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Ethics in Media Communication and the Right to Privacy

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ETHICS IN MEDIA COMMUNICATION AND THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

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An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Lindenwood University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Marketing

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will focus on determining whether or not the media does or does not pay heavy attention to ethical issues when reporting. Much of society believes that the media focuses more on "getting the story", rather than reporting the news. Also, some view the media as an entity which cares only about sensationalism, and producing the highest rating. Over the past fifteen years or so, media coverage has changed quite drastically. Journalists of earlier times would have not been expected to go to any lengths to get a story, as they seem to be in today's world. It is almost expected now to see a journalist chasing or stalking their subjects for whatever reason.

Society has somewhat grown accustomed to the fact that the media are allowed to act a certain way, and therefore, it is just accepted. As an

example, a viewer may see a plane crash on the news a particular evening. The viewer is not surprised to see that the reporter is making every effort to get an interview from a victim's relative or loved one. This type of behavior is obviously a moral issue, however, the media seem to assume that they have the right to put a camera or microphone in someone's face after they've received the "news".

For many, they view the media as unethical, ratings chasers who care only about themselves; others feel the media does a sufficient job with what they have to do. The purpose of this research is to show through various studies, what the media does consider ethical or unethical, as well as determine what the majority of the public opinion reveals about the field of journalism overall.

Results of the analysis showed evidence that the hypothesis be accepted and to conclude that, with the studies analyzed, a majority of society agrees that ethics in the media is not a heavily focused upon issue, and sensationalism plays a large role in the journalism field.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Media Communication is one of the primary ways that Americans obtain information about what's happening in their world. A majority of adults say they get most of their news from television. TV affects the thinking and behavior of more people in our society than any other information technology. The media business operates with two purposes: to provide a public service and to make money. Much of society would agree, however, that the more important purpose is to make money (Gerard 21).

Aspiring journalists get started by imitating established journalists. The criteria that determined yesterdays coverage is being used to put together today's news, in a self-referencing, self-perpetuating process. Journalists draw heavily on previous stories by reporters who, in turn, probably

relied on still earlier stories. All too often, the media circle is unbroken. Facts pass into circulation swiftly, but so do inaccuracies, distortions, and outright lies. Once published or broadcast, they are much more likely to be repeated than corrected.

Lacking direct contact with the events and people prominent on the evening news, society depends on media to establish us to "experience" them. In theory, objective journalism informs the public about relevant facts, so that citizens can make up their own minds about current issues. Yet value judgments infuse everything in the new media. Mass media not only report the news, they also literally "make" the news. Familiar types of coverage can come across as "objective" precisely because they're so ubiquitous, blending in with the customary media landscape(Wieseltier 42).

Objective journalism lends to the subject of the need for a system of ethics in the field. Ethics is the foundation of our advanced civilization, a cornerstone that provides some

stability to society's moral expectations. Media practitioners are in a particular need for a system of ethics because they are the primary source of information in a democracy. They stand at the crossroads between the citizens and their political, economic, and cultural institutions. Accurate and reliable information is the lifeblood of the democratic process, whether it be political intelligence offered up by journalists or the economic messages of advertisers. Society has a right to expect a certain level of ethical behavior from its media institutions. When this fails, a crisis of confidence occurs between these institutions and the public (Day 21).

An ethical system must be constructed first on shared values. Although individuals and groups within society may apply these standards differently to specific situations, they should at least agree on common ethical norms. This commitment to shared, or common values is often reflected in the codification of those norms. The Ten Commandments,

for example, are part of the code of moral conduct underlying the Judeo-Christian heritage. Many media institutions have codified their ethical principles and such codes can at least provide the journalistic novice with some idea of the dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Ethical standards should be based also on reason and experience. They should seek to strike a balance between the rights and interests of autonomous individuals and their obligations to society (22). Institutions, like individuals, must learn to be socially responsible. But there is no reason to believe that, in doing so, they must sacrifice their corporate autonomy. Institutional autonomy, like individual, consists of freedom of choice, but there is a price to be paid for making decisions that do not at least take into account the interests of others (37).

For the media, attitudes of social responsibility can be acquired through a two step process. The first step is to promote a positive corporate image and to improve the chances of gaining public respect. This can be done through an aggressive campaign of external communications and a

consideration of the impact on society of any ethical decisions made by media managers and employees. Although this step is based in part on self-interest; the idea that social responsibility is good for business creates a set of corporate values on which a more altruistic notion of responsibility can be built (37).

The second step is community involvement. This is accomplished by encouraging employees to participate in civic affairs and providing corporate financial support for community projects. It can also involve a high level of commitment to the resolution of social problems, even though it may not be economically advantageous to do so. Major newspapers, for example, might consider greater coverage of low income and minority neighborhoods. In addition to the involvement of some institutions in the communities of which they are a part, there are other visible signs that the media have at least recognized that freedom and responsibility can easily coexist on the same moral ground. The media have acknowledged that some self regulation is essential because failure to regulate will result in further erosion of confidence and

perhaps even public demands for governmental intervention. This recognition of social responsibility as a moral duty has been reflected on three self-regulatory mechanisms: codes of conduct, informal institutional practices, and press councils (38).

Although most media practitioners agree that ethical norms are important in their fields, formal codes of conduct are still controversial. Proponents of such codes agree that a written statement of principles is the only way to avoid leaving moral judgments to individual interpretations and that if ethical values are important enough to espouse publicly, they should be codified (Anderson 1).

Opponents of such codes view them as a form of self-censorship, a retreat from the independence and autonomy necessary for a free and robust mass communication enterprise. In addition, critics argue, such codes must be general and vague and thus are incapable of confronting the fine nuances of the ethical skirmishes that occur under specific circumstances. Such luminaries in the field of

journalism philosophy as John Merrill have dismissed codes as meaningful tools for ensuring accountability. According to Merle, this suggests that, the problem with such codes and creeds, however, is that they are not even sufficient in what they do; develop a consensus in thought and action, reason: the rhetorical devices of the codes of ethics and the creeds are so nebulous, fuzzy, ambiguous, contradictory, or heavy-handed that the few journalists who do read them are perplexed, confused, bewildered, and angered. Journalists, of all people, should use the language skillfully, directly, and effectively. But when it comes to codes and creeds they seem to retreat into a kind of bureaucratize, or sociological jargon that benumbs the mind and frustrates any attempt to extract substantial meaning from the writing.(38)

There is also a fear, sometimes justified, that formal codes of conduct will be used against the media in legal battles as evidence that employees have behaved negligently in violating their own standards of ethical deportment. Finally, opponents contend that codes are nothing more than

statements of ideals and are conveniently ignored in the competitive environment of the marketplace (38). Nevertheless, codes are viewed as a serious attempt to at least recognize the fundamental values and principles for which media organizations stand. All of the major professional media organizations, representing a broad constituency, have developed formal codes. The Society of Professional Journalists,(SPJ), has adopted standards for such things as truth, accuracy, objectivity, conflicts of interest, and fairness. It is interesting to note that this code lists several areas of press responsibility and then devotes one subsection to ethics. There has been a recurring debate over whether the SPJ code should be enforced within the journalistic community, thereby insuring adherence to the code's ideals. However, even the SPJ has resisted this idea, in part because of the traditional fear that such enforcement would be the first step toward licensing the media under a universal standard of conduct. In 1985, its directors voted against enforcing the code on individual members because of a concern that such a stance would interfere with the First Amendment

freedoms. There was also a fear of litigation resulting from punitive action taken against some stubborn SPJ members for having violated the code (39-40).

For media practitioners, another area of ethical consideration would be whether or not the information being projected is true or not. In theory, it would appear that absolute truth is an ideal for which all media practitioners should strive. In practice, however, the application of this principle often depends on the circumstances and the role of the moral agent. Although outright falsehoods can seldom be justified, exactly how much truth is good for the public soul depends on our expectations. For example, journalists are expected to be unbiased and to report only the truth; that is as many known facts as possible that are important to the story. On the other hand, consumers realize that public relations practitioners and advertisers are advocates and do not expect them to do anything that would be contrary to their self interest or the interests of their clients. This is not surprising considering the fact that advertisers and Public Relations,(PR),professionals come from a different

tradition than journalists. Thus, the question becomes one of how much of the truth should be revealed and under what circumstances. PR professionals and advertisers may withhold information that might be important to consumers (Iggers 3).

