# ethical space

The International
Journal of Communication Ethics
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## NEWS

- ICE conference: Call for papers
- PR expert on the right to lie

## VIEWS

- Don Hale on the dilemmas faced when researching a mysterious death
- Barry Turner on anti-terrorism legislation and investigative journalism
- Tessa Mayes on using children as TV sleuths

## ARTICLES

- Sallyanne Duncan on ethics and the blogosphere
- Marlis Prinzing and Stephan Russ-Mohl report on a major research conference
- Antonia Carding on the ethics of suicide coverage

## PAPER

- Peter Simmons examines the pressures on the ethical disclosure of news sources by journalists

## PLUS

- Book reviews – and much more

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The International Journal of Communication Ethics



**Publishing Office**
Abramis Academic,
ASK House, Northgate Avenue, Bury St. Edmunds,
Suffolk, IP32 6BB, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1284 700321
Fax: +44 (0)1284 717889
Email: info@abramis.co.uk
Web: www.abramis.co.uk




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## Aims and scope

Communication ethics is a discipline that supports communication practitioners by offering tools and analyses for the understanding of ethical issues. Moreover, the speed of change in the dynamic information environment presents new challenges, especially for communication practitioners.

Ethics used to be a specialist subject situated within schools of philosophy. Today it is viewed as a language and systematic thought process available to everyone. It encompasses issues of care and trust, social responsibility and environmental concern and identifies the values necessary to balance the demands of performance today with responsibilities tomorrow.

For busy professionals, CE is a powerful learning and teaching approach that encourages analysis and engagement with many constituencies, enhancing relationships through open-thinking. It can be used to improve organisation performance as well as to protect individual well-being.

## Submissions

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# Contents



## *Editorial Board*



Special thanks to David Houlton, Robert Beckett and Maryline Gagnère
**Contact:** ICE Administrator, Katherine Hill, Faculty of Media, Business and Marketing, Leeds Trinity and All Saints, Brownberrie Lane, Horsforth, Leeds, LS18 5HD, UK
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EDITORIAL

# On cultivating the reflective practitioner

The question of suicide lies at the heart of the human predicament – drawing in a vast range of philosophical, ethical, social and cultural issues. Indeed, according to the French journalist, novelist and philosopher Albert Camus, at the start of *The Myth of Sisyphus*: 'There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest – whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories – comes afterwards.'

Moreover there are 800,000 suicides around the world each year, according to the World Health Organization. Some 30 per cent of the world's population suffer some form of mental illness yet two thirds receive inadequate or no treatment – even in countries with the best resources. Clearly, given the current global crisis in mental illness, the media bear an enormous responsibility to cover the fundamental issues surrounding suicide and depression with appropriate sensitivity. As the title of the new MediaWise Trust's study of the media's portrayal of suicide stresses: *Sensitive Coverage Saves Lives* (see News).

Yet too often, driven by the need to improve ratings and circulations, the media sensationalize their coverage of suicidal behaviour, intruding into terrible personal tragedy and causing unnecessary upset for the bereaved. In Britain, a massive controversy erupted in January 2006 after three newspapers (*The Times*, the *Sun* and London's *Evening Standard*) published photographs of a woman leaping to her death from the ledge of a London hotel. A series of complaints were made to the Press Complaints Commission, yet the PCC first ruled that the existing Code of Conduct had not been breached since the decision to publish was one of 'taste and decency' over which it had no jurisdiction.

Then on 29 June 2006, following the submission of compelling evidence from the Samaritans and others that media reporting of suicide often prompted copycat cases, the PCC added a new Clause 5 ii to the Code: 'When reporting suicide, care should be taken to avoid excessive detail about the method used.' Whether this amendment to the code actually changes journalistic practice remains to be seen. A cynic might argue that journalists operating in the capitalist market-place often see the code's clauses as hurdles to be jumped rather than as clear ethical guidelines to be respected.

