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Crafting Deviance: Moral Construction as Narrative Strategy in Investigative TV-journalism

Abstract: Journalism researchers have argued that one of the ways in which investigative journalism engages audiences is the construction of a moral point of departure and a subsequent indicating of shocking deviance from that morality (Ekström, 2002; Protess et al., 1991; Mølster, 2007; Ettema and Glasser, 1998; de Burgh, 2008).

By means of a set of Labov’s (1972) narrative concepts and the objectification of standards described by Ettema and Glasser (1998), this article shows and analyses how moral deviance is gradually constructed and expanded upon in an episode of the Swedish investigative TV programme Uppdrag granskning [Mission Investigate].

Based on the analysis the article argues that journalistic constructions of aggravation of moral transgressions have implications in three areas: increased attention value of the own production, justification of the shaming and exposure of featured wrongdoers and establishment of journalism as a purveyor of moral constructions influencing social order.

Keywords: Investigative Journalism, Morality, Professional Identity, Narrative

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Strukovno zastranjivanje: Moralna konstrukcija kao narativna strategija u istraživačkom TV-novinarstvu

Apstrakt: Istraživači novinarstva se slažu da je jedan od načina na koji istraživačko novinarstvo uključuje publiku konstrukciju moralnog polazišta i naknadno ukazivanje na šokantno odstupanje od tog morala (Ekström, 2002; Protess i sur., 1991; Mølster, 2007; Ettema i Glasser, 1998; de Burgh, 2008).

Pomoću skupa Labovog (Labov, 1972) narativnog koncepta i objektivizacije standarda, koje su opisali Etem i Glaser (Ettem, Glasser, 1998), ovaj članak prikazuje kako se moralna devijacija postupno konstruira i proširuje u epizodi švedske istraživačke televizijske emisije Uppdrag granskning (Misija istražiti).

Na osnovu analiza, u radu se slažemo da novinarske konstrukcije kršenja moralnih pre stupaka imaju posljedice u tri područja: povećana pažnja o važnosti sopstvene produkcije, opravdavanje srarnočenja i objelodanjivanje glavnih prestupnika, kao i uspostavljanje novinarstva kao nosioca moralnih konstrukcija koje utiču na društveni poredak.

Ključne riječi: istraživačko novinarstvo, moral, profesionalni identitet, narativ

Introduction

Ettema and Glasser (1998) states in their book *Custodians of Conscience* that investigative reporters “help to articulate the moral order by showing that the actions of alleged transgressors are in fact transgressions” (Ettema and Glasser, 1998: 62). This article studies how moral deviance is construed by means of evaluative strategies or devices in an episode of investigate TV-journalism. It also puts that construction in perspective as to the role of journalism as an institution of justice and as an influencer of societal standards and designer of a moral order.

By applying a set of narrative devices (Labov, 1972) I analyze how moral deviance is constructed and aggravated throughout an episode of the Swedish investigative TV programme *Uppdrag granskning* [Mission Investigate] in which Swedish private charter schools are accused of blocking admissions of problem pupils.

Background

To follow the development of the studied episode a few facts about the Swedish school system must be understood. In 1992 a reform of the Swedish school system opened up for private independent schools, so called charter schools (*friskolor*). They were to be funded by tax money and to exist alongside and in competition with municipal schools. As a result of that reform parents may now choose freely among both municipal schools and privately owned charter schools without tuition fees. Charter schools are subject to the same regulations, the same standards and the same supervision by the Schools Inspectorate (*Skolinspektionen*) as the municipal schools. There are also some schools operating on tuition fees, but they are very few and marginalized (Swedish Institute et al., 2019).

The number of students in charter schools have increased steadily since the reform. In 2017 around 27 percent of all students at upper secondary levels (*gymnasium*) and 15 percent of students at primary compulsory levels (*grundskola*) were enrolled in charter schools (Swedish Institute et al., 2019).