This variable standard of truth among different kinds of practitioners is an important concept. From a journalistic perspective, expert opinion abounds on what constitutes a truthful news account. At the minimum there appear to be three concepts that underlie the notion of truth in reporting:

First, and most obviously, the reporting should be accurate. If there is some doubt or dispute about the facts, it should be revealed to the audience. Obviously, being inaccurate can destroy the credibility of any journalistic enterprise (Goldstein 14).

Secondly, a truthful story should promote understanding. The goal should be to provide an account that is essentially complete. A story should contain as much relevant information as is available and essential to give the average reader or viewer at least an understanding of the facts and

the context of the facts. This places the working journalist somewhere between the extremes of full disclosure and no disclosure. Noted in The Virtuous Journalist, "The obligation of journalists in reporting on important events falls somewhere between the poles of full disclosure capable of promoting an in-depth understanding and a cursory account of the bare facts. Just as a dentist cannot be held accountable for providing each patient with a course in dentistry before pulling a tooth, journalists cannot be expected to provide a seminar through a newspaper article or documentary" (Klaidman).

The fact is that the whole truth can probably never be known about any situation, but ethical issues arise when moral agents intentionally withhold all or some "facts" relevant to the public interest. This practice is contrary to the journalistic inoperative of reporting all of the known relevant facts, but there are times when threats to the lives of individuals or the public's welfare lead to the withholding or delaying of certain kinds of information. Fast-breaking stories

relating to kidnappings and hostage takings are two prime examples (Peterson 10).

Truth in journalism also should be fair and balanced. Journalists should attempt to accord recognition to those views that enhance the understanding of the issue. Every effort should be made to represent them fairly and not to use quotes out of context (Anderson 3).

It has been shown that journalists do try and abide by "codes" or "rules" of ethical conduct and have some guidelines to follow. The question that arises is whether or not media practitioners consider the outcome of ethical issues and immoral judgments. This study, therefore, will explore the effects of decisions made by journalists, as well as determine how the Right to Privacy affects media coverage to see if, in fact, practitioners do consider the outcome of ethical issues and immoral judgements.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

One can think of everything that gets written or said as part of a great conversation that takes place, not in a vacuum, but in the context of institutions-newspapers, television stations, universities-and informal settings, like the neighborhood cafe. Each institution has its own rules for conversation. The conversation gets shaped by the interests of the institutions and the participants, and by those in power (Iggers 1).

Codes of ethics are part of the journalists' conversation. They reflect the often conflicting interests of people who draft and adopt them. They are, in short, political documents. Institutional interests determine how ethical principles will be translated into rules of conduct, how those rules of conduct will be enforced, and what acts will be seen as violations of the rules (Iggers 1).

That's what makes journalism ethics so problematic. It is quite possible to be a very ethical journalist and still to produce journalism that is utterly irresponsible or destructive. One could say that journalism's codes of ethics provide a convenient defense of the indefensible: it is much easier to stay within the guidelines of the codes, especially if one has the power to interpret and enforce them, than it is to fulfill the civic responsibilities of the press (Iggers 2).

The irony of this may explain the cynicism journalists feel about their own profession: their perception that there is a profound contradiction between the mission of the press-to provide citizens with the information they need to play an active role in democratic life-and the journalism they practice, which systematically compromises values of public service in favor of other interests. It may also explain why many in the public feel "journalism ethics" is a contradiction in terms. The public sees that the rules journalists invoke to justify their conduct, instead undermine their mission to serve the public interest (Iggers 2).

Although the social responsibility theory may not be familiar to many journalists, a slogan that came along about the same time as the theory is: "The public's right to know", a chant of American journalists in the period since World War II as they fought to expand their access to news of government, business, and other areas of the society that have found ways to hide from public scrutiny (Christians 23).

The phrase seems to have started with Kent Cooper, former top executive of the Associated Press (AP), and then became cemented into the conventional wisdom of journalism when Harold Cross used it as a title of a book he wrote for the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE). The general theme of his book and of the doctrine the slogan represents is that the public has a legal right to know what its government is doing and the press is the representative of the public in finding that out. In a 1991 interview, Cross explained that "one must follow the idea that the free press clause was put in the Constitution to give the press some kind of peculiar role in monitoring the government". This notion has encouraged the developing idea by Cross that the press "is part of the government machine and in turn, society gets access when it is

necessary in the governmental process, then and only then"(Christians 24).

From this doctrine has come a long and reasonably successful campaign by journalism to get most of the states to adopt open meetings and open records laws and get the federal government to enact the "Freedom of Information Act" in 1967. None of these laws has worked to the complete satisfaction of most journalists, but they have been useful in opening up more of the activities and records of government to the news media and to the public (Goodwin 9).

There has been an ethical dimension to the public's right to know movement. It has stimulated journalists, somewhat arrogantly in some cases admittedly, to see themselves as representatives of the people. Many a reporter has sensed a special responsibility when covering some important public meeting with no members of the public present except perhaps an observer for the League of Women Voters and a couple of lawyers representing some special interest or another. The reporter in that all-too-common circumstance usually makes a special effort to report actions that might affect those absent citizens. This same sense of representing the public at large has spurred journalists as they have tried to throw light

on the less obvious activities of business and other areas of the private sector in which the public has an interest (Lippmann 226).

Journalists, limited by news space and time, have to decide everyday what it is that the public has a right to know. A visit to any newsroom at the end of a working day shows even the casual observer how much news is left over, unused, apparently not material the public has a right to know about. The point is not to make jest of the difficult news decisions that editors have to make, but to argue what the public has a right to know is determined by editors making subjective judgments and by managers who determine how much news space and time will be available. A doctrine so imperfect can hardly justify illegal and unethical behavior by any thinking journalist. One of Faludi's ethical premises is that "journalists owe the reader the choice of whether or not he or she has the right to know. The problem with newsrooms today is that the decisions are being made by those in authority at the newsroom, not society" (Faludi 10).

A responsibility evolving out of the First Amendment that journalists these days seldom question is the obligation of the news media to be a watchdog of government. Keeping the press free from government

allows the press to help protect citizens from the abuses of government. In modern times this watchdog role has been extended by most journalists to business, education, sports, and other important institutions of American life (Faludi 10).

Many observers believe that the news media also needs scrutiny - some watchdog of the watchdogs. Journalism is too important to all of us to be left entirely to journalists. It needs independent and critical monitoring. But journalists have resisted such appraisals on any systematic basis, mostly out of concern that they might diminish press freedom. So the history of the U.S. journalism in this century has been only lightly spotted with examples of continuing reviews of journalism's performance (Knecht 1).

One appraisal method that has had great appeal in this country as well as in other countries is the news council, a body charged with monitoring the suppliers of news to the public. The idea was first put forth seriously in the U.S. by the Commission on Freedom of the Press, which recommended in its 1947 report, "the establishment of a new and independent agency to appraise and report annually upon the performance of the press." Although the agency proposal was to be non-governmental, any journalists at the time read

veiled threats in the commission's report because of language such as this:

> Freedom of the press for the coming period can only continue as an accountable freedom. Its moral right will be conditioned on its acceptance of this accountability. Its legal right will stand unaltered as its moral duty is performed (Knecht 1)

Another instrument for making journalists more accountable to the public is the newspaper ombudsmen, an idea adapted from Sweden. About thirty-five of the some 1730 daily newspapers in the U.S. have added such functionaries to their staffs in recent years to handle reader's complaints and to serve as in-house critics. Most are called ombudsmen, the Swedish word, but some are known as reader representatives or some other similar and more understandable term (Fatheringham 96).

The masses cause a lot of the trouble for the mass media. The masses of people contain many diverse interests and conflicting viewpoints. Striking a balance among the differences and treating everyone evenhandedly is the editor's most difficult job. When interviewers in the ASNE survey read a long list of categories of ethical problems to the sample of editors, the editors in the ASNE claimed that "Fairness, balance, objectivity, allocating

space to opposing interest groups or political candidates, and providing right of reply to criticism", are the most difficult to acquire in journalism. The editors who said such problems were discussed in the newsroom at least once a month represented sixty four percent of daily circulation in the U.S. No other general category scored as high as forty percent (Fallows 45).

In a diverse society, the problem of fairness is so complex that a direct solution is impossible. What is fair to one group will seem like bias to another. Action taken to solve a problem in one area will create new problems in other areas. The notion of objective reporting is itself a fiction. As columnist Robert J. Samuelson has once pointed out, "bias in the media is more often traceable to the fact that journalists are a profession of outsiders, and superficiality is often the best they can do" (Dunn 18).

