

# Media portrayal of USA female journalists as victims of sexual harassment and discrimination

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper brings forward the media portrayal of women-journalists, focusing on the gender inequalities in mass-media that put in jeopardy the safety of female journalists when performing their jobs. Within the purpose of investigating the issue of discrimination against female journalists, the analysis included the cases that mass-media drew attention upon regarding the inequalities and abuses in the newsrooms, and also the correctness from an ethical point of view of reporting these materials by the press. These aspects emphasize if the representation in national mass-media of these cases is achieved in an impartial manner by all media institutions involved in the process, and if the reporting of these cases included ethical violations.

**Keywords:** female journalists, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, ethical norms

## 1. Introduction

US journalists have a multitude of ethical and deontological codes to guide their journalistic work, both at the national and editorial level. Such provisions are found in the ethical and deontological codes drawn up by

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certain societies that encompass professional journalists. One such society is the Society of Professional Journalists, founded in 1909, which provides a revised code of ethics in 2014 to guide them in exercising their profession in the media field. Regarding the composition of the Society, it is made up of approximately 7,000 members at the national level, including print, online and broadcast journalists, journalism educators and students interested in a career in journalism. The Ethics Committee is made up of the Chair of the Ethics Committee and 9 of its members. Its role is to encourage the use of the Society's Code of Ethics and to resolve public issues. It also analyses national trends and conducts case studies on work carried out in difficult conditions.

Within the Society of Professional Journalists we can observe a guide that includes several resources on sexual harassment in the workplace, especially in newsrooms. The President of the Society of Professional Journalists proposes a set of rules that journalists should follow to contribute to a better atmosphere in newsrooms. According to these recommended rules, journalists should demand that the newsrooms where they work have a sexual harassment policy. Also, they should insist that this policy be read by every employee and that they assume this by signing it. The same recommendations encourage the human resources department or the management of the newsroom to organize an annual training for all employees on sexual harassment. And last but not least, there should be a support team, not part of the editorial board, where victims can report cases of sexual harassment. This team should report these cases further, so that such behavior can be stopped.

The provisions of the Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics are embedded in a guide that aims to ensure that the information disseminated to the public is "accurate, fair and complete". It states that journalists should act with integrity, both when gathering information and when providing it to the public. The code then presents articles that journalists should strictly adhere to. The first part, entitled "Seek the truth and report it", encompasses the responsibilities that the journalist has towards the public: to verify information before publication, to use original and credible sources, to provide context, to correct information and always keep it up to date, to

identify sources accurately, to avoid stereotypes, not to distort facts or context, as well as visual information, and last but not least, not to plagiarize, always attributing the information taken.

The code of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists specifies the relationship of the journalist with the sources, mentioning the promises made to them, which should not always be respected, as well as respecting the reasons for the anonymity of a source, if their identification puts them in danger or may attract retaliation or punishment. In terms of fairness, a journalist must also offer the right to reply to the accused or criticized. When it comes to how journalists gather information, it is recommended in this code that they only resort to undercover methods as a last resort, and only if the information collected is of public interest. A journalist who wants to comply with ethical norms must not be intimidated by the status of people in power, but also give victims a voice and the chance to tell their story. The use of stereotypes in reporting facts should be avoided. The right to exchange opinions of the people involved must be provided, regardless of whether the journalist agrees with these opinions or not.

The next section of the code titled "Minimizing Harm" contains a series of provisions on what ethical journalism entails, emphasizing the importance of respecting third parties of a journalist: colleagues, sources, people they write about and the public. Thus, the journalist must find a balance between the public's need to find out information and the possible discomfort or harm that it could cause to the person about whom the material is written. Compassion is needed towards people who may be affected by the publication of press materials, when it comes to victims of sexual assault, minors, vulnerable people (who do not have the necessary experience or cannot give their consent), as well as in the case of cultural differences. A private person has more rights in the control he has over personal information than a public person. Thus, the journalist must take into account the effect produced by the exposure of information about a public person on a private person. Another provision in this section brings to the attention of the journalist the right of a suspect to a fair trial and the right of the public to be informed, as well as the consequences of publishing the suspect's identity before a verdict by a legal entity. The journalist must

also consider the implications of publishing long-term articles, which require him to constantly supplement the information published. The third section of the code, titled "Act independently", emphasizes the journalist's relationship of fairness towards his audience. Thus, a journalist who wants to have an ethically correct attitude will avoid conflicts of interest, refuse gifts, favors, special treatment and political involvement that could affect his integrity, impartiality and even credibility. Special attention must also be paid to sources that provide information in exchange for money or favors. Donors, advertisers, or any other external factors that could influence the story should not be given special treatment. When journalists report advertising, they should be marked as such. In the section "Be Responsible and Transparent," journalists who want to comply with ethical norms will take responsibility for their work and explain their decisions to the public. They should also provide explanations to the audience to clarify the decisions and processes through which they produced their stories. Journalists are encouraged to engage in dialogue with the public about journalistic practices, coverage, and content. When making mistakes, a journalist should own up to the fact that he or she has made a mistake, acknowledge it, and correct it immediately. He or she should explain the corrections he or she has made and the clarifications to the public. The journalist should also respond promptly to questions about the accuracy, clarity, and fairness of his or her stories. When a journalist observes unethical behavior within the newsroom, they must report it. Journalists must behave in the same way they expect others to behave toward them.

## **2. Representation of female journalist victims of discrimination in the media. Empirical research**

This paper aims to investigate the extent to which national ethical provisions regarding the representation of victims in the media are respected, how the portrait of the victim and the aggressor is composed when both are media professionals, as well as the respect for ethical norms regarding the representation of accused persons in national press materials.

### *2.1. Research questions:*

- To what extent do editorial offices respect the norms of journalistic ethics regarding gender representation?
- To what extent do editorial offices respect the norms of journalistic ethics regarding the representation of victims of discrimination and sexual harassment?
- To what extent do editorial offices respect the norms of journalistic ethics regarding the representation of persons accused of discrimination or sexual harassment?
- How are victims portrayed in the analyzed media products?
- How are aggressors portrayed in the analyzed media products?

### *2.2. Research method*

The method chosen to study this topic is the qualitative content analysis, focus on researching differences in gender representation among female journalists in different newsrooms. We chose qualitative content analysis in order to identify articles in which ethical writing norms were violated in journalistic materials and to observe how these cases were represented in the media.

### *2.3. Sampling*

In order to carry out the analysis on press articles, using a targeted sampling on materials that presented the problems of discrimination against women journalists. Thus, articles that met the imposed criteria were selected, namely those that presented the initial investigation, the responses from the accused newsrooms and the finality of the case.

### *2.4. Research tools*

The research tools used in the paper will be the analysis grid, which will divide the information into elements to be analyzed, and the questionnaires. The analysis grid is used as a means of quantifying the information, to divide the information with the help of exact values in

various areas of interest. This tool enables us to obtain an overview of the elements that repeat, but also of the elements that show changes, thus providing an accurate perspective on the information received.

The articles analyzed are divided into three distinct groups: the investigations, the editorial responses to the investigations and the presentation of the final cases.

In order to perform the analysis in the United States on press articles, we included 12 provisions of the ethical code of the Society of Professional Journalists, which we transformed into indicators. These indicators provided for the journalists' compliance with measures by which the materials produced are in accordance with the ethical provisions of the code. The edited journalistic articles were passed through the filter provided by the indicators. The SPJ code of ethics was chosen as a basis for developing the indicators because multiple media institutions included in the analysis do not fully present editorial codes of ethics, examples including Fox News, The Variety, The New Yorker or ABC.