Significantly, the MediaWise survey found that there was 'some reluctance' amongst journalists to engage in self criticism, with suicide rarely considered a 'compelling topic for discussion'. Such a reluctance to engage in self criticism may characterize many other journalistic cultures around the world. The survey adds appropriately: 'Journalists themselves are not immune to the pressures that drive people to suicide or bring on depression, and they too have personal experience of the distress caused by sudden death. The pity is that media professionals seem to isolate themselves from their audiences, as if unwilling to acknowledge a correlation between their life experiences and their work.'

Both the MediaWise report and Antonia Carding, writing elsewhere in this issue of *Ethical Space* (Handling suicide coverage: The importance of the ethical approach) highlight the need for better education of journalists on the issues surrounding suicide and mental illness. As Carding rightly concludes: '…stereotypical and sensational media representation of mental health issues in the popular press is one of the major contributors to the public's poor understanding of such issues, including suicide. Since the media and the popular press play such an important role in determining dominant attitudes and agendas, it is more crucial than ever that journalism teaching and practice acknowledges the importance of the responsible handling of suicide'.

**Richard Keeble**
University of Lincoln

  

NEWS

# Communicating diversity: Call for papers

'Every word matters: Communicating diversity' is the title of the annual conference of the Institute of Communication Ethics on 16 November 2007 at Leeds Trinity and All Saints College, Brownberrie Lane, Horsforth, Leeds LS18 5HD.

This one-day, international conference, organized by the leading communication ethics institute in the UK, is an opportunity for practitioners and academics to come together and discuss the crucial issues that surround the communication of diversity – diversity in all its forms. Thus discussions may focus on:

- representations of ethnic diversity, class and gender in the media – both in Britain and abroad;
- the Internet and campaigns for people with disabilities;
- promoting awareness of diversity issues in higher education;
- language, ideology and myth in the constructions of diversity.

The conference will be in a café format enabling relaxed, creative dialogue between all delegates. Papers will be short (around 10 minutes each) with the emphasis placed on the ensuing discussion.

Position papers/articles or statements are welcome and will be published as part of the conference papers and may also be carried in *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*. They should be between 1,000 and 2,500 words and sent to Fiona Thompson, chair of the Institute of Communication Ethics, (f.thompson@leedstrinity.ac.uk) or Richard Keeble (rkeeble@lincoln.ac.uk), ICE director and joint editor of *Ethical Space*.

# New book reviews editor for *Ethical Space*

*Ethical Space* now has a book reviews editor in the southern hemisphere, complementing the work of Prof. John Tulloch in the north. Dr Mary Griffiths, who is associate professor and head of media at the University of Adelaide, Australia, researches the diverse political and social outcomes of new media practices, especially the cultural and ethical contexts of e-democracy, censorship regimes, e-citizens, citizen journalism, social networking online, online participation and learning, and mobile media. She will enrich the journal through her academic networks in Australia, New Zealand and Europe.

Dr Griffiths is an associate editor for EJEG: the electronic journal of e-government and on the editorial boards of the *Journal of E-Government and Southern Review: Communication, Politics and Culture*. On the conference executive of the annual European Conference in E-Government, she initiated, and chairs, the e-democracy track. Her recent publications include Media-savvy professionals: Intranets and reinventing government (EJEG 2007) and she co-authored a chapter on online pedagogy, The 'pastoral' in virtual space: A tale of two systems and how e-learning practitioners remake them.

The reviews editors welcome suggestions for titles to review and offers to review items. Please contact either editor, at jtulloch@lincoln.ac.uk and mary.griffiths@adelaide.edu.au.