So, writers, whether they are newspaper reporters, screenwriters, or novelists, adopt models into which they can fit their objective facts. These models help both the writer and the reader to understand and make sense of the facts, but this benefit comes at a cost. In addition to being guides to interpretation, these necessary models also help to select which aspects of

the objective world should aspire. Katherine Dunn explains in a 1993 article for The New Republican, "If something is truly new and different, it may not fit into the existing model, and one may not see it. Or one may so distort it to make it fit into the existing model that it could only steer them away from, not closer to, the truth" (Dunn 18).

The need for fairness, balance, and objectivity then, is driven by even more than the democratic need to treat every person or cause evenhandedly. It is related to the newspaper's ability to see matters afresh, to view the world, at least some of the time, with a perfectly innocent eye is the source and restorative of wisdom. And this means that conventional wisdom, on which perceptual models are generally based, needs to be re-examined from time to time. To conduct such an examination, a journalist needs to think in a scientific mode: suspending judgment, examining data, constructing alternative models. It is not easy and cannot be done every day. Journalists have, therefore, opted for some easier ways of striving for fairness, balance, and objectivity. These pragmatic rules amount to operational guidelines that create what's been referred to as the "man from Mars" role (Meyer 51).

This role requires a reporter to give the sources, whenever it is not obvious, for every important fact in a story. Thorough sourcing can clutter up a story, break its rhythm, and slow it down. But it lets the reader know exactly where he or she stands, and how much credibility to put into each statement of fact. However, when applied compulsively, this role can lead the reporter to forget the journalist's responsibility to go behind the sources and make an independent check of their validity (Meyer 52).

Another rule that journalists use is the "get the other side of the story" rule. Whenever someone makes a claim that is not verifiable by direct observation, and for which other points of view exist, the reporter is expected to include those other points of view. This practice tends to yield a story pattern in which there are always two points of view, no more, no less. Reality is often quite different. In a complicated situation with many points of view, some viewpoints are inevitably going to get lost when the reporter assumes a model with only two contrasting views. In national politics, for example, the interesting things said by third parties are often ignored while news reporters concentrate on Republicans and Democrats only. According to media critic Ben Bagdikian, "an

unconscious assumption in the get-the-other-side rule is that both sides are equally credible." One example of this is if the Surgeon General says cigarettes cause cancer and the tobacco company says they don't, a newspaper's compulsion to get the other side may lead it to give both sources equal weight (Meyer 53).

Bias entails a value-directed departure from accuracy, objectivity, and balance-not just a distorted presentation of facts. For a story to be biased, the distorted information it contains must be causally connected to the writer's or editor's values. Charges of bias are also frequently leveled incorrectly in response to a superficial presentation of facts. As columnist Robert J. Samuelson has pointed out, much of what is called political bias in the media is more often traceable to the fact that journalists are " a profession of outsiders; superficiality is often the best we can do" (Bates 51).

It is sometimes assumed that being biased requires holding a narrow-minded opinion. As an example of why this is not so, consider someone given to wishful thinking about his or her family's social status. This wishful thinking could produce a bias born more of family loyalty than of narrow-mindedness. Biases also may or may not be idea. Although ideology can produce

bias, not all bias is ideal. Bias may derive from various sources including irrationality, illusion, prejudice, greed, ambition, and religious fervor. The distortions introduced may be intentional or unintentional (Bates 52).

In journalism, charges of bias often stem from the belief that a reporter or news organization holds blind views and therefore reports issues and events in a partisan fashion. The disposition to partisanship and the need to eliminate it have been the focus of considerable criticism of the press. Certainly partisanship can be a cause of bias, but being partisan is not equivalent to being biased. A partisan reporter may restrain his or her partisan beliefs in writing a story, and a reformist reporter may write a story that is biased but not partisan. For example, when James Whelan resigned as the editor of The Washington Times, he said he did so because the Unification Church, owner of the paper, distorted news coverage by imposing political beliefs on reports in the paper. If this is true, the conservative political reporting of the paper results directly from the management's partisan political views, and therefore represents bias (Kann 618).

The most widely discussed form of bias in journalism is manifest when personal beliefs or values intrude into news coverage. These personal views often blend with and thereby distort factual accounts in news or opinion pieces. This is the basis for the charge of "liberal bias", persistently leveled by some American politicians at various journalist and news organizations. It implies that a predominantly liberal political perspective on the part of reporters, editors, news executives, and publishers in the national media distorts the news that most Americans see on television or read in their newspapers, especially through the national networks and the news services of the major newspapers. According to Katherine Dunn, former reporter for the New Republican, "to qualify as a bias, a distorting slant must have occurred over an extended period of time, is what many believe and this is understandable, but misleading" (Bain 56).

The philosopher David Hume considered a "moderate" species of skepticism an antidote to journalism bias. He maintained that journalists should check and recheck basic observations, the data derived from the testimony of others, and the inferences from both observations and testimony. Skepticism on every level, where reason

corrects untrustworthy observations and inferences, is what David Hume argues as the only method "by which one can ever hope to reach truth and attain a proper stability and certainty in one's destinations". He saw skepticism as "a necessary preparative to the study of philosophy, by preserving a proper impartiality in ones judgments and weaving ones mind from all those prejudices, which one may have imbibed from education or rash opinion" (Goodwin 89).

In the routine of their jobs, journalists regularly harm corrupt officials, unsuccessful athletes and actors, businesspersons whose companies perform poorly, and many others. If the harm is done in the service of a greater good, such as exposing corruption or advising the public not to waste its money, then it is an acceptable side effect, just as in medicine an amputated leg is generally an acceptable side effect if the alternative is death. But there are flaws in this analogy. In clinical medicine, both the risks and the benefits can be discussed with and refused by the patient. In journalism, the risk of harm to a person or institution being reported on is rarely disclosed, not always evident, and virtually never refutable. Furthermore, the potential beneficiary is not the

subject of the story who will suffer the harm; the beneficiary is usually the public (Klaidman 94).

The harmful effects of journalists' activities seldom lead to disciplinary action, even if the public benefits of the journalist's work fails to justify the harm done. This situation is tolerated because of the axiom that the harmful effects of placing legal or other external restraints on journalistic freedom would outweigh the harmful effects of virtually any instance of journalistic malpractice. John Stuart Mill, author of The Harm Principle, has argued that, "while it is difficult to determine a set of right and wrong exercises of liberty, some valid restrictions are necessary and they all turn on protecting persons against the harmful actions of others". Mill devised what's called "the harm principle", which says, "a person's liberty may justifiably be restricted to prevent harm that the person's actions would cause to others" (Katz 10).

On a superficial level, the moral problems involved in causing and avoiding harm seem uncomplicated. Almost everyone would agree that damaging another person's interests, if there is little compensating benefit and the damage could easily be avoided, shows poor character. But journalists rarely

confront such a clear, relatively uncomplicated scenario. There usually are benefits that offset the harm, which cannot always easily be avoided (Beauchamp 94).

Another common problem in journalism is causing harm by either innuendo or insinuation. The primary problem seems to be a failure to scrutinize what has been written for hidden or subtle meanings and consequences. But the press does sometimes use insinuation and innuendo intentionally and there are many cases of unascertainable motives and mixed intent (Klaidman 117).

Consider, for example, the press accounts during the 1984 presidential campaign of alleged Mafia connections in the family of Democratic vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro's husband, John Zaccaro. An article that appeared on the editorial page of The Wall Street Journal, under the headline, "Rep. Ferraro and a Painful Legacy", seemed to hold that Ferraro, who was then running for vice-president, might be the heir to, or at least be deeply influenced by, the actions of her deceased father-in-law, Philip Zacarro (Klaidman 117).

Newspapers have a right, even a duty, to raise questions they cannot answer in the hope that the

questions will enhance the public's awareness of important issues and that airing the questions might produce answers. In the Ferraro case, there is good reason to believe that simply raising the questions might significantly harm the interests of the article's subject or subjects, with no clear compensating benefit for the public. There is a substantial possibility that the misbehavior, immorality, and illegality implied by the headline was non-existent; but even if there had been wrongdoing of some sort, it was irrelevant to the public's legitimate interests in the primary subject of the story. In this case, the real target was Ferraro. Had she not run for vice-president, there would have been no story and no objective (Klaidman 119).

Philosophers have often argued that the obligation to avoid harm is more stringent than the obligation to provide benefits, but this claim, and the distinction on which it rests, are of suspicious merit. To be sure, the claim that avoiding harm is a more stringent duty has a strong initiative appeal. For example, a physician's duty not to injure patient by abandonment intuitively seems stronger than the duty to prevent injury to a patient who has been abandoned by another physician. Similarly, the duty not to drown someone

seems stronger than the duty to save someone from drowning (Beauchamp 136).