### *2.5. Sources used for data collection and the selection of articles from the USA to be analyzed*

The newsrooms included initially in this study are the major news organizations in the United States, such as: The New York Times, Fox News, CNN, CBS News, NBC News, ABC News, The Washington Post, The New Yorker and The Variety. These newsrooms were selected based on their popularity, number of employees and trusted afforded by the American public. Another reason for the selected the newsrooms was in order to expose the incidence of workplace discrimination cases within the newsrooms and to draw a parallel between the percentage of women in these institutions who are in leadership positions, compared to that of men, as well as the salary differences between them. Journalists included in this study will be journalists who have experienced some form of discrimination or threat, either within the media institutions or from outside.

The sample of articles and cases was selected, given the context of the #MeToo movement, since the beginning of this movement in the United States. It includes articles that have involved discriminated against or

harassed female journalists, thus analyzing whether their representation in the press has respected the ethical norms of writing a journalistic text and the message that was suggested by these articles.

In order to analyze the data on discrimination against female journalists in the media a comparison will be performed between the manner in which the cases of the victims are presented, namely female journalists who have suffered discrimination at work or have been harassed in any way by male persons, and the representation of their aggressors. Following the preliminary analysis of the articles on the chosen topic, we found that those targeting discrimination and harassment of female journalists are most often found in articles written about their aggressors. Also, these discriminations and aggressions are those in the editorial offices where they work, and their aggressor is usually a superior. We selected for analysis 5 representative cases of sexual harassment by journalists or media directors towards the women they had under their control, including female journalists, interns or simply employees of the editorial office who wanted to have a career in journalism. To carry out this analysis, we selected articles that have as a source the newsrooms that made the information public through investigations, articles that described the victim or the aggressor (if these were not included in the initial investigation), articles that responded to these accusations and that were produced by the accused newsroom, as well as the finality of the case presented in media materials from the same newsrooms. With the aid of qualitative content analysis we will observe whether the newsrooms that presented the cases respected the imposed ethical norms, such as protecting the anonymity of the victim and the aggressor, using reliable sources to report the facts, specifying the non-compliance with ethical norms within the newsroom or the opportunity for exchanges of opinions and offering both parties the right to comment. Supplementary we chose to include in the analysis investigations carried out by editorial offices other than the ones targeted, as well as articles written by the accused editorial office to observe whether there is a response from it and whether it complies with ethical norms at the time of writing the article. Thus, the women who suffered harassment or abuse are either journalists, or wanted to pursue a career in journalism or had another status within the media enterprise.

## *2.6 Cases analyzed and presentation of results*

### *2.6.1 The Roger Ailes- Fox News case*

One of the most famous cases involves Roger Ailes, the chairman and founder of Fox News, who was accused of harassing female colleagues and women who wanted a career in journalism over several years. Although the women journalists were also part of the Fox News team, they were overshadowed by the prominence of the bully in the newsroom.

Two investigations by The New York Times, one on July 6, 2016, and the other on August 22, 2016, aimed to present the facts, the victims and the perpetrator in an objective manner, following all ethical rules of journalistic writing. Each article presents two cases of a lawsuit: one from former anchor Gretchen Carlson and another from former moderator Andrea Tantaros. In both investigations, the right of defense and the right of the accused is offered, as well as an exchange of views at article level from all parties involved. The New York Times exposes violations at the Fox News newsroom, ensuring that the information is complete and verified. Regarding Fox News' July 6, 2016, article about the accused by Fox News, there is favoritism by the author towards the accused, using words such as "sickening lawsuit" when describing the prosecution on behalf of the victims. There is a constant return to mentioning favorable things that one of the women has done in the past about the accused, but present accusations are avoided and positive actions on his part are always mentioned. It is noticeable that the journalist resorts to a common stereotype of the powerful and influential man and the woman who is not grateful for his efforts and help. There is also no mention of any breach of ethical standards at Fox News, with the journalist's biased tone towards the aggressor and favoring his image. Fox News' response to the allegations made by The New York Times investigation comes on July 21, 2016 with an article outlining the firing of the accused. The article offers no comment from Roger Ailes, only from representatives of 21st Century Fox, the parent of Fox News. Victims' opinions or the exchange of those involved are not included in the article, only certain statements supporting the accused. There are also no other sources included in the article that add veracity, and



the journalist's praise of the defendant contributes to the subjectivity of the material. Although these issues are violated, 21st Century Fox representatives mention improving the newsroom's work environment so that employees feel they are respected and protected.

Finally, two articles in The New York Times conclude the cases of the two victims, Gretchen Carlson and Andrea Tantaros. Carlson's case concludes with her settling with 21st Century Fox to compensate her for her treatment at Fox News. In contrast, Andrea Tantaros fails to win in court, resulting in a win for Fox News. Both articles follow all the rules of ethical journalistic writing, providing arguments and statements that reinforce the credibility of the article.

*Ethical analysis of articles. Presentation of the analysis results*

The Roger Ailes case kicked off a number of accusations from women to senior journalists and media executives. The article published by The New York Times on July 6, 2016, titled "Gretchen Carlson of Fox News Files Harassment Suit Against Roger Ailes"<sup>3</sup>, brought to the surface the practices he engaged in against his female employees. The article details the lawsuit Gretchen Carlson filed against Roger Ailes and her statements about sexual advances from her superior, who had managed to create a "boy's club" in the newsroom, as the victim describes it.

In terms of how the article was written, the information in the article is taken from direct sources, from statements by the parties involved. The journalist explains to his readers the context in which these allegations arose, detailing information about the characters in the article. The material contains the comments, statements and responses of all the parties involved, without any power influence of any of them over the author. There is mention of sources who have confirmed such behavior in the newsroom, stating that they too have had similar experiences. This statement came from Ms. Carlson's lawyer to the journalist. The journalist makes the public aware

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<sup>3</sup> Michael M. Grynbaum and John Koblin, "Gretchen Carlson of Fox News Files Harassment Suit Against Roger Ailes," *The New York Times*, July 6, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/07/business/media/gretchen-carlson-fox-news-roger-ailes-sexual-harassment-lawsuit.html>.

of the existence of such ethical breaches in the newsroom. In **describing the victim**, the journalist uses the phrases “prominent female anchor” and “a longtime Fox employee”. The assailant, on the other hand, is described as “the chairman of Fox News”, “perhaps the most powerful man in television news”, “a towering figure in media”, “a fierce public relations warrior who can be ruthless with enemies”. It is easy to see the discrepancy that the journalist creates in reporting the facts to emphasize the power differences between the two.

The article published by The New York Times on August 22, 2016, titled “Andrea Tantaros of Fox News Claims Retaliation for Sex Harassment Complaints”<sup>4</sup>, brings information that complements the first investigation by The New York Times. A new victim of Roger Ailes is introduced to the public, bringing serious allegations against the Fox News founder and ethical violations within the newsroom. The work environment is described as intimidating, indecent and misogynistic for women in the newsroom, and accusations are also leveled at other men in the newsroom, such as Bill O'Reilly. The information provided by the journalist is taken from a reliable source, Andrea Tantaros' lawsuit against Fox News. It contextualizes the information with reference to Gretchen Carlson's lawsuit. The journalist gives a right of reply to all parties involved in the lawsuit, but some of them refuse to comment on the subject. The objectivity of the journalist is visible as he does not allow himself to be influenced by any of the parties, reporting the statements as they are found in the trial and the responses that the accused give or the refusal to comment on such statements. This article comes as a complement to the original investigation, bringing other allegations against Fox News into focus. Ethical violations at the newsroom are exposed through the victim's statements. The journalist chooses to describe the assailant at the end of the article as “the network's founding chairman and guiding force for two decades”, while the women he refers to are described as “former Fox News host” or “former anchor”. This way of

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<sup>4</sup> Jim Dwyer, "Andrea Tantaros of Fox News Claims Retaliation for Sex Harassment Complaints," *The New York Times*, August 23, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/23/business/media/andrea-tantaros-of-fox-news-claims-retaliation-for-harassment-complaints.html>.

referring to the characters involved shows the difference in status between them, as well as a stereotype of the influential and powerful man in relation to the women under him.