The Swedish system has been criticized on the grounds that charter schools are not restricted as to how much profit owners and stockholders could retrieve, which is the case in several other countries. This has generated concerns and debates over whether financial concerns and profit maximization risk to outflank quality consciousness as the main entrepreneurial driving force. There is an ongoing political discussion on the need to restrict profits. At the same time surveys show that the level of parental satisfaction is higher in charter schools than in municipal schools (Swedish Institute et al., 2019).
Empirical Material

The episode is produced by the Swedish TV-program *Uppdrag granskning*. It is a program focusing on investigative journalism, some of its counterparts in other countries being *Dateline, CBS 60-minutes (USA), BBC’s Panorama (England), NRK’s Brennpunkt (Norway) and Envoyé Special (France)*. The focus of reporting is various types of misconduct or problems in society. Journalists identify and expose wrongdoing, present victims and hold those responsible to account. The program has been running for 19 consecutive years. More than 850 programs have been aired and the production is considered to be the most influential program of Swedish investigative TV-journalism (Johansson, 2006: 33). *Uppdrag granskning* is produced by the Swedish Public Service Company SVT (*Sveriges Television*).

The episode studied is named *En skola för alla* [A School for All]. It is one hour long and was broadcast on October 28, 2013. The point of departure is a suspicion that Swedish charter schools are breaking the Law by blocking unwanted students from admission even though they claim they do not. The Swedish Law states that schools cannot sift out students by accepting some and rejecting others by choice. If there are vacancies they have to accept any student that applies for admission.

In the introduction the program host explains that we are about to know “the truth about the charter schools pretending to be open to all students” [00.07]⁴. Immediately after the presentation a set of scenes are establishing what this “truth” is all about. Two scenes feature the same school and the same representative of the school getting two calls from two fathers of two aspiring students asking for admittance. In the first scene the father of a disorderly underachiever is told that there is no admittance, and that his son must wait for his turn and that he is number 139 in line. In the second scene the same representative warmly welcomes a well-adjusted overachieving girl who is given immediate admittance.

The next scene features The Chairperson of The Association of Private Schools who emphasizes that any such example would be unacceptable. We are then told that the Swedish minister of Education (at the time) will be interviewed.

When the introduction is over we are given a short historical review of the Swedish political reform in 1992 allowing for private schools to operate funded by public money. It is stressed that the spirit of the reform was to make it possible for students to freely choose a particular school regardless of study results, and that no school could refuse any type of student admittance if there were openings.

To test the allegations that some schools do sift students reporters use hidden cameras and false identities to give a number of private schools the prospect of accepting or rejecting two fictitious students; a well-behaved, well-adjusted high achieving girl and a rowdy under-achieving boy. In the first part of the testing the boy’s father is given an immigrant background and the boy’s name is Alejandro. Half-way through the episode the boy and his father are replaced. The new father is presented as a low-income divorced parent of apparent Swedish origin and the

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⁴ The numbers in brackets indicate when in the episode the quote appears. [minute.second]
boy’s name is now Jocke, a quite typical Swedish knick-name. Several schools, but far from all, accept the girl but reject the boy. There is no difference between Alejandro and Jocke in that regard, both are rejected to the same degree.

A director and owner of a private school is filmed with hidden camera during an interview with what he thinks is an applicant for a vacancy as music teacher. In reality he is talking to a reporter at *Uppdrag granskning*. In the course of the interview the director utters some grossly demeaning views concerning certain types of students. He uses the n-word and likens some students to rotten apples and a cancer that has to be cut off. He also gives some advice as how to sift out non-desirable students.

When The Chairperson of the Association of Charter Schools is confronted with the result of the investigation he is forced to admit that there is a problem, but he maintains that it is neither systematic nor wide-spread.

In the final part of the episode the demeaning director and one of the head-masters who discriminated the underachieving boy are confronted by the program host. The director denies the allegations vehemently and is consequently shamed when presented with the footage of the hidden camera. The head-master is apologizing and assures that her action was a temporary lapse of judgment and not a systematic behavior. Other schools that rejected the boy are given the opportunity to defend themselves via mail and phone. Some deliver what appear to be quite lame excuses, and others declare that they will change their routines to prevent further sifting.

The episode is concluded with an interview with the minister of education who expresses his indignation over the discrimination and the poor excuses, and promises that he will see to that more efficient controls are undertaken.

**Analytical Perspectives**

To analyze how the moral charge is built up and intensified in the episode I am using two different analytical concepts, the *objectification of standards* described by Ettema and Glasser (1998), and a set of *narrative evaluative devices* found in Labov’s study of narrative structures (Labov, 1972). I also comment upon my analysis by means of Urniaz’ work on guilt construction in investigative TV journalism (Urniaz, 2013).