# The Ethics of Research in Communication and Media Studies: Call for Conference Papers

Attempts to prescribe how we should examine ethics need to recognize the breadth of the topic. Since there is no area of human activity outside its scope, ethics is necessarily a broad field. One of the carefully specified methodologies in ethics, however, is 'research ethics'. Partly as a result of the World Medical Association's work in medical ethics, there are strong assumptions in favour of examining research ethics in terms of specific agenda. These include the informed consent of research subjects, the maintenance of confidentiality of subject specific data, the avoidance of harm to research subjects or participants. They include too a certain presumption in favour of standards of scientific rigour, epitomized perhaps in randomized controlled trials.

But many components of such an approach are inapplicable outside medical research or, more generally, outside the constraints of scientific research conceived within a particular paradigm. This is particularly true perhaps of communication and media research, communications being concerned with every aspect of human activity and behaviour. The ethical issues of communication research, therefore, extend beyond matters of deontology. They include approaches to ethics which examine the primacy of 'the other' in communication (Levinas), communication and power (Habermas), communication and the practice of virtue (MacIntyre). Inevitably, a wide range of ethical issues emerges. For instance:

- The much treasured principle of freedom of expression means that people's feelings are sometimes ignored with impunity in material published in the press. Such matters are within the scope of communication ethics. But are we entitled to be similarly disdainful of people's feelings or even harm suffered by them when publishing communication research which might quote and repeat hurtful messages?

- Those affected by communication are the dispersed viewers and readerships of globalized media. How could those affected by these media be identified or in any meaningful sense be sampled?

- Are there nevertheless some ethical constraints that should be applied to communication research to avoid harm to those involved in our research? And how do we define who is involved in our research?

- Do the (sometimes) anonymous authors of texts that appear in the press become participants in our research just because their work comes within the domain of our research or scholarship?

- What implications are there for seeking informed consent?

- Confidentiality is another difficult area. Rather than striving to protect confidentiality, a free press strives to expose secrets and confidentialities in favour of a presumption of openness. Is communication research entitled to adopt the same presumption?

- It would be inappropriate to assume that the canons of medical research ethics can be always applied to communication research. But does that leave the field without any guidance on the ethics of communication research? What might such guidance be and what fresh ethical issues does such guidance raise?

These and associated questions are the subject of a special issue of the journal, *Ethical Space*, the journal of the Institute of Communication Ethics. The Special Issue will be guest edited by the Revd Dr John Strain who teaches applied and professional ethics at Surrey University, UK and is a Director of the Centre for Applied and Professional Ethics.

Proposals for full length articles (5,000 words) and shorter case studies (2,500 words) are invited. They should include abstracts of the proposed work in not more than 500 words and full contact details. They should be forwarded to j.strain@surrey.ac.uk. Full submissions will be required by 1 March 2008.

# Journalist gunned down: Little response

In August 2007, Chauncey Bailey, editor of the *Oakland Post*, a small African-American paper in the USA, was gunned down on the street. At the time, he was investigating a local business, Your Black Muslim Bakery. An employee was arrested and, according to the police, confessed to the murder (though the man has denied it).

Bailey is not the first American journalist to be killed while reporting. Thirty-two years ago, Don Bolles, a reporter with the *Arizona Republic*, died in Phoenix after a bomb destroyed his car. Following his murder, the Arizona Project (www.ire.org/history/arizona.html) was set up by concerned journalists from around America to investigate the corruption behind the killing.

According to Dan Gillmor, a director of the Center for Citizen Media: 'The project had its flaws. Critics called the entire idea a mistake. But the "Desert Rats" (www.ire.org/history/desertrats.html) — the reporters and editors who did the work — and the news organizations that supported and published the long series did, in the end, have an impact (www.azcentral.com/specials/special01/0528bolles-arizonaproject.html) both on Arizona's power structure and the investigative-journalism field. Above all, they tried to send a message to those who would silence journalists: It won't work.'

In contrast to the response to the Bolles' murder, journalists today did little more than indulge in hand-wringing over Bailey's killing, according to Gillmor. 'The Arizona Project was, clearly, one of a kind. But the financial pressures on media organizations mean that even if people wanted to do another Arizona Project they probably couldn't, at least not the way they did in the 1970s. As traditional media organizations whack away at their staffs and play to Wall Street's unceasing demands, many are all but abandoning serious investigative work, too.'