Fox News conducts an article on July 6, 2016 that comes as a defendant's statement against the allegations from Gretchen Carlson. The article is titled "Ailes denies allegations in Gretchen Carlson harassment suit as Fox News launches investigation"<sup>5</sup> and features Ailes' response to the sexual harassment allegations, as well as 21st Century Fox's response to the lawsuit filed by Gretchen Carlson. The article attacks the allegations made against Ailes in an attempt to improve his image and presents the company's "total confidence" in him. The article emphasizes several times the effort Roger Ailes is said to have made to help Gretchen Carlson advance her career as a journalist, including by offering her own show. Reference is also made to Carlson thanking Ailes in her book, describing him as "the most approachable boss I've ever worked for". Carlson is accused on several occasions of filing a lawsuit against Ailes on the grounds that his contract was not renewed.

The analysis of the material showed that the journalist violated several ethical rules. However, he provided the public with information that had been checked in advance and taken from the trial. He also referenced Gretchen Carlson's lawsuit against Roger Ailes and provided statements from all parties involved to give context to the information. However, it can be seen that the author tried to favor the perpetrator by the way he related the information about the perpetrator as opposed to the way he referred to the victim. Carlson's lawsuit characterizes him as "disgusting" and when referring to the victim's statements, he uses the verb "alleged" and in the case of Ailes, "said". The opinions presented come from both sides, both what Carlson states in his trial and Ailes' response to the charges. The author insists on some of her past statements that put Ailes in a favorable light to disprove Carlson's claims at trial. Thus, the stereotype of a powerful,

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<sup>5</sup> Howard Kurtz, "Ailes Denies Allegations in Gretchen Carlson Harassment Suit as Fox News Launches Investigation," *Fox News*, July 6, 2016, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/ailes-denies-allegations-in-gretchen-carlson-harassment-suit-as-fox-news-launches-investigation>.

influential man who helped create the career of the woman who accuses him is portrayed, and she is not grateful for his efforts in the rise of her career. Also not outlined and exposed are the transgressions that took place at the newsroom level, with the author claiming that there is no evidence to corroborate Carlson's claims. In describing the two, the author refers to them mostly by their first names, but refers to Carlson as "the former host" and to Ailes as "Fox News Chairman Roger Ailes", which is meant to denote the difference in status and power between the two.

Fox News responds on July 21, 2016 with an article titled "Roger Ailes resigns as Fox News chairman, Rupert Murdoch assumes acting role"<sup>6</sup>, which details Roger Ailes' resignation following sexual harassment allegations and 21st Century Fox executive chairman Rupert Murdoch assuming his duties. Mr. Murdoch admired Mr. Ailes' achievements, without mentioning why he had to resign. Murdoch's sons, who also hold important positions in the company, acknowledge Ailes' contributions, noting the importance of a respectful and trusting work environment. The article mentions the actions that led to Ailes' resignation, mentioning Gretchen Carlson's allegations, but noting that she sued him over non-renewal of his contract.

After ethically analyzing the article, we found that the journalist violated some provisions of the Code of Ethics. In terms of the provisions that the journalist complied with, the journalist provided verified information from the sources' statements and provided the readers with context by referring to the case reported in The New York Times. The article also includes a statement of the need for a safer work environment and the need for respect within it. In shimb, the author does not provide comments from the accused, Roger Ailes, on the resignation, but only the reactions of the 21st Century Fox CEOs to the incident. Neither are the opinions of any of the victims offered, which means that there was no exchange of opinions

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<sup>6</sup> Howard Kurtz, "Roger Ailes Resigns as Fox News Chairman, Rupert Murdoch Assumes Acting Role," *Fox News*, July 21, 2016, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/roger-ailes-resigns-as-fox-news-chairman-rupert-murdoch-assumes-acting-role>.  
<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/roger-ailes-resigns-as-fox-news-chairman-rupert-murdoch-assumes-acting-role>.

in the article. The reporting of the facts is subjective, with the journalist including only praise for the accused, such as Murdoch's statement "Roger's remarkable contributions to our company", but not mentioning any of his victims. It referred to him as "female Fox employee" and to him as "chairman of Fox News, Fox Business and Fox television stations". Such descriptions are intended to emphasize how much more important the perpetrator was to the company than the victims.

Two articles written by The New York Times bring finality to the case, both regarding Gretchen Carlson and Andrea Tantaros. The article concerning Gretchen Carlson, published on September 6, 2016 under the headline "Fox Settles With Gretchen Carlson Over Roger Ailes Sex Harassment Claims"<sup>7</sup> presents the final details surrounding the case between her and 21st Century Fox. However, after a \$20 million dollar loss in their lawsuit with Carlson, they suffered another loss after one of their Fox News hosts, Greta Van Susteren, left the newsroom. The article also describes the tensions in the newsroom, the cases Fox had settled with two other victims, the evidence Carlson had against Roger Ailes, and the number of women who made allegations against Ailes.

The article complied with ethical writing rules, the author of the material presents previously verified information, provides context to the material by referencing the original case, provides the right to comment to the accused parties, is not influenced by the status of the accused, includes other sources in the material, and presents exchanges of all those involved in the story. However, when it comes to the description of the victim and the perpetrator, i.e. a woman and a man, it uses the phrase "former anchor, Gretchen Carlson" to describe her, while he is described as "the network's powerful chairman, Roger Ailes". There is a difference in the way a woman who is in an inferior position to a man is reported and how this influential man is described.

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<sup>7</sup> Michael M. Grynbaum and John Koblin, "Fox Settles With Gretchen Carlson Over Roger Ailes Sex Harassment Claims," *The New York Times*, September 6, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/07/business/media/fox-news-roger-ailes-gretchen-carlson-sexual-harassment-lawsuit-settlement.html>.

The May 18, 2018, article, "Lawsuit Brought by Ex-Fox News Host Andrea Tantaros Is Dismissed"<sup>8</sup> returns after nearly two years with conclusions on the Andrea Tantaros case. The lawsuits against Fox News and Roger Ailes on behalf of Tantaros did not come with a win on her side. The victim couldn't offer enough concrete evidence to convince the court, with Fox News coming out the winner in the case. Also, one allegation that came to support the victim's indictment was that she published a book without the editors' consent.

The article showed no ethical writing violations, and the journalist complied with all the relevant provisions. The information in the material has been contextualized, the inside information has been vetted through the trial and the case being reported, the defendant has had the opportunity to present his comments and opinions, statements by an authoritative person, in this case a judge, are included to reinforce the veracity of the information, the journalist is in no way intimidated by the status of the defendant, and even clarifications are made about ethical violations at the newsroom level. In describing the victim, the journalist uses the phrases "former on-air host" or "former co-host of "The Five", and in introducing the defendant, he describes him as "Fox News's founding chairman". Here too, the same stereotype can be observed, which points to the importance of the profession of the two men, with the man always in the position of hierarchical superiority.

#### 2.6.2 *The Mark Halperin Case - ABC News and NBC News*

Another case is that of Mark Halperin, a journalist and anchor who was working in the NBC News newsroom at the time of the allegations, appearing on MSNBC's "Morning Joe". He was the political director of the ABC News newsroom, and the allegations are directed at the time he was employed there. After the revelations, Halperin was fired by NBC News. CNN exposed his sexual assault of several of his female colleagues in the newsroom.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael M. Grynbaum, "Lawsuit Brought by Ex-Fox News Host Andrea Tantaros Is Dismissed," *The New York Times*, May 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/18/business/media/fox-news-andrea-tantaros-lawsuit.html>.

