

Submission to BSA re Draft Codes of Broadcasting Practice August 2015.

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In starting, I support your suggested changes to contextualise the issues that many of your Codes deal with.

My submission, though, is really in response to how I see the draft Codes of Broadcasting Practice impacting upon Māori, and in turn upon Aotearoa/New Zealand.

I wish to address two Codes: ‘Discrimination and Denigration’ and ‘Balance’, but I would argue that these overlap. I start with ‘Balance’ as it is the lack of balance in news that leads to discrimination and denigration.

Balance

I am concerned that the concept of ‘balance’ only applies to issues which are regarded as ‘controversial issues of public importance’. As the BSA’s *Māori Worldviews and Broadcasting Standards: What Should be the Relationship* notes (p. 7), there is considerable concern among those of us who research the representation of Māori in mainstream news at the absence of Māori within such news. Such absence contributes to a lack of understanding of things Māori in the wider population, and the valuing of things Māori. It also diminishes the position of Māori as citizens of Aotearoa/New Zealand. While many of us argue that mainstream news needs to cover more stories about Māori, I am aware that the BSA can only consider those news stories which have been broadcast. There is a wider issue here of both better education of journalists and of changes to the Broadcasting Act. But there are nevertheless two areas where I think the BSA should be able to pass judgement.

The first is where a story does not include a Māori point of view (based either on tikanga or the (continuing) aftermath of colonisation) where there is one. As I have argued above, this does not need to be ‘controversial’. I agree with the argument that mainstream news is Eurocentric (*Māori worldviews...p. 8*), and the presentation of a Eurocentric perspective as the ‘normal’ and only perspective on an issue or event is a slap in the face for Māori, perpetuates monoculturalism despite the fact that New Zealand declares itself bicultural, and misses the chance to contribute to normalisation of Māori realities and tikanga in the wider audience. At its most basic, such omissions mean too many news stories are NOT balanced.

The second is, I concede, more problematic. I think that the BSA should be able to consider more than just individual stories, and extend its range to look at patterns of representation. If a complainant produces evidence that over a period of (say) two months a particular news bulletin has included Māori as (say) 4% of sources, that is hardly ‘balance’. This goes beyond counting ‘vox pops’ – the relative avoidance of Māori here though is obvious – but considers whose voices are being heard.

In the end, I have to ask: freedom of expression for whom?

Discrimination and Denigration

Discrimination’ is defined as encouraging the different treatment of the members of a particular section of the community, to their detriment. ‘Denigration’ is defined as devaluing the reputation of a particular section of the community.

Because negativity is such a strong news value, when Māori do appear in the news it is predominantly in negative stories. In 2007 a research group I was part of analysed over 1,700 national stories from *One News*, *3 News* and *Prime*. 1.8% of these were about Māori, and of this 1.8%, 58% were about child abuse¹. While not denying that child abuse is an issue in the Māori community, this is hardly a balanced representation of Māori, and anecdotal evidence has suggested that this has contributed to a “devaluing [of] the reputation of a particular section of the community”. Stories that show Māori failings, because they are not balanced out with other portrayals, are too easily seen to be representative of Māori. This does not happen with Pākehā. Even though unintentional, the strong tendency to include Māori in the news mainly in a negative light thus can be seen as leading to denigration and discrimination.

¹ I am repeating this research this year, looking at the number of stories Māori appear in, what types of stories and how Māori are represented in these stories.