know that the person was a politician. In online communication, because there are few visual and auditory cues, it’s not surprising to find that people form impressions of online communication partners with a heavy reliance on stereotypes.

Consider, however, another kind of stereotype: You’re driving along a dark road and are stopped at a stop sign. A car pulls up beside you and three teenagers jump out and rap on your window. There may be a variety of possible explanations. Perhaps they need help, or they want to ask directions. Or they may be about to engage in carjacking. Your self-protective stereotype may help you decide on “carjacking” and may lead you to pull away and into the safety of a busy service station. In doing that, of course, you may have escaped being carjacked—or you may have failed to help people who needed assistance.

Stereotyping can lead to two major barriers. First, the tendency to respond to a person primarily as a member of a (national, racial, religious) class can lead you to perceive that person as possessing qualities (usually negative) that you believe characterize the group to which he or she belongs. Second, stereotyping can lead you to ignore the unique characteristics of an individual; you therefore may fail to benefit from the special contributions each person can bring to an encounter.

You’re not going to lose your stereotypes. But you can become mindful of them and, when appropriate, ask yourself if your perceptions of another person are being unduly influenced by your stereotypes.

***Internal behaviors and external influence***

***& Internal factors of the communication in media***

However, how to realize “Dialogue and tolerance within media itself” that can be, within sociology point of view observed towards internal factors, bit also towards external factors of communication, having in mind that every internal behaviors has its own external effects and influences, but also vice versa, when we are talking about the media.

That is why we need also dialogue and tolerance within and around the media to find a modality of understandings of advantages of professional journalism:

1. Education of journalists, but the public as well within the immediate cooperation with sociologists and psychologist with the goal of creation of the society of good intentions and not sensationalistic aspirations.
2. Immidate organization of permanent contacts of adequate bodies of journalistic association with media companies with the goal of introducing with ethical codes of the profession.
3. Starting of introduction of media culture, but also of media literacy into the educational system (secondary school) with the goal of shaping up of the society of knowledge about communication but also about understandings of the communication reality.

Internal factors of communication in media (editorial board, journalists, owner of the media) within its responsibility must bear the biggest liability within satisfying of the ethics of professional behavior and work.

Internal and external factors of communication in media and around media jointly creates collectiveness of diversity and way out is in mutual understandings and aspiration towards shaping up of the society that is aimed to the creation of human and not animal in us.

***Collectiveness of diversity & “Yellowness” of the ethics***

Collectiveness of diversities we can see within joint approach of understanding that mutual, joint point of view for the professional journalists and the public must be only accepting diversities even within understandings between each other’s. By doing that, they make a huge step forward avoiding misunderstandings and within honest and open discussions (thank Internet for the social media and forums and chats) will find a path of proper presentation and understanding of the “truth” whatever it, ethically, might be, at the end of day. As proverb say, it is better to talk for 100 days than have a war for one.

Against the yellowness of ethics we can only fight together through educational outbuilding of all parts of the society with the goal of communication of the knowledge of all towards all and not only communication of acting of one to another and vice versa.

Question to think about: Does the ethics and morality depends on ensuring, processing, distribution and understanding of the news, or...?

Next*: Media ethics in professional journalism:* The case of Kevin Karter