• Gillmor is author of *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism for the people, by the People* (2004, O'Reilly Media). His blog is at http://citmedia.org/blog/

# How sensitive reports can save lives

Suicide coverage should be included in vocational training for media professionals and where possible training should include access to relatives or survivors of suicide attempts and representatives of support group.

These are among the recommendations of a detailed report, *Sensitive Coverage Saves Lives: Improving Media Portrayal of Suicidal Behaviour*, by the media ethics campaigning group MediaWise, following consultations with journalists, suicide prevention agencies and mental health groups.

It suggests that following the introduction of a new sub-clause into the Editor's Code of Practice on reducing the risk of suicides, the Press Complaints Commission will need to work closely with editors to limit breaches.

A review of recent coverage of suicides in the UK media concludes that the 'shock' and 'celebrity' factors appear to count higher in rating the newsworthiness of a suicidal event than broader, more relevant issues (such as debt, depression and despair).

'The provision of helpline details is not commonplace and there is some evidence throughout that even the most basic guidance on responsible reporting has been ignored or at least not taken into full account.'

There is a clear gulf between people committed to improving services and facilities for people at risk of suicide and the journalists who report about people who take their own lives, according to the report.

'There is a perception among the former that journalists don't really "care" about the people and problems they write about. More contact between journalists and mental health and suicide prevention groups might help.'

MediaWise conducted its research on behalf of the Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP) (www.csip.org.uk) and the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) (www.nimhe.csip.org). The study is also part of both the Shift programme (www.shift.org.uk) to reduce stigma and discrimination, and the national suicide prevention strategy for England. The full report can be downloaded from www.mediawise.org.uk.

# Website highlights anti-racism in sport

A new website, http://empower-sport.com, is committed to exposing and eliminating racism in sport. Founder Satish Sekar commented: 'I was shocked to find that there were no media that dealt with this issue exclusively. We feel that sport has the unique capacity to embrace equality and competitive spirit in equal measure and that through the continued expansion of football and other sports, we can help meet the common goal of greater global integration in sport.'

Messages of support have already come from such celebrities as Geno Washington, the legendary blues singer, Sue Law, former England footballer and currently the FA's head of equality and child protection, and radio presenter Henry Bonsu.

A typical news story focuses on how plans to send 20 talented young Palestinian footballers to the UK were totally dependent on the Israelis giving them visas. And that was not certain.

## Campaign stops lads' mags sales

Marks and Spencer have decided to stop selling all lads' mags following a campaign led by the group, Object. M. and S. is keen to promote its ethical policies and refuses to invest in businesses involved in the pornography industry.

Object is now aiming to persuade M. and S. to stop selling the Richard Desmond-owned *Star* newspaper. Those concerned can write to Matt Rogers, CEO's Office, Marks and Spencer, Retail Customer Services, Chester Business Park, Wrexham Rd, Chester CH4 9GA; tel: 020 7935 4422.

A detailed, critical analysis of lads' mags by Object concluded: 'Their constant denigration, trivialization and sexualization of women is further bolstered by their promotion of voyeurism; the blurring of fantasy and reality; the message that women are to be judged, rated, scored and found wanting; that women are commodities to be owned.'

• For more information see www.object.org.uk

## Media 'missing the mark on impeachment'

Across America, the campaign to impeach President Bush for abuse of power and subversion of the constitution is intensifying. Scores of towns and cities have passed resolutions calling for impeachment proceedings to begin. On 28 April impeachment rallies were held in 125 cities including Seattle, Minneapolis, Boston, Honolulu and Memphis. And yet the topic is hardly raised in the national media, according to Cynthia Cooper, writing in the July/August 2007 issue of *Extra!* the journal of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR).