There is also an important conceptual problem in analyzing the distinction between avoiding harm and providing benefits that is illustrated by the following examples. If a journalist writes a story about someone's desperate need for money or free medical care because of an exotic disease, and the money or care is provided by donors as a result of the story, has the journalist provided a benefit, contributed to avoiding a harm, contributed to removing a harm, or all of the above? Similarly, if a journalist refrains from writing a story that is likely to ruin a career, even though it is based on compelling evidence, has the journalist simply prevented a harm, or has he or she also provided a benefit to the party who would have been injured? These examples indicate that the distinction between providing benefits and avoiding harms does not have sharp conceptual boundaries. Therefore society should view the journalist's obligation to provide benefits more as continuous with the obligation to avoid harm than as different from it. Physicians, for example, who pledge to do no harm are not pledging never to cause harm, but rather to strive for a balance of benefits over harms. According to

Beauchamp, "journalists should strive for a balance of benefits over harms as well" (Beauchamp 137).

For public officials, conflict of interest is perhaps the most visible ethical problem. The county commissioner who votes for a road project affecting his own land is a common example. The federal official who comes from a private industry to regulate that industry and eventually goes back to it, is another. Because journalists are very much aware of conflicts of interest among public officials and tend to report them vigorously, they are sensitive to conflict in their own affairs most of the time (Meyer 62).

The problem is that conflict of interest can be extremely subtle. Few cases are as clear-cut as that of R. Foster Winans, as The Wall Street Journal reporter who used his position at the paper to find out what stocks were going to be mentioned in a column called "Heard on the Street", and passed that information along to friends in advance of publication. Such information has very high potential value, because the column discusses the outlook for individual stocks and groups of stocks. An investor who gets the information ahead of time can make a lot of money. Winan's friends not only used the information to make a lot of money, but also shared the proceeds with Winans.

This violated the Journal's strict conflict of interest rules, and as it turned out, was against the law and led to a jail sentence for Winans. That is an example of a perfectly straightforward case. The conflict was wrong and everyone knew it (Meyer 63).

Journalists are also often faced with other forms of conflict of interest as well. The freebie, something given without charge or cost, was at one time commonly accepted in the newsrooms of America. Many journalists accepted Christmas presents from the people about which they had written stories. Taking free tickets to the theater, the circus, or the baseball game was a common occurrence. Freebies went with the job, perquisites of a trade notorious for underpaying its apprentices. There was a "tradition in journalism of take what one could get" says Richard Turtle, executive director of the Elmira Paper in New York, "these favors come in all sorts of packages-from free lunches to fur coats, and journalists had no problem with accepting them" (Goodwin 87).

Freebies are still being accepted by journalists today, and the outside interests are still working hard to buy their way into the news columns with favors, but the practice is widely condemned in the field and may disappear entirely (Goodwin 87).

Efforts by public officials, politicians, and others to influence or at least gain favor with journalists through the gifts of free food and drink continue to be a problem. Some news sources insist on picking up the tab whenever they have lunch or drinks with reporters. They may not expect anything in return for such favors, but again they may. Most journalists these days insist on at least paying for their own meals and some often buy for their sources (Goodwin 88).

Perhaps the most serious freebie ethically is the junket, a free trip paid for by a news source or some vested interest who picks up the tab for the journalist's transportation and often for food and lodging as well. There seems to be no question that junkets are on the decline among the bigger media, best able to pay to send their journalists where they need to go. Eugene L Roberts, Executive Editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer, discovered that one of his writers had taken a free $8,000 cruise a few weeks after the papers had declared a formal policy of paying its own way and not accepting freebies. The first thing the writer did when he got back from the cruise was write a long article about it, including complete

photos supplied by the cruiseline. He was immediately terminated (Goodwin 97).

Journalists get criticized for some of the methods they use to get the news. No one disputes such conventional reporting methods as observing and recording a public event, interviewing people in their work place or home, or doing library research. But when journalists lie or break laws or use sleazy tactics to get a story, observers wonder whether the ends justify such means, and whether their methods do not color or distort the news they produce (Fiegelson 18).

Robert Scheer, who as editor of Ramparts Magazine helped develop the so-called "counterjournalism", has said that some of the most important stories of recent years have involved theft, burglary, seduction, and conning people. Scheer, who has become more conventional as he has progressed from Ramparts to The Los Angeles Times, makes it clear that he does not believe in using such extreme methods unless the reporter is dealing with a story vital to the public's interest. Scheer is not happy with the thought that he'll probably be most remembered for his 1977 comment when dealing with politicians who were trying to

hide things from the public, "the journalist's job is to get the story by breaking into their offices, by bribing, by seducing people, by lying, and by anything else to break through that palace guard". During an interview shortly after that remark, Scheer tried to emphasize that he does not support the use of dubious means to get most news stories (Fiegelson 20).

Nice people do not eavesdrop, but journalists do. Or as William Thomas, editor and Executive Vice-President of The Los Angeles Times puts it, "nice people don't eavesdrop unless they have to". Most journalists do not regard listening in on other people's conversations with the naked ear as a high-level ethical sin. But eavesdropping with electronic devices or telephone wire tapping is fairly generally condemned as a reporting method (Lalli 11).

Photography can also play a role for journalists who are eavesdropping. The Chicago Sun Times did that in its famous Mirage investigation of bribery and shakedowns by government inspectors. Hiding in a compartment above the toilet rooms of the Mirage Tavern that the paper bought for that project, photographers took pictures of police officers and inspectors as they accepted bribes from the reporters posing as owners of the tavern. The principal reporter on that assignment,

Pamela Zekman, claims the paper was very careful not to publish any photo that showed ordinary patrons of the bar who were not known to the Sun Times people. Although she would not support using a hidden news camera in a private home, Zekman considers it to be an acceptable technique in a public place. "Sometimes its crucial to have the credibility and authenticity that photos can give you", says Ralph Otwell of The Chicago Sun Times (Goodwin 177).

One question that arises is whether or not to publish a particular photo that may be disturbing to some viewers. Ralph Otwell admits that "some pictures are disturbing, but are an important part in telling the story". Otwell does not believe that all such photos should be published automatically. "If an emotionally unstable woman sets herself on fire in a public place, we would not use that picture" (Otwell 191).

A study by photojournalist Lil Junas showed that fifty-six percent of the winners in the top two news photography competitions in the U.S. were pictures of violence and tragedy. The Pulitzer Prizes have been particularly partial to such pictures. Junas found that twenty-six of the forty Pulitzer awards for news photography between its beginning in 1942 and through

1981 went to pictures showing violence and tragedy. She discovered that thirty-two of the sixty-three "pictures of the year" recognized by the National Press Association between 1944 and 1982 were photos of violence or tragedy. This is a good example of how journalism photography has been stereotyped as being sensational (Goodwin 192).

It may seem to the casual reader that some of the better known and most respected news operations in the country have more ethical problems than the lesser known ones. So many examples of questionable behavior come from the most respected media. Part of the explanation for the abundance of ethical violations or marginal practices by the better news organizations lies in their visibility, the attention they get from media watchers. But the other explanation lies in their quality: because they seek out the news aggressively and take more risks and get into more trouble. News organizations that play it safe and do little more than report what news comes in from the wire services do not get into too many conventional ethical problems. But, however, they do commit the biggest ethical sin of all: failure to fulfill the primary responsibility of reporting the news fairly,

accurately, aggressively, and as comprehensively as possible (Goodwin 304).

The most ethical journalists in the business seem to be found in quality news operations, large and small. There are many journalists who never get a chance to learn and practice either good or ethical journalism because they work for news operations that cover the news superficially, and cater to the power elements in their communities (Goodwin 305).

In striving for more ethical practices, journalists are well advised to avoid seeking special privileges for themselves and the news media. Freedom of the press and of speech belong to everybody, not just journalists. Ethical principles that segregate journalists as a class from the rest of society ill serve either journalism or society. What is needed is a set of principles based on a journalism that serves the public by seeking and reporting the closest possible truth about events and conditions of concern to people, a journalism that collects and deals with information honestly and fairly and treats people with compassion, and a journalism that faithfully interprets and explains the news so that it makes sense to society (Goodwin 306).

