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Kari Koljonen, University of Tampere, Finland
Pentti Raittila, University of Tampere, Finland
Jari Väliverronen, University of Tampere, Finland

Rethinking the Boundaries of Journalism: Finnish Reporters' Reflections on Their Profession after Two School Shooting Cases

Reporting on a tragedy is never an enviable task, but the school shootings in Jokela and Kauhajoki proved to be exceptionally challenging assignments for Finnish journalists. In prior crises, journalists were able to justify the huge intensity and volume of news coverage by the media's traditional duty to disseminate as much information as possible. However, in the case of the two school shootings, this central principle came in for heavy criticism and was questioned especially in two ways. First, how to approach the grieving and shocked victims and their relatives without harming and possibly even traumatizing them? And secondly: how to tell stories about the shooter without turning him into a mythical hero figure, whose example may serve as an inspiration for some people to commit new acts of violence?

The journalists' plight during the school shootings points to a broader crisis of professionalism. In an ever-transforming, complex and hectic society the profession's old ways of doing things and traditional aims are no longer deemed as widely applicable and acceptable as they used to be. Therefore, new solutions are necessary, and reaching them requires a rethink of the current practices and underlying values.

This study analyses how Finnish journalists reflected on their work after the school shootings in Jokela and Kauhajoki. The primary research data consist of 50 open ended interviews where journalists involved in the coverage of the massacres speak about the choices they made at work during the incidents and ponder their own, as well as the profession's, performance in the two events. Articles published in dailies, tabloids and trade papers about journalists' performances in Jokela and Kauhajoki are also used as secondary data to contextualize the interviews. The analysis of journalists' self-reflection is divided into four different levels and investigates:

- 1) How journalists describe their work flow in Jokela and Kauhajoki;
- 2) What kind of comparisons journalists make both in time and with others (i.e. with past crisis reporting practices and other journalists' ways of going about their business);
- 3) What kind of explanations journalists give for their actions and how traditional values of journalism and codes of practice appear in their parlance (if at all); and
- 4) How journalists evaluate their and others' performances in Jokela and / or Kauhajoki and what guidelines they have for future crisis reporting.

With a qualitative analysis of the interviews and articles, this study aims to find frames of reflexivity that guide the journalists as they describe and evaluate their and others' performance. After the Jokela shooting, the hostile reaction of the local

community towards journalists placed the entire profession in a defensive frame, which served to both activate and limit the reflexive work. After Kauhajoki, journalists were able to evaluate their work in a more multi-faceted way, but despite this, most of the reflections still sprang from comparisons to Jokela.