Ettema and Glasser explain how journalists “locate and select, simplify and interpret the standards that the public is then invited to use in making its judgment”. They call the process “objectification of standards” and develop how this is a part of a societal construction of public morality (Ettema and Glasser, 1998: 12). This “objectification of standards” is a concept describing how investigative journalism employs a toolbox of moral criterion in the form of: laws, rules, regulations, standards, guidelines, expertise, statistics and concepts of common decency to define the moral value of transgressions and deviance (Ettema and Glasser, 1998: 72).

In his development of a model for narrative structure and analysis Labov concludes that the most important part of a narrative may be the evaluation (1972:
Robertson concludes that there is not always a clear cut difference between the evaluation and other parts of the narrative (Robertson, 2005: 240). In the introduction of a story an interpretative frame is constructed as an initial evaluation, but a continuous evaluation also guides the subsequent phases. In the studied episode of investigative journalism the consecutive evaluation builds up a value system on which the moral conclusions of the story are based and according to which the investigated individuals are judged.

Evaluation is the part of the story where moral is established and deviation is constructed. The evaluation is also where the moral point of departure is elaborated and charged with meaning. It is the evaluation that is stating why the reader, listener or spectator should care about what is being told (Labov, 1972: 366). Labov states that every story-teller is under obligation to show that the story goes beyond the ordinary, that it is reportable. "If the event becomes common enough, it is no longer a violation of an expected rule of behavior, and it is not reportable" (Ibid, 370).

A narrative structure is not just a series of events. It also contains elements whose strategic function is to add value to those events and expand the amplitude of the moral point of departure of the story.

Evaluative devices say to us: this was terrifying, dangerous, weird, wild, crazy; or amusing, hilarious, wonderful; more generally, that it was strange, uncommon, or unusual – that is, worth reporting. It was not ordinary, plain, humdrum, everyday, or run-of-the-mill (Ibid, 371).

Labov identifies four “evaluative devices” or narrative techniques that “are distributed throughout the narrative” (Ibid, 369) in order to expand upon the moral content of the story. He labels those devices: Correlative, Intensifier, Comparator and Explicative.

Correlative designates a way in which the narrator increases the moral charge of the story by pointing out a connection between one subplot, action, event or state of affair, and another. “Correlatives bring together two events that actually occurred so that they are conjoined in a single independent clause” (Labov, 1972:387). This means that events in a story could be seemingly unrelated, but still be pointing in the same moral direction and be joined together by a single moral verdict (Ibid, 389). A story in which person is described as unreliable at work could be correlated by a sequence where that same man is cheating at a game of cards.

It could also mean that the same action is laden with two different moral charges. Something could for instance be described as illegal but also be narratively constructed as a disregard for human dignity. Labov calls this type of correlative appended participle (1972: 387), one moral charge is appended to another doubling its impact. A correlative may also add a “but it is even worse”-aspect to something already bad, like a trait of character (Ibid). If a person is presented as not only prone to violence but also cruel, cruel is a double attributive correlative to prone to violence (Labov, 1972: 389).
Using *Intensifiers* is a narrative strategy which aims at enhancing the moral impact of an event in a linear narrative. "An intensifier selects one of these events and strengthens or intensifies it" (*Ibid.*, 378-379). Labov mentions gestures, phonology, repetition and quantifying as ways in which to intensify the evaluation of an event (1972: 379). He also identifies *ritual utterances* as a type of intensifier. By that he means expressions that in a particular culture play an evaluative role, “they are conventionally used in that position to mark and evaluate the situation” (*Ibid.* 380).

*Comparator* is a strategically evaluative element comparing or contrasting what has happened with what should have happened, or what someone did with what someone else did. A *Comparator* could be a person who does what someone else should have done, or an event working out as a contrast to one that did not. The effect of the comparator is that it imputes moral value to actions or character with which it is compared or contrasted (Labov, 1972: 381-382; Patterson, 2008: 27).

The term *explicative* signifies in Labov’s analysis a narrative element adding a moral dimension to a story by suggesting a contextually value-laden explanation to a certain course of action (Labov, 1972: 390). Explicative could be used to identify and point out attenuating circumstances, but if the explanation has a negative connotation the transgression’s moral charge is negatively polarized. Stealing is in most cases bad, but stealing out of greed is worse than stealing out of poverty.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1:** Evaluative narrative devices amplifying the moral charge.