Given the five articles targeting Mark Halperin, the most objective reporting is found in CNN's investigations. ABC News does not seek the opinion of its former employee, who is accused of harassing women in the newsroom, but only takes his statements from a social media platform. It also does not raise concerns about breaches of the newsroom's ethical rules or take steps to prevent such violations in the future. The NBC News newsroom also does not make a statement about the newsroom's ethical rules and the steps it will take in the future to prevent harassment of women. In terms of protecting the victims, all the articles maintain their anonymity on the grounds that women fear professional repercussions. Instead, the identity of the perpetrator is made public because he is a public person. CNN articles put more emphasis on the victims, even in the headlines they are mentioned first and then the perpetrator. In contrast, ABC News and NBC News only present the name of the perpetrator in the headlines, without mentioning the victims. The latest NBC News article that brings up Mark Halperin from August 2019, brings a new round of rebukes to the accused, but the article does not present the accused's opinion on the subject and the charges. No exchange of opinions is presented, only the accusations of some of the victims against Halperin, without Halperin providing a response to them.

*Ethical analysis of articles. Presentation of the analysis results*

CNN's October 26, 2017 article, "Five women accuse journalist and 'Game Change' co-author Mark Halperin of sexual harassment"<sup>9</sup>, come to accuse Mark Halperin of sexual harassment while he was an ABC News employee. Five women have claimed that he behaved inappropriately towards them while they were employed by ABC News, and other sources confirm their claims. The article also announces his departure from his role as an NBC News analyst and from his frequent appearances on "Morning

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<sup>9</sup> "Five women accuse journalist and "Game Change" co-author Mark Halperin of sexual harassment," *CNN*, date accessed June 10, 2021, <https://money.cnn.com/2017/10/25/media/mark-halperin-sexual-harassment-allegations/index.html>.  
<https://money.cnn.com/2017/10/25/media/mark-halperin-sexual-harassment-allegations/index.html>.

Joe". Statements from victims, who choose to remain anonymous, give disturbing details about his behavior between 1990 and 2000.

The manner in which the CNN journalist wrote the article does not appear to violate any ethical rules of journalistic writing. It gives context to the information, specifying the role of the accused in the media, the period when the harassment took place and the newsroom he was working for at the time. Victims remain anonymous on the grounds that they fear professional or social repercussions. His identity is made public because it is a matter of public interest. In his account, the journalist is not intimidated by the status of the perpetrator in the media and gives all those involved the right to express their opinion. The article is complemented by subsequent statements from the newsrooms concerned and makes known the ethical violations at ABC News. However, the journalist resorts to the use of stereotypes that are common in articles of this kind. He chooses to describe the victims as "a former ABC News employee" or "The second woman, another former ABC News employee", while he portrays the perpetrator as "Veteran journalist Mark Halperin" and "one of the preeminent political journalists", "political director at ABC News". This shows the importance of the defendant's journalistic duties in comparison to the women who were mere employees.

A second accusation comes the very next day, on October 27, 2017, when four more women come forward to accuse Mark Halperin of harassment, with CNN running an article titled "Four more women accuse Mark Halperin of harassment, bringing total to at least a dozen"<sup>10</sup>. The material comes with details of Halperin sexually patronizing female ABC News employees or sexually blackmailing women under his employ. One of the women who gave statements anonymously in the previous article is now making her identity public. The story provides the accused's full statement and also presents ABC News' reaction to the violations. The journalist takes the information in the article from reliable sources, from the statements of

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<sup>10</sup> Oliver Darcy, "Four more women accuse Mark Halperin of harassment, bringing total to at least a dozen," *CNNMoney*, October 27, 2017, <https://money.cnn.com/2017/10/27/media/mark-halperin-new-accusations/index.html>.



the victims and the assailant, giving readers context to the original investigation. The anonymity of the women is preserved, motivated by the professional and social repercussions they may suffer as a result of revealing their identity. The violation of these ethical rules at ABC News is condemned in a statement issued by ABC News urging that people who felt their rights had been violated should come forward to report this for further action. In presenting the two sides, the journalist chooses to stereotype the victims, describing them as “the women were young and had little power” in contrast to the perpetrator who was “in a position of significant authority at ABC News”. This emphasizes the power imbalance between women and men in important positions.

The ABC News response comes on October 28, 2017 in an article titled “Political analyst Mark Halperin 'profoundly sorry' amid new sexual harassment allegations”<sup>11</sup>. Here clarifications are made about the allegations made against him by some ABC News female employees, as well as his statement that came via a Twitter post, where he admits the wrong he did to his female colleagues. Also included is ABC News' statement that it was not aware of any such behavior by the former employee. A CNN correspondent specifies in tweets that Halperin's actions were “a known secret” and supports the victims, specifying that the only one to blame for the sexual misconduct is the man who initiated it. The information provided in the article is verified information taken from CNN's investigation and other statements are taken from the Twitter accounts of the sources. The material refers to the investigation that publicized the case, and the women in the article are anonymized. All views on the subject, from all sides, are presented, as well as outside sources supporting the claims of the assaulted women. There is no mention of any breach of ethical standards in the newsroom or of improved working conditions for ABC News employees. In describing the victims, the journalist uses phrases such as “The women, who were all in their 20s at the time”, “a former ABC News researcher”, while the

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<sup>11</sup> "Political Analyst Mark Halperin "Profoundly Sorry" amid New Sexual Harassment Allegations," *ABC News*, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/political-analyst-mark-halperin-profoundly-amid-sexual-harassment/story?id=50757425>.

assailant is portrayed as “Political analyst Mark Halperin is seeing career fallout”, “political contributor at the network”, and his status is referred to as “his high position at ABC News”. These descriptions indicate a portrayal of men as superior to women, both professionally and socially.

The newsroom of NBC News, where Mark Halperin was employed at the time the sexual harassment allegations were revealed, publishes an article on October 26, 2017 responding to the CNN investigation, headlined “NBC News Analyst Mark Halperin Accused of Sexual Harassment”<sup>12</sup>. The material begins with an apology from him for his behavior and an official statement from him is inserted. MSNBC states in a statement within the article that Mark Halperin will not return to work for NBC News. At the end, all of Halperin's assignments during his career at NBC are listed, as well as the bestselling books he co-authored. The manner in which the journalist chose to write the article complies with some of the ethical guidelines, but some of them are violated. As for those that are respected, the journalist checked the information included in the story, taking statements from sources both from other publications and from his own sources. He provided readers with details that referred to the investigation that uncovered the case and included the assailant's statements in the article, noting that Halperin was sought for comment. In the NBC News piece, the victims' statements are not included, only a mention of what they suffered. There is no indication of any breach of ethical rules or mention of a thorough investigation or measures to prevent such incidents. Gender stereotyping is visible in the article when it comes to the words characterizing the victims and the perpetrator. For the victims, the journalist chooses to call them “five anonymous women, four of them former ABC News employees”, while the perpetrator is described as “a senior political analyst and frequent contributor for NBC News and MSNBC”, “when he was a top political journalist at ABC News” or “Halperin, who worked for NBC News, MSNBC, Bloomberg Politics and Time magazine”, always mentioning his position.

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<sup>12</sup> Alex Johnson, "NBC News Political Analyst Mark Halperin Accused of Sexual Harassment," *NBC News*, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/nbc-news-analyst-mark-halperin-accused-sexual-harassment-n814491>.

Such portrayal denotes his importance in the NBC News newsroom and a reaffirmation of his status.

Finally, NBC News writes an article on August 19, 2019, "Mark Halperin's new book faces widespread criticism"<sup>13</sup>, which outlines the hostility with which the publication of a new book by Halperin is being met. Gretchen Carlson says the possible book launch would be "a slap in the face to all women". CNN political commentator Karen Finney also described Halperin as "a predator" and condemned Regan Arts for agreeing to publish his book. Rebecca Katz, a political strategist, published a Twitter post in which she declared that "you can defeat Trump and not support Mark Halperin's career rehabilitation". NBC notes that he will not publish his book through NBC News or MSNBC. The article describes the reputation of the Regan Arts publication, which in the past has accepted controversial books for publication.