On the rare occasions when it is considered, the subject is normally treated with 'derision, dismissal and denial', she argues. 'At a time when people need coherent, informative and probing discussions of presidential misconduct and constitutional standards, the major media are simply missing the mark on impeachment.'

• See http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=3149

## Site examines the future of journalism

The End of Journalism? is an online forum for people who feel uneasy about the current state of journalism and who wish to discuss and analyse the crisis. EofJ aims to open the floor for a dedicated discussion on the future of international journalism with the aim of improving the quality of communication in the public sphere.

Commentaries and relevant links are filed under seven categories: managers and moguls, cost cutting, PR pressure, professional fatigue, user-generated content, media regulation and censorship. Benchmark pieces of excellent journalism as well as concerns or complaints about the industry are filed under two categories: best practice and misconduct. Another part of the site examines the future of journalism.

Set up in early 2007, the site is run by the alumni of IJP's annual British-German journalists' conference. IJP is a global association based in Germany organizing vocational training abroad for journalists from more than 40 countries.

• See www.end-of-journalism.org. For more details contact Internationale Journalisten-Programme e.V. (IJP), Höhenblick 2, 61462 Königstein/ Ts, Germany (www.ijp.org).

## PR expert promotes the right to lie

The 'pursuit of lying' should be added to the UN list of human rights, according to Klaus A. Kocks, former chief spin doctor for the German nuclear industry. In a controversial talk to a seminar organized by the Swiss Journalism School and the European Journalism Observatory in Lucerne, he argued that journalism was a specific form of PR allowing editors and their proprietors to sell room for advertising. Discrimination against public lying was a 'neurotic obsession of Calvinist witch-hunters'.

'Being strongly opposed to discriminating against lies and very much in favour of story-telling, I realize that journalists tend to define themselves as "fact-finders" and "truth tellers". That sounds like ethics carved in stone: only facts, only the truth. The sun of enlightenment shines in our eyes. Well, am I impressed? No I'm not.'

He continued: 'As a matter of fact, the truth has very seldom been a relevant category of public speaking. As a speaker you had to be smart, charismatic, entertaining, whatever, but never was there any misunderstanding about the fact that a merchant in the market wants to sell his products. By almost any means.'

The full proceedings of the conference which explored the relationship between PR and journalism are contained in *A Complicated, Antagonistic and Symbiotic Affair: Journalism, public relations and their struggle for public attention*, edited by Bernd Merkel, Stephan Russ-Mohl and Giovanni Zavaritt. See http://ejo.ch for details. For a critical commentary on Kocks' talk by Professor David Miller, of the Spinwatch website, see http://www.spinwatch.org/content/view/230/8/. Another recent publication by the EJO, *Media Journalism in the Attention Cycle: Problems, Perspectives, Visions*, follows another EJO conference exploring media journalism – defined as journalism which covers media and journalism as a topic.

# Young 'denied a voice' in UK media

Young people are being denied a voice in the national UK media, a survey in *Young People Now* magazine reveals. Youngsters appeared in only 11 per cent of the reports related to them while almost 80 per cent of national coverage was negative towards young people. The research, carried out by TNS Media Intelligence, found the broadcast media were particularly negative, showing youngsters negatively in 87 per cent of coverage.

# Leaks site boosts investigative journalism

Investigative journalism has been given an extraordinary boost with the launch of wikileaks.org. Based on the wikipedia model, it aims to facilitate 'untraceable mass document leaking and analysis'. Its primary focus is on the oppressive regimes in Asia, the former Soviet bloc, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East as well as unethical behaviour by Western corporations and governments.

Founded by a coalition of journalists, mathematicians, dissidents and start-up company technologists from the US, Taiwan, Europe, Australia and South Africa, it claims sophisticated cryptographic technology ensures the protection of the leaker's anonymity.