Urniaz study of constructions of guilt in investigative TV-journalism shows how choice of footage, music and editing create what he labels *TV flows* that influence moral judgement and attribution of guilt (Urniaz, 2013: 14). He develops how the relation between reprehensible actions and plausible intent is built through narrative techniques and discursive intertextuality and shows how “condemning norms can be activated and highlighted” in the process (Urniaz, 2013).
Urniaz distinguishes between two types of constructions of guilt; guilt by character and guilt by transgression. The first implies that the character of the investigated individual is flawed and the development of the narrative focuses on showing how different actions converge to expose and highlight different aspects of that flawed character. The second means that focus is upon the transgression itself. The narrative describes how and to what degree the transgression is morally reprehensible and how different dimensions of norm-breaking are involved. Actions of different individuals could also add to the moral charge of the transgression. Urniaz shows how those constructions of guilt are identified, exposed and expanded upon by means of a set of editorial choices and strategies (2013: 201-202).

Analysis

I will use the concepts of Objectification of Moral Standards and Evaluative Narrative Elements to identify and highlight strategies used to build up the degree of moral deviation imputed to the action of sifting out unwanted students which is investigated in the episode.

Objectification of Moral Standards

Sifting out unwanted students is paramount to law breaking. But in the episode the sifting is constructed as something more than just a breaking of the Law. The transgression is also given an additional dimension by being put in a particular historical context. A short presentation of the Swedish reform in the 90s in which charter schools were allowed to get public funding stresses that the spirit of the reform was to allow for all sort of students to choose the school of their preference. The footage constructs the sifting as not only a transgression of the law but also as being against the spirit of the reform. A film sequence features the then Swedish prime minister, Carl Bildt saying at the introduction of the reform: “The public funding should follow the student. One of the commitments of the school system is to create respect for democratic principles such as tolerance, cooperation and equality” [05.20]. The reform is presented as a value system resting on high moral grounds and having lofty moral aims and goals, against which the discrimination of students constitutes not only a transgression but also a counterproductive act.

The very purpose of the reform is counteracted and thus disrespected by schools actively choosing the students they prefer and blocking the admission of others. The transgression is thus given a slant of “profit over progress” behavior. The meaning constructed is that discriminating school officials are not only breaking the law, they are also violating the spirit of the law and thereby impeding the societal progress it purported.
In Ettema and Glasser's interviews the professed moral commitment of the individual or organization under investigation is presented as a choice form of objectification of standards (Ettema and Glasser, 1998: 75). In this episode such standards are manifested through a series of open interviews in which a number of school officials recite the law and emphasize the importance of all student’s rights to choose freely and their own commitment to that principle. But by means of hidden camera or recordings, and false identities, those same officials are revealed to actively sift out undesirable students. The hypocrisy dimension is given a further twist when one representative of a school hints that other schools do sift students, but that her schools does not. She is however one of those who, captured by hidden recording, are admitting the well-behaved girl but rejecting the unruly boy. So the transgression is not only lawbreaking, it is also a matter of hypocrisy.

In the course of the episode a fourth form of objectification is also employed. Ettema and Glasser calls the method borrowed codes. This means that an external voice is called upon to denunciate the transgression and impute moral value. The episode borrows moral codes from several different voices. One academic expert, Nihad Bunar, professor in the Science of Children and Youth, states that the system is detrimental to all types of schools and that it above all disfavors weak performers since it opens up for the sifting of unwanted students. In the end of the episode the then minister of education, Jan Björkdun, is put on the spot as the minister responsible for the system in place. But he succeeds in partially deflecting the charges against himself by adding additional moral dimensions to the charges against the responsible school representatives. During the interview he pumps up the level of guilt by bluntly stating that the transgressions were premeditated, committed cold-headedly and that the explanations given by those investigated were only smoke-screens. He also brands as cowardly behavior the discriminating school officials’ refusal to accept responsibility when confronted with their transgression.

Those are lame excuses. It is not acceptable, and I believe that most of them, if not all, know that. And when you confront them they are unwilling to accept responsibility. It is illegal, but it still they do it [55.14].

His statements and his expressions of strong displeasure put a governmental seal upon the act of accusation against the discriminating schools and his involvement and promises of swift action gives the issue an importance at a high societal level.

By employing various types of objectification of standards the journalists build up an increased moral tension. The transgression is not only a law breaking, but also a violation of the spirit of the law and in the process an impediment to social progress. It is also represented as going against one’s own professed standards and going against the recommendations of scientific expertise. In addition it is the subject of a ministerial denunciation and a violation of common decency. The objectification of standards is moving the moral charge from “bad” to “outrageous”.