As has been shown through various instances, journalists face many situations everyday that require decision making of an ethical nature. Critics, however, will continue to debate the question of whether or not media ethics do in fact exist, are considered, and are exhibited. The studies to be shown in the next chapter will exhibit results that portray how society does, in fact, really view the media and their tactics to uphold sensationalism.

Chapter III

SELECTIVE REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF RESEARCH

A profound change is sweeping American newsrooms, print and broadcast alike. Even though profit seeking business has been the enabling foundation of journalism ever since entrepreneurs succeeded political parties as operators of the press one hundred and fifty years ago, it has usually been kept in the basement. Now the business of selling news is being invited upstairs (McManus 4).

As newspapers, TV stations, even the networks, have been sold by the families of those entrepreneurs to investors on Wall Street, more and more of the nation's news is being produced by corporations whose stockholders seek to maximize return on their investment. Newsrooms have begun to reflect the direction of managers discretion rather than the public eye. The reader or viewer is now a "customer". The news is a "product". The circulation or signal area is now a "market". As business logic begins to permeate the newsroom and journalism is crafted to serve the market, the question is whether it will provide a

clearer picture of the world upon which one can act? Or as news becomes explicitly a commodity, will it lose its informational value (McManus 4)?

For journalism purists, the trend toward letting the logic of the marketplace into the newsroom is defilement, a blasphemy. Carl Bernstein, one of the reporters who broke open the Watergate scandal, blames the market orientation of modern journalism for creating an "idiot culture". According to Bernstein,

> For more than fifteen years we have been moving away from real journalism toward the creation of a sleazoid info-tainment culture in which the lives between Oprah Winfrey, Phil Donahue, Ted Koppell, and Geraldo Rivera are too often indistinguishable. In this new culture of journalistic titillation, we teach our readers and our viewers that the trivial is significant, that the lurid and loopy are more important than the real news. (5)

Media critics, such as Ben Bagdikian of the University of California, write that, "market journalism gathers an audience not to inform it, but to sell it to advertisers. A few large, powerful corporations win and the public loses" (Altschull 22).

But for a growing majority of newspaper publishers and station general managers, market journalism represents a breath of fresh air and a chance for a

win-win situation. They argue that market forces posess the potential to reinvigorate as American journalism that was too serious and often boring. The "professional" journalism of a different era, the marketers contend, " has lost its attraction among Americans, particularly those under thirty-five years old" (Altschull 22).

Market journalists contend that the media environment of the 1990's has become too competitive to support media firms pursuing traditional journalism with its separation of the "church" of news gathering and "state" of advertising sales, production, and distribution. Certainly the media environment has grown much more competitive. Metropolitan and suburban newspapers, local broadcast stations, and cable stations are all battling each other for the attention of consumers with less leisure time than a decade ago, and fighting for a share of a stagnating or slow growing pool of advertising dollars (Abel 36).

Partly because it has been longest established there, the best place to study media ethics is within local television newsrooms. Attitudes about the news media change with the flow of events, particularly during times of war and governmental scandal, and with the wording of questionnaires measuring opinion. Over

the past twenty years, however, the majority of polls indicate that most Americans believe what they see on TV news. In 1994, the Gallup Poll asked a national sample of adults to rate a variety of news media on their credibility and other characteristics. Local TV news and network news tied as the media rated most accurate, 81% called them accurate, compared to 73% for local news, 77% for radio, and 78% for "nationally influential" newspapers (McManus 6).

Americans consider local TV news to be a powerful influence on public opinion and generally approve of how that power is used. In 1995, a Los Angeles Times survey indicated that 86% of a national sample said their local news stations had "some" or "a great deal" of influence on community opinion (McManus 6).

The argument that the public acting through the market should be the final arbiter of what's newsworthy and how news should be presented is the backbone of market journalism. The attractiveness lies in putting to use in journalism the same mechanism that has led to constantly improving products at stable or lower prices when applied to many other goods and services (McManus 7).

Advertisers and sources, who are contracting for public attention, however, can know with considerable

precision what they are getting for the money or information they offer. Some sources and advertiser enjoy a buyer's market (Bagdikian 9).

Putting aside all theoretical reasons for why there is a contradiction between news content that serves the public and that which serves the market, there is a more practical reason to disbelieve the claim that the public knows best. Not one of the journalists below the level of news director who was interviewed believed the claim to be true. In fact, the journalists of The Wall Street Journal in a 1994 interview, claimed that, "quality journalism would be empty if the public were to be the judge" (McManus 177).

It is difficult to address the social impact of journalism with precision. No one has determined what proportion of American news media has abandoned "traditional" informative journalism for a market driven approach. For that fifty percent of American adults who rely on two or more sources of news, the weakness of one may be offset by the strength of another. This is most likely at the national and global levels of reporting where the competition is greater and more diverse. The spread of market journalism form local television into network news and

newspapers coupled with the decline of daily newspaper reading among young adults make empirical assessment of journalism's impact on society urgent (Ciabattari 27).

Critics of the press have offered a variety of solutions to the problem of media profit-making at public expense. Two of those solutions, the most widely advocated ones, ignore the concept of markets. Indeed, they discount the economic structure of the news business entirely. The third invites the government to regulate the market. The fourth foresees a technological rescue. The fifth attempts to use the market itself as a lever for higher quality (Abel 203).

The most widely employed strategy for combating the commercialization of news is to instill in students a greater sense of professionalism. Ethical standards are inoculated by journalism educators, by professional groups such as the Radio and Television News Directors Association, and The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). Journalists, as the courts have often ruled, are not independent professionals, but employees. Journalists are not as free to follow professional norms as are doctors, lawyers, architects, and others. Journalists are not paid by those who consume their services. News departments need not meet professional standards for accreditation. While

professionals serve clients, acting on their own interpretation of the client's best interest, employees serve the market; accepting the customer's interpretation of what's best (Collins 92).

Much of mainstream media criticism published in academic journals and trade magazines has argued that the news business has a duty to serve society, implied by The First Amendment to The Constitution, and directly stated by the Federal Communications Act of 1934 in broadcast. Often these critics have tried to demonstrate that news media could improve their products without sacrificing profits, or at least without undue sacrifice. Low quality journalism may be even more profitable, but responsible journalism hardly threatens bankruptcy. The industry does have a choice (Collins 93).

Efforts to curb junk journalism through an emphasis on professionalism both in journalism training and organizations of reporters and editors should continue, but they would need to exercise economic clout, perhaps through unionization, before management is likely to respond. Appeals to the social responsibility of media owners seem unlikely to succeed so long as those owners are distant stockholders who believe they are insulated from the civic consequences

of poor quality news. Any government enforcement of news risks censorship and contravenes The First Amendment. Government funding of public or private news organizations might be a valuable idea, however, provided that funding decisions aren't made by the subjects of the reporting. Government incentives to boost citizen information seeking and political participation would presumably foster the demand for quality journalism. Whatever time and trouble such an effort would require, however, would be a bargain compared to the alternative. As Walter Lippmann observed seventy years ago,

> all that the sharpest critics of democracy have alleged is true if there is no steady supply of trustworthy and relevant news. Incompetence and aimlessness, corruption and disloyalty, panic and ultimate disaster must come to any people which is denied assumed access to the facts. (204)

Good theories in social science evolve over extended periods of time and lots of research. The theories presented here merely begin analysis of the news as a commodity. Their validity and generalizability are tentative, however, pending further testing and elaboration. The following empirical study was done in 1994 by John McManus, author.

The validity of the conclusions reported about journalism is threatened by at least four major considerations. The first considerations is observer bias. Social science has taught that society has a tendency to observe selectivity, looking for what one expects and sometimes what one wishes to see rather than what's really there (McManus 208).

Before embarking on the study, McManus read every previous study of television journalism that he could locate. The research suggested that journalistic norms were often violated in the newsrooms (McManus 208).

Social scientists have several weapons for combating observer bias. First, researchers often randomly select the items; stories, newscasts and so on. This prevents picking just those items that confirm one's expectations or fulfill one's self-interest. Secondly, the research process requires the researcher to explain the methods as well as the results and submit both to other scientists for critical evaluation. These results, for example, were reviewed and accepted by a university dissertation committee. Third, in this case, the results were reported back to the newsroom. Although there were charges of the researcher "beating up on journalism",

no one questioned the validity of the findings (McManus 209).

Stations self-selection is the second consideration in evaluating the validity of conclusions. Because one station that was approached refused to join the study, it's reasonable to ask whether stations that did agree to expose their newsrooms might be different from stations that would not welcome analysis. The news director at the station that refused access said that he didn't want his reporters worrying about "journalistic questions" as they performed. Therefore, the possibility that newsrooms visited considered themselves more exemplary than others cannot be ruled out (McManus 209).