In August 2007, international media reported its exclusive revelation of a secret report claiming that relatives and associates of the former Kenyan President, Daniel arap Moi, siphoned off more than £1bn of government money.

• See www.wikileaks.org

# Bylines: but where are the women?

Although women account for half the population in Australia and New Zealand, a new survey of major Australasian newspapers has found that female journalists account for only 34 per cent of bylined stories in Australia and 36 per cent in New Zealand.

Writing in the current issue of *Australian Journalism Review*, Cathy Strong and Grant Hannis, of Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand, say that at some newspapers, female bylines accounted for half of front page and general news reports, but there were few women's bylines on the sports pages and in opinion pieces.

They conclude: 'Female readers, therefore, lack strong role models among sports reporters and, more importantly, among those the daily newspapers regard as having opinions that matter.' They suggest more should be done to encourage women to stay in the newspaper industry long term move into traditionally male areas and rise to senior positions.

In another paper, Ann Hardy, of the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand, examines New Zealand media coverage of a protest march on Parliament in August 2004 by supporters of the morally conservative, evangelical Destiny Church. She argues: 'The extensive and emotive coverage of this event demonstrates the validity of claims by American researcher Mark Silk (1995) that when journalists are ill-informed about issues in religion , they tend to fall back on a number of simplistic themes, the deployment of which is neither enlightening for the public nor satisfying for the religious organizations covered.' She suggests journalism education should incorporate courses about religious organizations, their procedures and beliefs.

• See the *Australian Journalism Review* Vol. 29, No. 1. For subscriptions contact Dr Cathy Jenkins, JEA Treasurer, School of Arts, Media and Culture, Griffith University, Nathan, Queensland 4111, Australia; email: c.jenkins@griffith.edu.au.

# Death of leading media ethicist

Claude-Jean Bertrand, the eminent media ethicist and member of the *Ethical Space* editorial board, has died in Paris. In all he published 20 books on media ethics, American civilization, Methodism and a range of other topics and his articles were published in 20 languages. He co-authored a book on pornography and even compiled a book of his favourite jokes.

Throughout much of his work on ethics he promoted the concept of M*A*S (Media Accountability Systems). He believed passionately in the capacity of individuals, groups and journalists themselves within democracies to improve standards by putting pressure on the media to change.

He defined the M*A*S as 'a non-governmental means of inducing media and journalists to respect the ethical rules set by the profession. They are extremely diverse but all aim at improving news media, using evaluation, monitoring, education, feedback and communication'.

Thus he identified 120 M*A*S – such as readers letters, codes of conduct, in-house ombudsmen, blogs, journalism reviews and media columns in newspapers and magazines.

He first ran a programme on American civilization at the universities of Strasbourg and Paris-X and then taught communication studies at the Institut français de presse at the Université de Paris-2 (where in 1995 he became an Emeritus Professor).

Claude supported the work of ICE from its beginnings. He attended the inaugural conference at City University, London, in 2003 and contributed a number of articles to *Ethical Space*.

He is survived by his wife, Michèle, four children and five grandchildren. All of us associated with *Ethical Space* and the Institute of Communication Ethics send our deepest condolences to Claude's family.

  

# Diving deep to extract the truth about a mysterious death

***Award-winning investigative journalist Don Hale examines some of the complex issues he faced when researching into the mysterious and controversial death of a British naval frogman more than half a century ago***

In April 1956, a British naval frogman, Commander Lionel 'Buster' Crabb, disappeared in mysterious circumstances during a secret mission under the hull of a Russian warship moored in Portsmouth Harbour. The ship had brought Soviet leaders Krushchev and Bulganin to Britain for a sensitive state visit at the height of the Cold War.

After Crabb failed to return, the press finally got hold of the story and Anglo-Soviet relations suddenly reached an all-time low. The establishment immediately closed ranks, and so began a rather cumbersome intelligence operation to bury the truth.