The author of the article includes verified information within the material and references the 2017 sexual harassment allegations. However, the accused is not asked for comment on the reluctance to publish the book, which does not provide an exchange of views within the material. Mention is given to the assaults suffered by the victims and statements from women who support them. There is repeated mention of Halperin's ethical violations. The article comes as an update on Mark Halperin's situation and what is the media reaction to his return to the public arena. It emphasizes the position he has occupied in the past by describing him as "the "Game Change" co-author and political commentator" and "then-ABC News political reporter Halperin". The women are portrayed as inexperienced victims in a situation of professional dependency on the perpetrator, with descriptions such as "she was a 21-year-old job seeker".

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<sup>13</sup> "Mark Halperin's New Book Faces Widespread Criticism," *NBC News*, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/all/mark-halperin-s-new-book-faces-widespread-criticism-n1043801>.

### 2.6.3 *The Charlie Rose Case - CBS News and PBS*

Charlie Rose is a journalist and former host of the Public Broadcasting Service's (PBS) "Charlie Rose," as well as co-host of "CBS This Morning" and correspondent for CBS News' "60 Minutes." He has been accused by several women who have worked or wanted to work with him of sexually harassing him. The Washington Post has conducted two investigations targeting Charlie Rose and the women he sexually assaulted. These investigations included women who did not want to be identified because of the repercussions, but women who worked with him at CBS News who revealed their identities when they came forward.

#### *Ethical analysis of articles. Presentation of the analysis results*

The Washington Post publishes a major investigation on November 20, 2017 called "Eight women say Charlie Rose sexually harassed them - with nudity, groping and lewd calls"<sup>14</sup>, in which he is accused by several women of sexual harassment. The allegations include women between the ages of 21 and 35 at the time of the allegations, who disclosed his inappropriate behavior from 1990 to 2011. The victims' statements were verified through their friends, colleagues and family, to whom they had confessed their experiences in the past. Five of the women gave their statements on condition of anonymity for fear of Rose's status in the media and the possible repercussions. Reah Bravo, who was an intern and then associate producer on Rose's PBS show, says of sexual advances from Charlie in various circumstances. Another victim, Kyle Godfray-Ryan, describes several instances in which Rose would appear naked in front of her at one of his residences, as well as situations in which he would call her to confess his sexual fantasies. Megan Creydt, who worked as Rose's show coordinator

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<sup>14</sup> Irin Carmon and Amy Brittain, "Eight Women Say Charlie Rose Sexually Harassed Them - with Nudity, Groping and Lewd Calls," *Washington Post*, November 20, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/eight-women-say-charlie-rose-sexually-harassed-them--with-nudity-groping-and-lewd-calls/2017/11/20/9b168de8-caec-11e7-8321-481fd63f174d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/eight-women-say-charlie-rose-sexually-harassed-them--with-nudity-groping-and-lewd-calls/2017/11/20/9b168de8-caec-11e7-8321-481fd63f174d_story.html). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/eight-women-say-charlie-rose-sexually-harassed-them--with-nudity-groping-and-lewd-calls/2017/11/20/9b168de8-caec-11e7-8321-481fd63f174d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/eight-women-say-charlie-rose-sexually-harassed-them--with-nudity-groping-and-lewd-calls/2017/11/20/9b168de8-caec-11e7-8321-481fd63f174d_story.html).

between 2005 and 2006, described him touching her leg while she was in the car with him. In addition to these eight women, it is reported that The Washington Post spoke with more than 20 women, six of whom said they believed they had been sexually assaulted, eight of whom confessed that they were uncomfortable with Rose's behavior toward women employed in the newsroom, and 10 of whom did not notice anything of concern. The Washington Post's journalist produced a story that did not violate any ethical rules of journalistic writing. He ensured that the information included in the story was reliable, checking the victims' testimonies with the people to whom they confessed and including many sources to back up the statements. It explains the context in which the violations took place, the years in which they took place and who the victims of the perpetrator are, as well as their status in the media. He is given the right to comment and his statement is included within the material. The sources' decisions on their anonymity in the article are respected, justifying the decision as being based on fear of the professional repercussions they might suffer. The opportunity is provided for an exchange of views among all those involved in the indictment and exposes the violations that occurred at the CBS News and PBS newsrooms. No stereotyping is used in the descriptions of the victims, only mentioning their ages as "young women" and "young assistants and producers". Tow is referred to by name only.

A second investigation published by The Washington Post on May 3, 2018, "Charlie Rose's misconduct was widespread at CBS and three managers were warned, investigation finds"<sup>15</sup>, adds to the chain of allegations against Charlie Rose, as well as the fact that the newsroom's management team was informed of his actions. In addition to the allegations in the first investigation a few months ago, 27 women have confessed to sexual assaults by Charlie Rose, 14 of whom were CBS News employees and

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<sup>15</sup> "Charlie Rose's Misconduct Was Widespread at CBS and Three Managers Were Warned, Investigation Finds," *Washington Post*, accessed June 10, 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/charlie-roses-misconduct-was-widespread-at-cbs-and-three-managers-were-warned-investigation-finds/2018/05/02/80613d24-3228-11e8-94fa-32d48460b955\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/charlie-roses-misconduct-was-widespread-at-cbs-and-three-managers-were-warned-investigation-finds/2018/05/02/80613d24-3228-11e8-94fa-32d48460b955_story.html). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/charlie-roses-misconduct-was-widespread-at-cbs-and-three-managers-were-warned-investigation-finds/2018/05/02/80613d24-3228-11e8-94fa-32d48460b955\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/charlie-roses-misconduct-was-widespread-at-cbs-and-three-managers-were-warned-investigation-finds/2018/05/02/80613d24-3228-11e8-94fa-32d48460b955_story.html).

13 of whom worked with Charlie in other circumstances. The time frame of the allegations also increases, with the earliest allegations dating back to 1986 and the most recent allegations from 2017. The information in the investigation was gathered through interviews over a five-month period with 107 former and current employees and dozens of others who worked with Rose on other television programs. Many of the statements were given on condition of anonymity, but all were corroborated through confirmations with people to whom the actions were confessed. This indicates that the journalist carried out a thorough check of the information before publication to ensure the authenticity of the depositions. The reference to the 2017 investigation where the violations produced by Rose's behavior were first revealed is also specified.

Although offered the right to comment, Charlie Rose would only state that "Your story is unfair and untrue." To The Washington Post. The journalist has respected the decisions of sources as to the anonymity under which to make their statements public, with reasons given for their fear of identification. The act of journalism is not influenced by Charlie Rose's status in the media, as he is increasingly releasing statements from victims through his investigations. The transgressions that were taking place in the newsrooms of CBS News and PBS are thoroughly exposed, including the fact that their managers were warned three times about Rose's behavior, but took no action. There is no stereotyping in the description of those involved in the confrontation, with the accused being referred to by his first name and the women by the words "woman/women".

In September 2018, CBS News announced that Charlie Rose had filed a motion against three of the women accusing him in a story titled "Charlie Rose files motion to dismiss sexual harassment lawsuit, says women are 'exploiting the #MeToo Movement'"<sup>16</sup>. It is disclosed that Rose has filed a motion seeking to dismiss the accusations leveled against him by three

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<sup>16</sup> "Charlie Rose Files Motion to Dismiss Sexual Harassment Lawsuit, Says Women Are 'Exploiting the #MeToo Movement'", *CBS News*, date accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/charlie-rose-files-motion-to-dismiss-sexual-harassment-lawsuit/>. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/charlie-rose-files-motion-to-dismiss-sexual-harassment-lawsuit/>.

women who worked at CBS News and his PBS show and who have filed a lawsuit against him. He claims that the women are “exploiting the #MeToo movement” and that they are not providing conclusive evidence, only evidence from some of the other teevees present in the article published by The Washington Post. CBS is filing a motion to show that one of the victims suing Rose was not working at CBS at the time of the assaults, but for his show. Based on the way the article is written, the journalist complies with all ethical requirements and does not refer in specific terms to either party. It is specified that CBS News has hired two firms of employees to look into allegations of sexual harassment in the newsroom. The article includes statements from the victims and the accused parties, as well as providing an exchange on the lawsuits filed and the motions seeking to quash them. The sources of the information come from the trials and statements of the people involved, and the article mentions the investigation that uncovered the irregularities.