Reactivity to the observer is the third area of consideration in evaluating analysis. A similar problem is the tendency of people to act differently when they know they are being observed than they might otherwise. Although a letter was written to each employee in the newsroom explaining the project and promising confidentiality to both the station and the individual, such an approach does not eliminate the desire to impress the observer himself. Some journalists interviewed may have been on their best

behavior, or answered differently when they knew they were being surveyed (McManus 209).

The fourth consideration with evaluating the analysis is called Purposive Selection of Reporting Case Studies. One bias was consciously introduced. Given the negativity of mush research being done on journalists, the stories chosen to survey were the ones management considered to be most able. More importantly, the researcher tried to accompany reporters assigned what were considered to be the most consequential stories. Although the newscast sampled were in all but one case randomly selected, the reporting case studies were chosen to examine the most normative journalism that the stations were producing (McManus 209).

How much confidence can one have that the results describe the logic of journalists across the United States turns on three considerations. The first is the sample size. In the formal part of the study only one station was chosen for each of three broad categories; medium, large, and very large. No representative was chosen from the smallest one hundred markets, and only four stations were visited. If there are great differences of journalistic practice among stations, it is absurd to generalize form four newsrooms to the

hundreds currently broadcasting news across the United States (McManus 210).

Sample geography is another area to view when seeking confident results. All four of the stations visited were located in California. To the extent that California is different from the other forty-nine states, one might expect differences in journalism. Although the present study was conducted in only one state, the research literature is nationally represented. That literature shows no differences important to the present study that researchers associated with state or regional differences (McManus 211).

The study data presented was gathered in 1986 and 1987. Since then, the television industry has undergone change. The FCC has relaxed regulations. An increasing number of households are wired to multistation cable systems, resulting in further fractionation of the viewing audience. Competition for advertising dollars has increased and the overall pool of money has stagnated. Local station profit levels are down from the mid 1980's level, but still well above national averages for other industries, according to The National Association of Broadcaster's annual surveys (McManus 211).

In his study, McManus used surveys including questions such as the following:

Does the reporter maintain a neutral stance so one can't tell what his/her personal feelings about the topic are? Does the reporter give all sides to a controversy a chance to summarize their side of the story? Does the reporter help evaluate source comments by giving additional factual evidence for or against arguments sources raise? Does the reporter seem sincere about interviewing the victim of a tragedy, or do they seem too pushy?

As far as the informational richness in the news was tested, McManus used questions such as:

Are the sources quoted providing content that is more factual or reasoned, or more opinionated and emotional?

Factual interviews tend to be with experts, leaders, and officials. The answers are usually specific and impersonal assertions of what's real, or logical arguments. Opinion interviews, in contrast, tend to be with everyday people, perhaps those affected by the event covered. Opinion answers provide personal observations about the advantages or disadvantages of what's real. Opinions are often delivered with considerable feeling. Although emotional opinions have

their place in news, most source comments should be factual (McManus 215).

Because news time is limited, reporters take angles or approaches to stories that emphasize certain facts about an issue or event and diminish the visibility of others. An angle is valid to the extent that it fits the viewers information needs and that reporter interpretations and conclusions are supported by evidence. One example of a question used to study this area in McManus's research was this:

Most reporter generalizations are:

Unsupported by empirical evidence or well supported?

Through McManu's research, he found that the reporters that were surveyed agreed that they felt they were "responsible journalists" and obeyed ethical codes and standards. This study, however, does entail bias due to the fact that those surveyed were all journalists, and were rating themselves in all categories that were evaluated. This alone could cause the results and validity to be overlooked by the public (McManus 215).

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The visual dimension of television news appears to play an important role in the perception of television news credibility. For example, Gaziano and McGrath reported in 1996 that when people experience conflicting news reports, they say that they are most likely to believe the news on television because "seeing is believing" (Slattery 279).

When raising questions about television news credibility, the issue of manufactured visuals must be considered. Gatekeeping research (Berkowitz, 1990, Harmon, 1989) shows that although traditional news values play a major role in news story selection and coverage, visual considerations are also factored into the decisions. When visuals are not available, news practitioners can turn to new technologies, which include digital manipulation and electronic wands, and staging-related techniques to create almost any kind of visual imaginable. This is one area where ethics

in media communication comes into question (Slattery 279).

The following study, done by Ken Slattery, published in the Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, focuses on the issue of identifying sensationalism and staging related techniques used in news stories and their effect on television news story credibility. This study defines staging as the intervention by news professionals into the actions of subjects who appear on camera, for the purpose of visuals that could not otherwise be obtained (Slattery 280).

Professional guidelines caution journalists to limit the staged related techniques to occasional stories and to clearly identify the techniques used as such. The Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) emphasized the importance of alerting the journalists and producers to "visually and or audibly simultaneously identify re-creations and simulations at the time of the broadcast". The RTNDA resolution followed an incident at ABC News in which the network had failed to superimpose the word "simulation" on a staged scene in a story about a U.S. diplomat

suspected of espionage. The network later apologized to its audience (Broadcasting 42).

The professional advice on labeling suggests that news credibility will be preserved if journalists clarify, through the use of labels, the distinction between video of events that are real or authentic and video obtained through a staged set up. Such may not be the case. A series of studies examining the effects of verbal information on visual processing suggest that it is possible to alter the meaning of visual information perceived and stored in memory by manipulating the verbal label or language used to explain the picture. Later studies demonstrated that visual and verbal information interacts in memory and the process can affect the recall and recognition of visual information received. Research suggests that although such labels enable TV news viewers to discriminate between an actual event and a re-enactment or simulation, they also alter the interpretation and evaluation of visual information and the immediate mediated environment in which the visual information exists. However, it is unclear whether viewers evaluate stories containing

staged-related video, labeled in the interest of truthfulness, as more or less credible than the same stories without labels (Slattery 280).

This study also examines the claim by some journalists that the use of staged-related techniques should in fact be stopped to prevent society from having such a negative view of the media. Edward Stone, of The Communicator magazine, emphasizes that network news restrictions which limit staging-related practices to occasional use in narrowly defined situations, are based on the view that journalists should be "just what they purport to be", and the use of a simulation "should be explicitly clear to the viewer". Stone points out that viewers have come to accept journalistic reconstruction of events through traditional editing techniques, but notes that news producers have always treated recreations and simulations as a special genre. He agrees with some journalists who feel the use of recreations damages the reputation of the media (Stone 281).

The experiment used to test the hypothesis consisted of a newscast containing five stories, two of which were manipulated with staged effects and labeling. Two separate stories were included to test

the general effect of the manipulation on news story credibility. A local television station provided the stories and the anchor introductions to each (Slattery 282).

One of the experimental stories was about a shortage of community volunteers to befriend AIDS victims. It featured a volunteer and the person with AIDS with whom the volunteer maintained a friendship. The two principles were shown socializing. The shots were made to look like the two people were great friends and contained the label "re-enactment" at the edge of the screen. The second manipulated story was about thieves robbing someone's home and was labeled as a dramatization. These two test stories were inserted alternately in the third and fourth positions in the newscast. To control for possible story order effects, eight separate versions of the same newscast were developed. The story order was rotated so that the labeled and unlabeled versions of each manipulated story appeared once on both the third and fourth positions of the newscast(Slattery 283).

During the 1989 spring semester at Marquette University, 159 undergraduate students participated in a pilot study conducted to test the validity of the

manipulations. The results indicated no significant difference between the unlabeled test stories on the credibility dimension. The mean credibility score for the unlabeled AIDS story was 5.18, whereas the mean credibility score for the unlabeled theft story was 4.93.

A panel of three news professionals, each with extensive experience, reviewed a final version of the newscast containing both labeled stories. They agreed that the labels were observable and suitable for the types of shots used in the story and that the production techniques used to label were technically appropriate (Slattery 282).

During the 1989 summer session at Marquette University, 240 graduate and undergraduate students participated in the experiment. Class size averaged 15 students or less. To avoid any systematic bias due to enrollment in particular class, subjects were randomly assigned to groups and the groups were randomly assigned to treatment conditions.

After viewing a version of the newscast, subjects completed a questionnaire. The credibility index used for this study included scales used in other news

differential scales, subjects rated each story on the following items:

Doesn't tell the whole story/does tell the story; unfair/fair; inaccurate/accurate; can't be trusted/can be trusted; biased/unbiased.