But besides this objectification of standards other strategies are also employed to maximize the moral charge of the transgression investigated.
Evaluative narrative devices

The term explicative is designating a value-laden explanation to a certain action or behavior. The term could be used to identify attenuating circumstances – but if the explanation has a negative connotation it increases the moral weight of the transgression (Labov, 1972: 390). In the episode the reporter is presenting financial incentives as a reason for the discrimination.

But there is a value the business do not willingly mention. The choice of school is made possible by what is referred to as “the school coin”. It varies according to municipality, but the idea is that all students are worth a certain sum of money. If the student has special needs, a school could be granted extra money. But regardless of bad or good grades, good or bad discipline, the school is attributed the same amount of money for each student. And to guarantee that schools do not sift out students who cost more there is a strict regulation [23.55].

The explicative is also visualized through a footage of children playing at a school-yard. They all have price-tags. The sequence illustrates how children are seen in economic terms, and how the unruly students are transformed into a variable in an excel-sheet, a variable which reduces the calculated benefits and thus mean bad business for the school. The narrative is thereby constructing greed as reason for sifting out unwanted students. It also hints the meaning that greed dehumanizes the children making them into economic units, thus presenting the private schools as profit maximizing enterprises rather than institutions caring for educational needs of children.

A second explicative in the story is depreciation of human value and a distorted view of man. Discrimination of a socially challenged group as a motive is built into the very setup of the test put in motion by the journalists. The fictive unruly and underachieving boy is not presented just as unruly and underachieving. He comes in two versions. In the first he is the son of an immigrant father and in the second he is presented as coming from a working class home and having divorced parents. So when the officials refuse the boy the refusal is by default constructed as an example of ethnical or social bias, or both.

This dimension of the transgression is also emphasized by the footage shot with hidden camera of the head master and school director during a fake job interview. In the footage he rants about how he wants to keep his school clean, how certain students are “rotten apples” and “cancer tumors” that must be kept isolated from the “good” students, and that certain students should “rap in Tensta5 and burn cars there instead of here6” [30.14]. The rants are giving the discrimination a racist if not even a fascist connotation. When the director later is confronted with his own utterances filmed by hidden camera, the program host is pointing to his view of man as an element of transgression. “That puts your view of students into question,

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5 A suburb to Stockholm that has become a symbol of social unrest.
6 All translations from Swedish are my own.
and your view of man [52.28]”. This director is not a part of the test featured in the episode. His story is what could be labelled in Labov’s terminology a *correlative*; a correlated story, or subplot by which the narrator increases the moral charge of the narrative by superimposing an additional moral dimension which is not a part of, but nevertheless correlated to the original story. The director’s moral status is in the process given a *synecdoche* function by which his morally repugnant rantings rub off upon the other school officials under investigation, thus constructing a motive of prejudice and bias.

The scene where the director’s ranting is captured by the hidden camera is repeated three times during the program. The repetition thus serves as an *intensifier* (Labov, 1972: 378) which establishes and intensifies the connection between the sifting of students and an elitist and racist attitude. His transgression is also intensified in an interview at the end of the episode, when he is confronted by the program host. The host uses repeated questions to make the director repeatedly denying having said what the hidden footage shows him saying. He repeats his denial five times. Each question and each denying answer prove to be part of a strategy to intensify his hypocritical stance and degrade his moral status.

Another type of intensification is quantifying. In the episode 50 schools have been tested. In 27 of those the well-behaved girl is admitted and in half of those the boy is not. Which numerically means that 13 out of 50 schools are actually culpable of the transgression in focus. The transgression is thus given a form of statistical validity. The prevalence is not just based on anecdotic evidence.

Five cities are included from Umeå in the North to Malmö in the South. The cities are metonymical for the whole country, thus pointing out the transgression as geographically generalized. The intensification by quantification is thus double (Labov, 1972: 379) in the sense that it is both numeric and geographic.

There is also a *comparator* active in the episode. In this case a representative for a school who in a short sequence both admits and warmly welcomes the unruly boy. As a contrast to all those who admitted the girl but not the boy she confirms that he has been given a place in her school and that he is “more than welcome” and that “all children deserve this”[18.08]. Both the speech act and the tone of voice constitutes a model of what the proper reaction should have been. Her role in the narrative is to pose as a moral opposite of those discriminating the weak student. She does what all of the others should have done, follow the law and welcome the boy. By showing that it is possible to do the right thing (Labov, 1972: 381, 382; Patterson, 2008: 27) her action is adding moral reprehensibility to those committing the transgression.