And just fourteen months later Crabb's headless and handless body was found in Chichester Harbour, sparking an unprecedented row between the British government, the secret services, the Admiralty, the KGB and even the CIA – that still smoulders today.

The full circumstances of his mission, together with the names of key personnel involved, have been kept under lock and key for more than 50 years – with a further half-century government ban now accepted and endorsed – due to the continued sensitivity of the case.

Following my own inquiries however, it became clear that despite severe restrictions, many of Crabb's current relatives, former friends and diving colleagues still demanded to know the truth about his final dive, and remained concerned at claims that he may have deliberately defected to Russia, turning his back on a country that he had served with distinction for decades.

**Was Crabb a Soviet spy?**

Others questioned though, whether he had, in fact, outsmarted everyone and had, indeed, operated as a Soviet spy, or as a double agent – as had some of his former friends and associates before him.

I must admit that despite a concerted effort, I could find little or no evidence to support these claims. Moreover, I found it very hard to believe the many conspiracy stories, fully believing the Russians would have proudly paraded him through Moscow's Red Square, if any of this were true.

In April 1956, Crabb was undoubtedly the country's top navy diver. He had first gained deserved plaudits during numerous daring WW2 missions in Gibraltar and Italy, thwarting teams of crack Italian saboteurs who had tried to destroy Allied shipping by securing mines from innovative underwater charioteers.

He later continued by persuading many highly acclaimed and experienced members of the Italian 10th Flotilla to change sides and to work for him in making Venice safe again from Nazi booby traps and mines, and to join in with attacks on Axis Forces.

His work in successfully countering these attacks in Gibraltar probably helped change the course of the war, earning him an OBE, George Medal, and a coveted place in Lord Louis Mountbatten's 'secret' intelligence unit.

Crabb's continued expertise in underwater warfare proved invaluable both during and after the war in further secret missions in Israel, Egypt, Malta, Russia, and later in home waters.

Working alongside naval intelligence chief Ian Fleming, wartime MI5 chief Anthony Blunt, and traitorous Soviet agents Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean and 'Kim' Philby, Crabb soon gained a remarkable insight into the sometimes unorthodox workings of British intelligence.

It was not too surprising, therefore, that after World War Two, Fleming, the journalist, later used many of Crabb's extraordinary and eccentric exploits as the basis, and indeed inspiration, for his 007 writings about the fictional spy James Bond.

**Securing access to the secrets**

Working extensively with several of Crabb's ex-naval colleagues, I was occasionally able to utilize the Freedom of information Act to access and analyse some important documentation – released in dribs and drabs – from the


 

Cabinet Office, MI5, National archives, and other intelligence agencies.

And by a slow process of elimination and re-applications and comparisons to the Polish, American and European authorities, a clearer picture soon began to emerge, and I was gradually able to fill in many missing blanks to finally reveal the precise circumstances of this final mission.

This also included evidence that Crabb's former commanding officer and other senior colleagues had tried to investigate the case nearly 20 years before, and that the BBC had once threatened to expose part of the plot but – like many people before them – they had all been blocked and threatened by the government of the day and the use of the Official Secrets Act and 'D' notices.

As usual in most initial intelligence inquiries, officials immediately hide behind a mountain of red tape and bureaucracy, claiming it would not be in the public interest to divulge certain information. However, I was pleasantly surprised by the determination of several like-minded individuals from across the globe to join in and help me to resolve this scenario.

The story then became a plot within a plot, a series of deals and double deals, intelligence and counter intelligence missions, cleverly disguising fact and fiction. Crabb's complicated missions also related to other unexplained wartime mysteries including the loss and probable sabotage of Polish General Sikorski's plane in Gibraltar, and an important role in searching for valuable stolen treasures.

**How the FBI proved 'surprisingly' helpful**

The FBI in America surprisingly proved most helpful, and revealed the extent of their early knowledge regarding the Cambridge spies, and a plan to interview Blunt during a lecture tour of the States at the exact same time as Crabb's final briefing.