A first response from the CBS News newsroom comes on November 21, 2017, with an article titled “CBS News fires Charlie Rose after sexual misconduct allegations”<sup>17</sup> which is a reaction from CBS to The Washington Post's first investigation. The article reports on Rose's firing following allegations leveled against him by several female CBS and PBS employees. Immediately following the revelations, Charlie Rose was suspended, his PBS show was canceled, and CBS terminated all dealings with him, according to the article. The journalist complied with the ethical requirements of verifying information prior to publication by presenting information from sources' statements. Also mentioned is the claim that Charlie Rose's dismissal follows the revelations of The Washington Post investigation. The material does not include Rose's response to the allegations and the consequences they have had on his career, nor does it include any exchange of views between the people involved. CBS News President David Rhodes elaborates on the violations at the newsroom and the intolerance of such behavior toward its

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<sup>17</sup> "CBS News Fires Charlie Rose after Sexual Misconduct Allegations," accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/charlie-rose-fired-cbs-news-sexual-misconduct-allegations/>.

employees. The journalist uses certain descriptions to describe the women he refers to: "eight women, all of whom worked or wanted to work for his PBS program", "three new accusers", "women who work at CBS News". It describes the accused as "'CBS This Morning' co-host Charlie Rose" and refers to his accomplishments as "Charlie's important journalistic contribution to our news division".

CBS News publishes its response to the second round of allegations against Charlie Rose on May 3, 2018 in an article titled "Report: CBS was warned about Charlie Rose sexual misconduct"<sup>18</sup>. It covers the other allegations coming from women against Rose, as well as statements coming from CBS News President David Rhodes about needed improvements to the newsroom environment. The statements and reports in the CBS News material are either from direct sources or from sources that have been fact-checked. Reference is also made to The Washington Post investigation to contextualize the information. The journalist includes a statement made by Rose about the new allegations coming against him, but the exchange is almost non-existent, with only victim statements and measures for improvement coming through a statement from the president of CBS News. The words describing the victim are "two dozen additional women" or "then a 22-year-old news clerk", and the words describing the assailant: "former 'CBS This Morning' anchor Charlie Rose" and "when he was a fill-in anchor on 'CBS Morning News'". These descriptions are not gender stereotypical.

The latest article featuring Charlie Rose is published on April 2, 2019 by CBS News and is headlined "Women suing Charlie Rose make new claims of sexual harassment"<sup>19</sup>. New allegations against Charlie Rose come from the three women who are suing him who are making new allegations against Rose in response to his motion to quash them. The article follows journalistic standards and includes statements from all those involved,

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<sup>18</sup> "Report: CBS Was Warned about Charlie Rose Sexual Misconduct," *CBS News*, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cbs-warned-about-charlie-rose-sexual-misconduct-washington-post-report/>.

<sup>19</sup> "Women Suing Charlie Rose Make New Claims of Sexual Harassment," *CBS News*, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/women-suing-charlie-rose-make-new-claims-of-sexual-harassment/>.



contextualizes the information by referencing the article that mentioned Rose's retaliation against the three women suing him. The information is updated, keeping readers up to date with information about the lawsuit that is still ongoing. It refers to the victims only by "woman/ women" or by their names: "The women, who were all hired to work for CBS News or for Rose's PBS show when they were in their early 20s", "the third woman in the lawsuit". The perpetrator is referred to by 'former CBS News anchor' and by name.

In light of The Washington Post's two investigations into Charlie Rose's sexual harassment of female CBS News employees, both journalists and future journalists, we noted that The Washington Post has followed the ethical standards for writing a public interest story that exposes a journalist's abuse of power over his or her female colleagues or employees. The investigation gives both the victims and the abuser the right of reply. In the second investigation by The Washington Post, the victims' statements are recounted in detail, and the material is dedicated to them and the events they were put through by their employer. As for CBS News and its response to the investigation, we noted that CBS News does not offer a right of reply to the accused, but does offer statements about improving ethical standards going forward. Statements from the victims and the assailant are missing from the article, which reports comments from the CBS News director and the author of the investigation from The Washington Post. The accused's response comes in an article by CBS News a few months later that follows the rules of ethical writing, objectively clarifying his statements through his attorney, even some unpopular opinions. Statements made by victims against him are also included. In an article presenting the partial results of the case, which is still ongoing, the latest statements by the victims and the accused on the state of the trial are presented. In its writing, all ethical rules are observed and no preference is given to one of the parties.

#### *2.6.4 The Matt Lauer- NBC News case*

Another high-profile case is that of Matt Lauer who has been accused of sexual harassment by several women who have come forward to testify about his behavior towards female colleagues in the NBC News newsroom.

Lauer was fired after a detailed report described how a female newsroom employee was sexually harassed by him at the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

The Variety's November 29, 2017 investigation of Matt Lauer features three victims who experienced sexual harassment from him in the workplace. Also in The Variety's newsroom the following day, a piece is published with the accused's response, which acknowledges the seriousness of his actions, but only includes his statement, with no statements from the victims. There is also no exchange of views and no other sources are included in the report. NBC News also published a response the next day, but it did not include the defendant's opinion, only the statement of the newsroom spokesperson about the victims' allegations. The accused was not given a chance to defend himself, only the victims' and the spokesperson's opinions were present. One can see a similarity between the reaction of NBC News and CBS News when the main anchor is accused of an assault, they do not give the anchor a chance to defend himself. In the first instance, the victims wished to remain anonymous because of fears over the professional repercussions they could face. However, in 2019, the identity of one of the victims is revealed and is included in Ronan Farrow's book- "Catch and Kill". The Variety received exclusive access to his book, which was not yet published, and based on it, did an article about Matt Lauer being accused of rape by Brook Nevil, one of the anonymous victims. In this article, published in October 2019, The Variety respected journalistic ethics, including the opinions of all parties or the accused's right to defense. Context is provided by reference to the original 2017 investigation. In response, the next day, an article is published, also in The Variety, outlining Lauer's position on the allegations, but without including other sources in the account. The victim's allegations and the defendant's response to them, which denies what happened, are presented. In May 2020, the same newsroom returns to the story and publishes a final update on the situation between Matt Lauer and Ronan Farrow, which continues to be tense. It describes the accusations on both sides, as well as a response from the victim about a possible exaggeration of the facts reported in the book. Ethical rules on the protection of sources are respected in all the articles analyzed that dealt with the case, and the identity of the assailant is revealed because the public interest prevails, as he is a public figure with influence over those who were following him.

*Ethical analysis of articles. Presentation of the analysis results*

On November 29, 2017, The Variety published an investigation under the headline "Matt Lauer Accused of Sexual Harassment by Multiple Women (EXCLUSIVE)"<sup>20</sup> exposing NBC News "Today" co-host Matt Lauer's inappropriate behavior towards female colleagues. The two-month investigation gathered statements from dozens of people who either work or have worked at NBC News. The article features the testimony of three women who claim to be Lauer's victims, their confessions cross-checked with friends or coworkers to whom they confessed. The women have chosen to remain anonymous, fearing the professional repercussions they could face if they went public. Matt Lauer had already been fired from NBC News days before, after another female colleague filed a complaint accusing him of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct beginning with the 2014 Sochi Olympics and continuing for several months. Several statements from NBC employees confirm Lauer's obsession with women and their bodies, the comments he made to female coworkers both verbally and through texts, and the consensual relationships he had with certain female employees, even though he was married. Even though several women complained to NBC about his behavior, no action was taken, given his status on the "Today" show, which was No. 1 in the US ratings. Both NBC and Lauer declined to comment. The statements point to a hostile and intimidating environment in the newsroom, where women say they were afraid to refuse Lauer's advances for fear of destroying their careers, while the management team protected Lauer.

