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Call for papers

Ethnicity, class and gender in news making: Weighing the Impact of Stereotyping in News Production

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Coordinators:

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Many studies have examined stereotyping in news media, but few have looked at its role (in terms of gender, ethnic, class, age, etc.) in the news production *process* (Schudson, 1989). The proposed studies will therefore focus their attention on news production—on the upstream process which culminates in finished journalistic content. This entails examining not only how actors in the process are affected by this stereotyping, but also how they understand, exploit and appropriate it.

The proposed articles could follow four lines of inquiry, one being to analyse the role of stereotyping (according to gender, ethnic, class, age, etc.) in the division of labour in journalism, both vertical (allocation of positions in the institutional hierarchy) and horizontal (distribution of assignments). Monica Löfgren Nilsson (2010) has shown how gender stereotypes in Swedish public television played a role in the assignment of women to “soft news” and men to “hard news”; women, perceived by managing editors as essentially passive/cautious/hesitant, were assigned most often to documentary research, while men, perceived as active/reliable/confident and able to “think on their feet” were generally assigned field work. Similarly, studies by Ferrández Alicia Ferrer (2012) for Spain and Eugénie Saitta (2016) for Italy have shown that managing editors’ racialized perceptions of (in)competence led to a horizontal segregation of duties in which immigrant news producers found themselves primarily assigned to the current events of their home country and to the lives of migrants in the host country.

A second line of inquiry would look at how the same stereotypes influence the recruitment of journalists, and, more broadly, play a role in the accessibility to the journalistic profession and the setting of public policy in media and communications (affirmative action for visible minorities, for instance). “Fixers” from working class neighborhoods employed by French television newsrooms (to facilitate the access of reporters to these places and the selection of interview subjects), for example, are not granted the official status of journalist because of restrictive perceptions of class *habitus* (Berthaut, 2013). Similarly, in Spain, ethnic stereotypes, combined with other factors, limit the participation of journalists with immigrant backgrounds to media spaces that constitute audiovisual programs for an immigrant public (Navarro, 2015).

A third track could examine the role of the same stereotypes in the relationships between journalists and their sources including: how stereotypes affect journalists' interactions with their sources (and vice versa) and the selection of information. As an example, some studies demonstrate that women journalists are sometimes able to transform gender stereotypes into a professional resource by flipping a stigma on its head. For example, Lucie Schoch and Fabien Ohl (2011) explain how some female sport journalists exploit their alleged incompetence in this "male" domain to obtain more time with their interview subject under the guise that they require more explanation. Einat Lachover (2005) also shows that female journalists may adopt two tactics, "flirting" and/or "the 'help me' tactic," to play into the perception by their sources that they are sexual objects, weak and maternal.

A fourth line of inquiry would focus on how the same stereotypes feed the worldviews of news producers—the framework of their thinking and their standards—and thus influence how news is presented. Jerome Berthaut (2013) shows how the prototypical view of the French "suburbs" (Tuchman, 1978) leads journalists to typify those working class neighborhoods in television news as nothing more than an accumulation of housing projects and bars. Similarly, Laura Navarro (2007), from an analysis of Spanish mainstream media, shows how an "orientalist" vision of the Arab world and Islam (as defined by Said) contributes to the relegation of many topics, like the work of reformist Muslim intellectuals, Islamic feminists and human rights movements in Arab countries.

Each of these four lines of inquiry could highlight the ways in which stereotypes, production constraints and professional standards interconnect and reinforce or contradict each other.

The goal of this call for papers is to contribute to the understanding of the substance of news production and the principles of the vision and division of the world it both integrates and conveys. It will shed light on the systems of categorization and classification of groups and individuals, and the stereotypes that impact them.

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Double-blind evaluation. All manuscripts must include a theoretical framework, a research method and empirical analysis.

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