To test the reliability of the credibility scales, Cronbach's alpha was computed, producing an alpha score of .90 on the credibility scale for the story about AIDS, .90 for the theft story. As a check for order effects, one way analysises of variance were run on the five separate credibility scales for each story. There were no significant differences on any of the scales attributed to order. The mean credibility score for the unlabeled AIDS story was 4.69, while the mean credibility score of the labeled AIDS story was 4.23. The mean credibility score of the unlabeled theft story was 5.11, while the labeled version scored 4.92. Thus, the results indicate that labeling stories that are staged does not significantly reduce the credibility of the story. These results show, in fact, that the stories that were more sensational really had no affect on viewers. The viewers did not feel that the staged stories seemed to include things such as bias,

being unclear, or other characteristics that are often associated with sensationalism (Slattery 283).

A study done by Barbie Zelizer of Temple University was designed to try and answer the question of whether or not communication in journalism is an excuse for ethical dilemmas to arise (Zelizer 79).

Regardless of one's view the discipline of communication, journalism has occupied a central place in it. Communication researchers have long used journalism to explain how communication works and journalist's visibility in mediated discourse has made them a target for scholars seeking to understand the work of communication practitioners and the communication process. The question arises, has communication done its job? Has communication scholarship provided the tools necessary to explain how and why journalism works? Has it explained why publics let reporters present themselves as cultural authority for events of the "real world"? In short, has communication adequately explained journalism and the journalist's views on different areas (Zelizer 80)?

The researcher, Barbie Zelizer argues that journalism researchers have allowed media power to

flourish by not addressing the ritual and collective functions it fulfills for journalists themselves. The study argues for a more interdisciplinary approach to journalism scholarship in order to provide a fuller account of media power. The study also considers the notions of performance, narrative, ritual, and interpretive community as alternative frames through which to consider journalism (Zelizer 80).

Media power is one of the outstanding conundrums of contemporary public discourse, in that we still cannot account for the media's persistent presence as arbiters of events of the real world. Audiences tend to question journalistic authority only when journalist's versions of events conflict with the audience's view of the same events. While critical appraisals of media should be part of everyday life, journalistic power burgeons largely due to the public's general acquiescence and its reluctance to question journalism's parameters and fundamental legitimacy (Zelizer 81).

In part, this has had to do with the rather basic fact that journalists do not invite or appreciate criticism. The media, Lule argued, "engage in critical evaluation of every institution in society

except themselves". Journalists ignore criticism leveled at them in journalism reviews, academic conferences, books, and the alternative press, trying to maintain a stance of autonomous indifference both with events of the real world and that world's most vocal inhabitants, their critics (Zelizer 81).

Yet scholars studying journalism have also been partly responsible for the public's inability to grasp fully the power of journalists. News has been approached primarily by communication researchers "as a sociological problem" by Richard Roshco, a well known communication researcher in his field. Inquiry has favored examining the dominant rather than deviant form of practice. It has generated linear notions of media power that have explained it as a dominance over the weak by the strong, supporting the view, recently voided by sociologist Dennis Wong, that power "is the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others". In adopting a sociological tenor in their scholarship, journalism fits neatly within sociology, but perhaps nowhere else in the academy. Given journalism's complex and multifaceted dimensions, this may mean we have missed much of what constitutes journalism. Reporter's

burgeoning authority underscores the degree to which we have understated journalists consolidation of the power derived from reporting any given event. We thereby need to explore other lenses for examining the trappings of journalism, and to consider how authority and power function as a collective code of knowledge for journalists (Zelizer 82).

The principal thrust of the previous study was to argue for a more interdisciplinary approach to journalism. This is a necessary corrective to the commonly held view of journalism-that it is foremost a sociological problem-for that view has prompted researchers to examine journalism in narrowly defined ways. By recognizing the dependence on sociologically motivated inquiry, one may find they have thus far missed much of journalism's central role in explaining the general communicative practice, this may mean we have missed much of the essence of communication as well (Zelizer 83).

Studies have also been done to determine if ethics in journalism are of great importance considering the effects and influence of television coverage on the public. The following study, done by David Fan, a German researcher, shows how issues

discussed in the media have a heavy influence on decisions made by the public.

It has been shown that the mass media can have profound impacts both in forming the public agenda and in influencing opinion related to that agenda. An enormous number of empirical studies, more than 200 according to Rogers, Dearing and Bergman, well known researchers in the field, have been reported after the initial studies by earlier researchers. Despite the impressive literature on the functions of the media, the results have often been weak and lacked consistency across studies (Fan 123).

The study consisted of 16,344 television news items for 53 weeks. The data was collected and coded by the Konrad-Stiftung agency, which monitors German TV shows on a regular basis. The news items were divided into 227 issues categories and identified important events by extra codes. Based on these 227 categories, the stories were then recorded to obtain numbers of TV items in each week for the 16 survey issues. These 16 issues accounted for about 50% of the news stories that aired during the entire 1996 year of German television (Fan 123).

Among all topics, health care and energy supply were the two issues for which there were the greatest changes in practices in those fields. TV coverage for the remaining 14 issues were combined into a pool denoted as "all others". A plot shows that their coverage was fairly constant until a significant increase occurred towards the end of the year at which time there were also increases in health care discussions, due to the obvious influences in the health care field (Fan 123).

To obtain a corresponding public agenda time series, the responses from 1000 people for the 16 categories were normalized by adding all responses for a week and scaling to 100 to give a public agenda percentage. With all results calculated, the study determined that viewers agreed that certain issues that received more news coverage, did in fact, have an influence on viewers as well as future news broadcasts. The study implicated that certain changes made in the industries covered were influenced by the heavy news coverage (Fan 124).

Micheal Breen of the Journal of Mass Communication, did a study in the summer of 1997 to see if journalists give more attention to certain

issues more so than others, and if that should be an ethical consideration for journalists.

The study focused on what's called the "agenda setting theory", which states that those issues that receive prominent attention in the media give the public the idea that those issues are more important than others (Breen 29).

By calling attention to some matters and not to others, television and newspaper news influences both the standards of judgement and the issues on which leaders are judged. This is particularly significant when the definition of newsworthiness includes deviance and the subjects of news reports are portrayed as socially deviant (Breen 29).

This fascination with deviance without regard to guilt or innocence, has been a well documented feature of news for many years. For this study, Breen chose the coverage of the clergy from 1991-1995. The method used in this research is content analysis of a variety of sources. Coverage is measured as both: the number of clergy dominant stories, and the valence of such stories.

The stories were coded into three categories of what the media thought was important. The remaining

stories were grouped in order of importance as well. After calculating the percentages of what stories the journalists felt were the most important, the numbers showed that the stories chosen as more important for the public's eye included coverage of the clergy (Breen 30).

The reporters were asked if they agreed that a story about the clergy was more important to air than one about child abuse, for example. Sixty-five percent of the journalists said that they would in fact agree to run the clergy story over a child abuse story. With the question of ethics in mind, the journalists were asked if the decision of choosing the stories would be an ethical decision for them. Only a few disagreed that reporters do consider ethics when determining what news content they felt is most important, but felt that ethical issues were not as apparent when stories are of equal content and value to society (Breen 30).

A very recent study survey was done by The Pew Research Center for the People and The Press. This study was done from September 4th-September 11th, 1997, to determine whether journalists give more thought to

sensationalism rather than how their pursuit of the story will affect the subject.

This survey was a telephone interview conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Association among a nationwide sample of 2000 adults, 18 years and older. For the results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2% points (Pew Center 3).

The survey consisted of the caller asking the interviewee if they felt that the media was acting irresponsible with its coverage of Princess Diana, before and after her death. The interviewees were also asked if they felt, in general, that the media acts irresponsibly when covering stories about sensationalism (Pew Center 3).

The results revealed that 1876 people out of the 2000 felt that the media did act irresponsibly not only by covering stories of the late Princess Di, but that they often act negligently in most situations of covering the "news". This study was done as a public opinion poll only and shows no true facts about the media field in itself (Pew Center 4).

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Summary

Considering some of the studies that have been conducted to determine whether or not journalists do, in fact, focus more on sensationalism when reporting, many of the results have determined that it was believed to be true, as well as implied it to be false.

The study done by Ken Slattery, published in the Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, focused on the issue of identifying sensationalism and staging related techniques used in news stories and their effect on television news story credibility. The results suggest that stories with staged video had no more effect on the viewers than did the stories without. The credibility was not questioned by the viewers, and they did not feel that they had been manipulated by sensationalism. Thus, disproving the hypothesis.