As for the manner in which this article was written, it can be seen that the provisions of the code of ethics were largely respected. At the beginning of the article, the journalist explains how he gathered the information, the sources he interviewed and their relevance to the story. Details are given about the background to the story, who the accused person is, the newsroom involved and the sources' statements. The journalist presents the opinions

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<sup>20</sup> "Matt Lauer Accused of Sexual Harassment by Multiple Women," *Variety*, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://variety.com/2017/biz/news/matt-lauer-accused-sexual-harassment-multiple-women-1202625959/>.

and complaints of female colleagues to the co-host of the “Today” show, as well as testimonies from sources confirming what they say, but also providing additional details to these statements. Both Matt Lauer and NBC News are offered the right to comment, but both Matt Lauer and NBC News refuse to provide a response. In order to protect their professional careers, the sources choose to remain anonymous in this investigation, a decision the author respects. The breach of NBC's newsroom ethics toward its employees is noted. As for disclosing the identity of the assailant, he is a public person and the public interest is paramount in this case, given the seriousness of the allegations. To describe the victims, the journalist uses expressions such as “young woman”, “female employee”, “female producers” or “women employed by NBC”. To describe the assailant, he uses the expressions “co-host of NBC's Today”, “crown jewel of the network's news division” and “America's squeaky-clean dad”. In this way, the differences between the women, who are described merely as employees of NBC, and the reputation of the abuser are clearly highlighted, which is also reflected in the journalist's description of him. Once again, it proves that men with high status in the media will overshadow their own victims, even in the material that indicts them.

Matt Lauer's reaction comes the very next day, on November 30, 2017, where in an article titled “Matt Lauer Responds to Harassment Claims: 'There Is Enough Truth in These Stories'”<sup>21</sup>, he admits his guilt towards the victims. The article apologizes to the women he has hurt through his behavior, admitting that his actions have hurt the people around him. The statement was released by his publicist on NBC News' Today program. The article mentions other names in the entertainment industry who have been accused of sexual harassment, such as Harvey Weinstein and Charlie Rose. Details are given about the “Today” show, who replaced Lauer, what the show's ratings are, its importance to American morning shows and the fact that it tops the ratings in that section. The material contains information from

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<sup>21</sup> Brian Steinberg and Brian Steinberg, "Matt Lauer Responds to Harassment Claims: 'There Is Enough Truth in These Stories,'" *Variety*, November 30, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/tv/news/matt-lauer-statement-today-sexual-harassment-1202626847/>.

Lauer's statement published by NBC News and reminds readers about the investigation that publicized the case. The defendant's apology and confession are present in the article, but victim statements are not included, nor is there an exchange of views in the text. Nor are there any other sources giving statements about the accused's actions. The journalist still respects the anonymity of the sources and by publishing the material renews the information he is providing to the public. A clarification is provided on the abuses at the newsroom level perpetrated by Matt Lauer. In describing the victims, the journalist uses only the words "woman/ women", without any status. The accused is described as "former 'Today' anchor" and "the latest prominent person to fall", ascribing to him a newsroom status and media prominence.

The article by NBC News on November 29, 2017, "NBC News fires Matt Lauer after sexual misconduct review"<sup>22</sup> comes in response to the allegations against Matt Lauer. Statements from victims in the investigation by *The Variety* as well as *The New York Times* are stated, presenting Lauer's firing after the newsroom received a detailed complaint against him. The president of NBC News is raising his concerns in a statement and advocates prioritizing a safe work environment that respects the newsroom's values. Lauer's statement acknowledging his wrongdoing towards his colleagues is also given. Details from *The Variety's* investigation are included, as well as a producer's allegations against Lauer and what the victims said. The management team denies receiving complaints from female employees after the initial investigation accused them of ignoring such reports from victims. The lawyer for one of the victims says the allegations his client made against Lauer were discussed in a meeting with the company's HR team just a few days ago. The rest of the article includes regrets about Lauer's departure from some of his colleagues, as well as a description of his journalistic career.

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<sup>22</sup> "NBC News Fires Matt Lauer after Sexual Misconduct Review," *NBC News*, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/sexual-misconduct/nbc-news-fires-today-anchor-matt-lauer-after-sexual-misconduct-n824831>.

Given the manner in which the article was written, there are certain aspects that violate the rules of journalistic writing. These include the absence of a full statement by the accused, with the article including only his apology to the victims. There is no exchange of views between the two sides, no victim statements are presented, only a conclusion by the victims on the accusations against Lauer, and Lauer was not given the opportunity to comment. Apart from these aspects, the journalist complied with the other provisions, such as keeping the anonymity of the victims, providing a context for the public to understand the relevance of the text and verifying the information. Also included is a caveat to the NBC News president's failure to comply with ethical rules. However, several words of praise are used in the description of the accused as well as descriptions that favor him in the eyes of the public. The women who are his victims are not described in the same way, the journalist using only simple references to them such as "female colleague", "unidentified former employee" or "unidentified woman". With these descriptions, the aim is that the public does not attach importance to the victims, does not identify with them and does not want to create a personality. Instead, the defendant is given attributes such as "a familiar face in morning news", "longtime colleague", "the married father of three", "a marque name with the network", "one of the highest-paid anchors in the industry". This is intended to emphasize the importance and greatness of this personality in the media industry, to create the impression that he is irreplaceable.

Another article indicting Matt Lauer is published on October 8, 2019 by *The Variety* and is titled "Ronan Farrow Book Alleges Matt Lauer Raped NBC News Colleague"<sup>23</sup>. In the article, one of the victims, Brooke Nevils, who in the original investigation was mentioned as the one who made the complaint against Lauer that centered around the events of the 2014 Sochi Olympics, comes forward to confess to the actions that cost Lauer his career.

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<sup>23</sup> Kate Aurthur Setoodeh Ramin, Kate Aurthur, and Ramin Setoodeh, "Ronan Farrow Book Alleges Matt Lauer Raped NBC News Colleague," *Variety*, October 9, 2019, <https://variety.com/2019/tv/news/matt-lauer-rape-nbc-ronan-farrow-book-catch-kill-1203364485/>. <https://variety.com/2019/tv/news/matt-lauer-rape-nbc-ronan-farrow-book-catch-kill-1203364485/>.

MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF USA FEMALE JOURNALISTS  
AS VICTIMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

In the book by investigative journalist Ronan Farrow, which was provided exclusively to *The Variety*, Nevils details how Lauer coerced her into having sex with him by taking advantage of her inebriated state and ignoring her refusals. Lauer's lawyer, in an open letter to *The Variety*, denies the allegations against his client, saying that Lauer admitted to having an extramarital but consensual relationship with Brooke Nevils, but that it could not be categorized as rape. Nevils admits that even after the Sochi incident she continued to have sex-based encounters with Lauer, but says they were "Totally a transaction. They were not a relationship." She also says that the atmosphere in the newsroom after learning of the incident was uncomfortable, given that she had to sit in the same room with friends close to Lauer who knew about the situation. She received cash compensation, the book reports.

In order to write this article, the journalist was careful to include information that is fact-checked, so the details from Ronan Farrow's book targeting Matt Lauer have been published in this piece. Reference is made to the 2017 investigation that exposed Lauer's actions in the NBC News newsroom and the intimidating atmosphere for women employees. The author of the journalistic material provides the statements that the victim made against Lauer in Farrow's book, as well as the defendant's response to what was said against him. The journalist does not allow the status held by the assailant to interfere with the victim's account of the facts that the victim, who waives her anonymity, details about him. All parties involved have the opportunity to provide their comments in the material, including the victim, the assailant and the NBC News staff. Mention is made of the violations at the NBC newsroom and the actions it allowed to happen. Within the text, the author makes a single reference to the victim as a "former NBC News employee" to provide the audience with details about his identity. No expression is used to refer to the perpetrator, only by his first name.