A further *correlative* is introduced when the reporter explains how even those who do not accept neither the girl nor the boy still treat his application differently. A series of short filmed sequences show how the girl’s father is greeted friendly and in a jovial manner whereas the boy’s father gets short grumpy answers and comments. Even if those school representatives do not discriminate unwanted children through a devious admittance process, their behavior is a form of discrimination by
attitude. The short grumpy answers constitute a correlative to the sifting. The narrative thus constructs two expressions of a single mentality; rejection by subterfuge and an obviously unwelcoming attitude. The reporter asks the rhetorical question: “The private schools say that all children are welcome – so why do they push boys like Alejandro away? [26.33]. The meaning being: Charter schools do not just illegally sift out unwanted students, they also push them away by an unwelcoming attitude. And even if they do not directly block admittance, they may still be unfriendly and aloof. The correlative adds a “it looks bad – but it is even worse”-aspect to the construction of the transgression (Labov, 1972: 387).

The position of and identification with the victims also have a bearing on how the magnitude of the transgression is perceived. In the episode are the victims are children, who by definition are vulnerable. But those children sifted out are also identified as underprivileged children. Their parents are presented as socially and/or ethnically marginalized. So the transgression is committed against a “dually exposed social group” (Litzén, 2004: 81). It is also given an additional ethical dimension when the father states that his application for the particular school is part of a plan to give the boy a fresh start to overcome his past problems. “He has been having a hard time. There were some bad company and his grades went downhill. Now he is looking for a new start in a new school” [07.52]. The choice of school is thus tied to anticipated possibilities to change a destructive pattern and a to evade a socially challenged environment. Litzén explains that “the possibilities to break free of a situation of repeated social vulnerability are limited by lack of financial means” (Litzén, 2004: 80). The episode stresses the fact that the reform was intended as an instrument to facilitate such a change for exposed social groups. Instead of facilitating the change, the charter schools discriminating the boy are subjecting him to “social victimization” (Ibid., 2004: 80), which means that he by being socially marginalized in one area is subjected to further such marginalization in another area. This moral dimension is also accentuated by the narrator. “He [the father of the discriminated boy] acts in line with the purpose of the reform of free choice of schools. He looks for a better future for his son, Alejandro, who is the victim of bad company and whose grades have been going down-hill” [14.47].

The two discriminated boys, impersonated by actors, are given a visual and emotional identity. Their facial expressions and body language visualize the discrimination of which they are victims. They do not laugh, not even smile. They just look into the camera with a sad complexion. In one scene Alejandro is sitting alone on a bench head down. Another scene shows him sitting on a stairway, alone with his head leaning towards the palms of his hands radiating despondency. The two boys are given character and a background not only to the representatives in the test, but even more so to us as audience. The school representatives are told that they are underachievers, unruly and that they come from socially challenged circumstances. But we as audience are also given the opportunity to feel their pain. The description of character and invitation to identification is in that sense instrumental in upgrading the gravity of the alleged discrimination.
Even the music correlates the plot and plays a role in moral construction. The sound track of the episode is a song called “The Tourist’s Lamentation” [Turistens klagan (Swedish)], written by the Swedish-Dutch troubadour Cornelis Wreeswijk. In the original version happy children’s voices are heard in the background and the lyrics state that “as long as there are children there is hope”. The version of the song played in the episode however is an antithesis to the original. It is slow, the rhythm is lagging and it is marked by melancholy. The happy children’s voices from the original are not present. The music is thus a part of the construction of guilt. The children who could have been happy and who could have been given hope by the including spirit of the reform are instead unhappy because of the discrimination and exclusion they are victims of. Where the children’s voices in the original version symbolize hope for the future and happiness, the version of the episode symbolizes the victimization of the discriminated children and how their hope to change their situation for the better has been thwarted.

The narrative of the episode forms a moral construction in which a set of values and standards are employed to establish several dimensions of moral deviance in connection with a specific type of transgression and to expand upon those. The construction is indicating guilt by transgression, which means that it focuses upon various moral facets of the transgression itself. The narrative describes how and to what degree the transgression is morally reprehensible and how different dimensions of norm-breaking are involved. Actions of different individuals add to the moral charge of the transgression (Urniţă, 2013: 201, 202).