The study done by David Fan, a German researcher, was to determine how issues discussed in the media

have a heavy influence on decisions made by the public. The results suggest that the force driving agenda change is information presented in media news coverage. After calculating the results of the study, Fan found that the viewers did agree that certain issues that receive more news coverage do seem to receive more attention in society and therefore result in positive or negative changes in that industry.

The results from the responses of the one thousand people that were surveyed implied that they do agree with the study's hypothesis on whether or not the journalists consider ethics in particular cases such as this one. The results would indicate that the media is manipulating the effects on certain industries due to their coverage of the issues. However, this study did not prove the hypothesis to be true in stating that the media pays more attention to sensationalism. The study did imply that the media favors certain stories over others and therefore that could be pondered by society to question the media's ethics.

The research done by Michael Breen of the Journal of Mass Communication, included a study similar to the previous one. Breen's study was to determine whether

or not journalists give more attention to certain issues over others. This type of study clearly shows what type of stories the media focuses heavily on and which ones are paid little attention. Breen included what he calls the "agenda setting theory", that states that those issues that receive heavy attention also imply to viewers that they are more important issues in society. Also, Breen felt that deviance also played a large part in his agenda setting theory. Certain events, seen as news worthy when deviance is a news norm, serve as triggers for inter-media agenda setting on side issues with very specific results in terms of both volume and valance of ensuing stories. In this case, the reporting of the story of the clergy was chosen to be more important than that of the child abuse; although both stories seem to be equal when considering how deviant they might be.

The following limitations should be noted: First, media treatment of the clergy may be in response to the specific changes now emerging in the light of an increased awareness of abuse. The stories may simply reflect an accurate account of what is happening. Second, the events studied are recent and the trend of media reporting, in the absence of

negative triggers cannot be stated with any accuracy. Third, the sample of news casts is itself limited. A larger study dealing with many more samples or even a comparative study across national boundaries may yield different results. Such limitation aside, interesting trends in this study bear further research.

The study mainly focussed on the agenda setting function of the media in relation to the media itself - how the media set their own agenda for news. Breen found it evident from the results that the framers of the news do yield significant power over what reaches the public.

Media coverage tends to focus on deviant behavior as a result of the journalistic understanding of what constitutes news worthiness. While the negativity of news is a universal phenomena, it does meet certain social and individual needs. The evidence of this study goes beyond the suggestion that the media are simply interested in deviant behavior per se (Breen 35). It appears that the media also create a significant slant on news according to their own schema (Breen 35).

The study indicates that there are parallel areas of research to be done. Is this set of figures simply

applicable to the clergy or generalized to any group in society which becomes associated with deviant behavior? One further possibility would be to do a similar analysis in connection with two other groups. It could also be argued that the media effect of negative coverage comes in part from the nature of the criminally deviant behavior. Does the same effect hold for other illegal or immoral behavior? A final line of inquiry is suggested by the incomplete nature of the results shown. The question arises as to whether previous media coverage of the clergy has set a precedence, and therefore the reporters feel that coverage of the clergy would be more important because abuse by the clergy seems more deviant than abuse in general (Breen 36). The last study discussed was done by the Pew Research Center for the People and the press. The study was a phone interview to two thousand adults questioning if the media did or did not act irresponsibly with its coverage of Princess Diana. The study concluded that ninety four percent of the interviewees felt that the media does act irresponsibly quite often and seem more concerned about sensationalism than reporting the news. This study's results are a good indication of public

opinion about journalism. The study included several questions designed specifically to show if interviewees agree with the hypothesis. The Pew Center was not surprised to find the ninety four percent result in agreement. Although only two thousand people were surveyed the results are a good indication of what would be found in future studies, with possibly a larger pool of subjects.

Considering the chosen studies to evaluate, each piece of research appears to support the hypothesis - media practitioners do not consider the outcome of ethical issues and immoral judgements. Although each study was different in its substance, the results have all implied the same evaluation. Each study showed a different aspect of ethical issues considered by the media, and all concluded to point towards an agenda of selfishness on the journalists part. Whether the issue is video staging, topic favoritism, agenda setting, or sensationalism, the areas all lead to ethical issues encountered by the media. As long as the results of different studies prove to show that the media does regard "getting the story" as the most important, the stereotype set for the media will remain a negative one.

For anyone who reviews the results of different research done on this matter, it would remain to be seen that journalism does in fact have a negative reputation in the public's eye, and the media does not consider the outcome or relevance of immoral judgements.

Limitations

During the course of this project, a problem that arose was that of the rarity of research done on this topic. Although there seems to be many studies on practices of the media, there is little on the actual beliefs and opinions of the public regarding the issue. For example, the first study chosen focussed more on how the media staged news stories to produce sensationalism. It proved to be true that staging is definitely an ethical issue that the reporters were overlooking, however, the study mainly showed that the viewers found the stories equally credible. Although it is implied that staging of stories was used to produce sensationalism in order to produce larger ratings, the study showed no real effect on viewers

beliefs in regards to ethical consideration. This was one limitation to this particular study.

The study done by German researcher, David Fan, showed changes in two fields of which were receiving greater media coverage. The study did show that certain issues that were receiving more coverage had an influence on viewers, and they felt that future broadcasts would also be influenced by this issue. Fan suggested that changes were made in those industries receiving heavy news coverage, but provided no hard facts to that effect. The only evidence of this matter was that the viewers did agree upon the hypothesis as being true. One limitation to Fan's study was that he implied that the media is being unethical by choosing and giving more attention to particular issues and industries. This study did not show any true facts questioning the ethics of the media. Also, the data collection in this study was poor. Fan collected responses from only one thousand people in one demographic area in Germany. The results may have been quite different if the researcher had chosen a larger geographical area and a larger pool of people. Due to the fact that the issues in question were issues receiving heavy

attention in this particular area in Germany, the subjects could have been more influenced or attained bias.

Michael Breen's study possessed limitations as well. The study was completed by interviewing reporters on whether they agree upon airing certain deviant stories over others. In this study, Breen chose two very similar areas to base his evaluation on; abuse by the clergy, and child abuse in general. When questioning the reporters on whether or not choosing the stories would be an ethical decision for them, few disagreed, but also noted that the stories seemed of equal importance. Breen might possibly have had a different outcome if he had chosen different types of issues for the reporters to identify ethical issues. Also, Breen produced bias by only interviewing the journalists themselves. His findings would naturally portray the journalists as they wished when they were the only subjects being sampled. The truth of how the public perceives the media in regards to ethics could not have been answered with this particular study.

The research done by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, gave the best descriptions

of how society truly views the media. The telephone survey was nationwide and included straight forward and to-the-point questions. However, this study may have included some bias due to the fact that some of the questions involved the death of Princess Diana, and the study was done only a week after her death. Considering the publicity her death received in regards to the possibility of guilt upon the media, this may have had some impact on the public. There were many reports on whether or not the media would go to any length to get a story, and many viewers saw these reports which could have influenced them and therefore produced bias in this study. If this study had been done prior to the death of Princess Diana, it would have most likely not produced the same results.

Suggestion for Future Research

Some suggestions for future research would include that of more directly related studies to the exact hypothesis. It would have been more helpful if there had been more research done prior to the recent reports and studies instigated by Princess Diana's death. Researchers are now beginning to focus on

studies that directly question sensationalism and ethics in the media. I find this subject a most interesting one and am surprised at the lack of research I found through numerous sources.

To have produced more factual results to prove the hypothesis true or null, the researchers could have gathered more pertinent information as well as larger sample populations. The largest sample consisted of two thousand people. This number seems low when trying to prove the opinion of the entire country. Also, I conclude that many of the tests used by the researchers did not include enough of a variety in the examples used, or a good mixture of questioning to prove the hypothesis.

Considering doing research on this subject again, I would search further for more appropriate testing methods and a wider variety of studies. I might suggest looking for research through sources other than book text, or the internet. If possible, doing the actual research oneself would be more beneficial to produce the analysis for the exact hypothesis. Another idea would be to inquire at journalism schools on whether or not they might be interested in participating in a research project of this type.

It is interesting to be aware that much of society does in fact agree that the media focuses on sensationalism and disregards ethics. There are media reports on television often that portray the media themselves as disregarding someone's right to privacy to get the story and photo. The media continues to behave unethically to produce a negative image for themselves. I am shocked that there is not more evidence to the stereotype that the public has given the media and how they perceive them.

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