After these allegations were made public in the previous article, *The Variety* also provides Matt Lauer's response the very next day, on October 9, 2019, in an article titled "Matt Lauer Denies 'False and Salacious' Rape

Allegation, Says Affair Was 'Consensual'"<sup>24</sup> . In it, Lauer denies the allegations against him that come from Brooke Nevils, a former NBC News colleague of his. He claims that the affair he had with Nevils was consensual and spanned several months in 2014. The article includes his full statement that what Nevils said in Ronan Farrow's book is not true, as well as other allegations coming his way, and notes that his silence up to that point was a mistake, but was meant to not hurt his family further.

In writing the article, the author followed the journalistic rules of ethical writing. He included background information by referring to the previous article accusing him through Ronan Farrow's book. Also, the information included in the article is taken directly from the statements of the accused, which gives it veracity. His comments are included in full, with his entire letter inserted within the article so as not to omit or misinterpret certain aspects. An earlier statement by the victim regarding the allegations is also present to give an exchange of views of the two parties. As for other sources supporting Matt Lauer's allegations, they are not present in the material. The text makes no further mention of ethical breaches at the newsroom level, only the exchange of statements from the two parties involved. In describing them, the author refers to the defendant only by his first name, while he refers to the victim as a "former NBC News co-worker" to show what their professional relationship was.

The NBC News editorial board's response to the rape allegations against Matt Lauer comes in an article published on October 9, 2019, titled "Matt Lauer accused of raping NBC colleague, Ronan Farrow book alleges"<sup>25</sup> and outlines the allegations made by The Variety article against him. The article reports the allegations coming from Brooke Nevils against Matt Lauer, who claims that he raped her years ago in Sochi. The president of NBC News

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<sup>24</sup> Maane Khatchaturian, "Matt Lauer Denies 'False and Salacious' Rape Allegation, Says Affair Was 'Consensual,'" *Variety*, October 9, 2019, <https://variety.com/2019/tv/news/matt-lauer-rape-denial-letter-1203364695/>. <https://variety.com/2019/tv/news/matt-lauer-rape-denial-letter-1203364695/>.

<sup>25</sup> Phil Helsel, "Matt Lauer Accused of Raping NBC Colleague at Olympics, Book Alleges," *NBC News*, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/matt-lauer-accused-raping-nbc-colleague-ronan-farrow-book-alleges-n1064096>.



denies that the newsroom management team knew of such allegations. Lauer's statement is also offered denying Nevils' claims. She offers a statement to NBC News and says she is not afraid of him. Comments are then offered from both sides on the facts of the matter.

For the purposes of writing this article, the journalist complies with all ethical journalistic writing but uses stereotypes in describing the two parties. He describes Nevils as a "female colleague", "the woman", although she was a journalist, this is not specified, and "former NBC News employee Brooke Nevils". Instead, Matt Lauer is described as "The long-running face of NBC's "Today" show" or "the anchor", in his case there is mention of the position he held.

The latest article mentioning the allegations against Matt Lauer is published on May 19, 2020, titled "Matt Lauer Denies Rape Allegation (Again), Rips Into Ronan Farrow's Reporting in Scathing Op-Ed"<sup>26</sup> and is published by *Variety*. Here Matt Lauer once again denies the allegations leveled against him via Ronan Farrow's book and claims that after checking the details in the book, he can prove that Nevil's allegations are false. Lauer claims that his former colleague's accusatory actions are meant to promote Farrow's book. Inside the article are several opinions from the parties involved, such as statements from journalist Ronan Farrow that contradict Lauer's claims, as well as from a spokesperson for the publication that released Farrow's book. The article complies with all the ethical provisions considered. It also provides context, verified information, exchanges of views by all those involved, clarifications of ethical breaches in newsrooms, and does not portray the people involved in a stereotypical way. It portrays the victim as 'Brooke Nevils, the former NBC employee', but also portrays the perpetrator in the same way, as 'the former "Today" show host'.

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<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Wagmeister, "Matt Lauer Denies Rape Allegation (Again), Rips Into Ronan Farrow's Reporting in Scathing Op-Ed," *Variety*, May 19, 2020, <https://variety.com/2020/tv/news/matt-lauer-ronan-farrow-opinion-piece-reporting-rape-allegation-1234611225/>. <https://variety.com/2020/tv/news/matt-lauer-ronan-farrow-opinion-piece-reporting-rape-allegation-1234611225/>.

### 3. Conclusions

Cases of sexual assault in the media began to surface in July 2016, a few months before the Harvey Weinstein case became public and the #MeToo movement that followed. After analyzing the previously mentioned articles written by some of the most important editorial offices in the American press, we found that there was a pattern in all cases of assault: the defendant was a man with an important position in the media, who took advantage of his position to intimidate women who were subordinate to him, and the victims were put in a situation where they were afraid to report the abuse because they risked losing their jobs. In the investigations that brought the abuse cases to light, the victims confessed only under the protection of anonymity, fearing social and professional repercussions. In many cases, reporting sexual harassment to the human resources team did not attract any sanction on the aggressor, the case being buried or silenced by offering a sum of money to the victim. A common aspect in investigations is that they include the victims' statements, and in some cases also the statements from the aggressor, not just their response to the accusations. We also found that some of the victims did not want to be identified, their status within the editorial staff not being disclosed in order to protect their identity and not suffer professional consequences.

As for the statements coming from the aggressors, these are most often included in articles from the editorial staff that are accused, if they are not found in the initial investigations. These articles present violations in terms of the journalist's objectivity, as he either does not include the statements of the women who make the accusations, or offers a stereotypical image of the aggressor and the victim by using terms that put the woman in an inferior position compared to the man.

The responses from the editorial offices that were accused are either subjective towards the aggressor, or do not include the opinions of the aggressor and the victims at all. Often these articles try to no longer associate themselves with the accused, presenting apologies and measures that he will take in the future through an editorial chairman. The conclusions of the cases do not present such a large number of violations at the level of ethical

provisions, although some of them no longer include the statements of the accused. Most of the cases were finalized after the accused offered the victims a sum of money to compensate for the abuses suffered, but some of the cases did not have a finality and are still ongoing.

All these investigations have demonstrated that the ethical norms within the accused editorial offices are violated at the highest levels, and the observance of these ethical norms when writing articles targeting them leaves much to be desired. In the case of all articles that violated the ethical norms for writing journalistic materials, it was observed that they had a subjective attitude towards the accused, who was employed by them, and the victims were not as important as him: their statements were not included in the articles, their comments were not presented and not all the points of view of the parties involved were presented. Only in a few of the cases of violation of ethical norms was the targeted editorial office specified that measures would be put in place to train the editorial staff against such behavior at work. Respect for the anonymity of sources was met in all cases, as was the disclosure of the identity of the aggressor, the reason being that he was a public figure.

Considering all these aspects, it can be concluded that female journalists suffer the most abuse and harassment from their superiors, the challenges posed by this profession coming from within the editorial offices where they work. After the #MeToo movement gained momentum, more and more female journalists began to confess the incidents they experienced many years ago, but hid them, considering that they were the source of the problem or for fear of social and professional repercussions. With the statement of a female journalist against her aggressor, more and more women were encouraged to declare the abuse they suffered. A chain reaction was created that fueled the need for confession by thousands of women who felt that it was time to do them justice. The press was the one that helped them report their incidents, but it was also guilty of these violations. The ethical norms at the editorial level are overlooked and do not constitute a benchmark when it comes to reporting abuses. Also, some editorial offices do not respect the ethical code even when reporting in their own articles what happened. The advantage that men with an important status have

within the editorial offices is also reflected in the way the articles are written. Thus, many of these articles portray them as heroes, not as aggressors. All these arguments come to support the fact that gender equality is a distant promise and that the fight for it still has a long way to go before it is won. The surest way to support this fight is to confess abuses, regardless of their level, by removing those who commit them from power and preventing the suffering of future victims.

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