The episode articulates the nature of the transgression and spells out the moral dimensions involved. What we as an audience are told is not only that the charter schools proved to be transgressors, but also what they were transgressing, how serious the transgression was, what type of transgressors they were and what their motives were.

Discussion and conclusions

As a conclusion I will discuss how the episode’s gradual construction of aggravation of the central moral transgression has implications upon the understanding of the role of journalism as a designer of moral constructs. Those implications are divided into three areas: the increased attention value of the own media production, the justification of the shaming and exposure of featured wrongdoers and the role of journalism in moral constructions of societal importance.

Firstly, the multiple moral dimensions constructed is an example of how the use of a set of narrative devices are used to state and emphasize why the reader, listener or spectator should care about what is being told (Labov, 1972: 366). It is a way to communicate and amplify the importance of the story and to suggest the degree of interest it should be given.
Gradually building importance and interest by amplifying the moral gravity of the transgression in focus becomes a sign of journalistic craftsmanship. A simply stated description of the transgression itself would not have created the same emotional and intellectual impact as the episode’s construction of multiple facets of moral deviation. Labov and Waletsky explains that “a simple sequence of complication and result does not indicate to the listener the relative importance of these events or help him distinguish complication from resolution” (Labov; Waletsky, 1966: 34). Journalism is in that sense employing its craft to enhance the attention value of its own production.

The study also shows how this process proposes attributions of guilt and shame at multiple levels as the proposed appropriate viewer response. The multiple constructions of moral transgression cater to a diversity in audiences’ moral sensibility thus increasing the potential reactiveness.

Secondly, the episode is also an act of accusation aiming at convincing the audience of transgression and guilt on the part of those held responsible. The narrative development connotes the pleading of a prosecutor trying to convince a jury of the gravity of the transgression of the accused, and by extension paving the way for a severe sanction. In the context of investigative journalism, the moral build-up is a way of justifying the public exposure and shaming of the featured wrongdoers. The greater the power abuse is proved to be, the more justified is the shaming and exposure.

A great deal of journalistic craftsmanship goes into showing and illustrating how serious transgressors the school representatives held accountable for discrimination are. The narrative gives the understanding a moral value and is creating a framework for judgment and performing a judgmental work. Journalism is thus justifying its own role as investigator of transgression and executor of justice. The greater the moral build-up, the more important the journalistic feat. And the more the process of building up gravity is charging the transgression with societal importance, the more the exposure and shaming of the transgressors is justified.

Thirdly, the episode is indicating the role journalism plays in constructing and maintaining moral standards in society. The construction of the transgression is favoring an understanding of guilt on the part of representatives of charter schools, not only as individuals, but also as a group. These representatives are through the narrative development given a metonymical status and the construction of moral is thus forming a framework for evaluating that particular type of schools and their aims and methods. Even though only 25 % of the examined schools were transgressors, the episode casts a shadow upon the moral status and the uprightness of the methods of the entire system. Even though public schools are still a majority no public schools were included in the test. The episode construed the problem as unique for charter schools, which it may have been, but since an established bench-mark is lacking, we do not know if that is the case. The evaluation process is also one-way oriented. There are no evaluative elements that moderate the moral charge and there are no attenuating circumstances accounted for. The episode creates a moral bench-mark stipulating a specific moral context to which further dis-
cussions on the subject have to relate. Those watching the episode will consciously or unconsciously bring with them the moral context created by the program into any discussions or reflections on charter schools. Journalism is thus establishing itself as a moral constructing societal institution. When an act is treated as a moral transgression in an episode of investigative TV-journalism it is given a specific moral value and anyone trying to redefine that act has to relate to the program’s moral construction and evaluation. Journalism is thereby exercising its power to frame issues of societal importance.

By means of the guilt increasing evaluative techniques described in the analysis, journalism is defining the transgression’s moral value, pronouncing a moral sentence over the transgressors and suggesting a proper condemnatory response from the audience. The importance and gravity of the case against the school representatives is gradually gaining momentum throughout the episode and the production is thus gradually generating public outrage. The craftsmanship displayed identifies investigative journalism as both indicator and establisher of moral standards. And the morality established have a strong impact both upon the particular case and in a wider societal context. By charging a part of a societal issue with strong moral content, the entire issue is emotionally and morally framed.
Literature