Their paperwork also confirmed a unique and previously unknown letterbox system at the British Embassy in Cairo that outlined plans for Burgess and Maclean's defection. Much of this information was later used to expose Blunt.

Additional British intelligence papers and recently released copies of confidential reports from Cabinet files, the office of Prime Minister Eden, and the final result of a specific inquiry from Sir Edward Bridges, the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office and Admiralty, added more substance to my other findings.

And although much of the published work still remained blanked-out, my additional research through a variety of supporters, informants and ex-navy personnel, finally confirmed the relevant facts.

Eventually, a substantial file of 'Top Secret,' and 'For Your Eyes Only,' government documentation revealed and confirmed the full extent of a massive and unprecedented cover-up concerning Crabb's disappearance – coupled with the enormous task of keeping a permanent lid on proceedings.

I find it quite extraordinary that the Government of today still feel the need to continue to ban the contents of Crabb's file until 2057. What purpose does it serve? And what harm can this really do to either international or Anglo-Soviet relations?

This case has already been the subject of fierce debate in Parliament several times over the past five decades and, remarkably, the role of Russians and their notorious KGB officers has once again been questioned, more recently over another mysterious death of another intelligence agent on British soil.

Despite the intensity of the current controversy, and the knowledge of the past, this present government still manages to avoid admitting the truth, or to revealing the full circumstances of the matter.

We should therefore be thankful that we still have a relatively free and curious press, coupled with the strength and determination of certain key individuals, to seek justice, by helping to reveal many of these incredible anomalies.

**• The precise findings of Don Hale's investigation into the Crabb affair are to be revealed in his latest book, *The Final Dive: The Life and Death of 'Buster' Crabb*, published in October 2007 by Sutton-Haynes. Don Hale has collected a host of regional, national and international awards for investigative journalism. In June 2002 he received an OBE for his campaigning journalism in the Stephen Downing miscarriage of justice case. His book on the so-called 'Bakewell Tart' case, *Town Without Pity*, was short-listed for the Crime Writers' Association Gold Digger award for non-fiction and was made into a successful television drama.**

  

VIEW

# Reporting Extremism: Why do we still want to shoot the messenger?

***Legal expert Barry Turner looks at the implications of recent anti-terrorism legislation for investigative journalism in the UK***

From the end of the 1960s to the second half of the 1990s Britain faced a domestic terror threat of unparalleled sophistication. While successive governments pledged to eliminate terrorism, the most highly organized, best trained and best equipped terrorist network formed under the banner of the Provisional Irish Republican Army.

All the efforts of the British government failed to bring this organization down and 30 years of violence, murder and mayhem only ended when the IRA had effectively achieved many of its aims. During the 1980s the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher decided the organization's increasing strength and effectiveness was somehow linked to its ability to grab media headlines rather than the government's own political and military ineptitude in fighting it.

The Conservative government embarked on a series of legislative measures to 'starve the IRA of the oxygen of publicity'. A series of clumsy, ineffective pieces of legislation supposedly designed to prevent IRA spokespersons from glorifying in attacks were introduced which led to the bizarre spectacle of Sinn Fein politicians and IRA spokespersons making silent films – only to have their exact words dubbed over by actors speaking in cod Ulster accents. The media launched legal challenges to this absurdity and it finally faded away having failed to achieve anything in terms of defeating terrorism or stopping its attacks.

Today we are faced by what our governments call a 'new threat'. Our governments like to enhance this often by using the phrase 'new and even more deadly' as if it were marketing some brand name. This is the brand of international terrorism often described as 'Islamist' or Al Qaeda. We are told this form of terrorism is much harder to fight than those that went before it and that, therefore, new laws are needed. We are even assured that while these laws will restrict civil liberties they are a price worth paying for our safety.

**Reporters under threat**

The major problem with the terrorism legislation is its broad-brush approach, which is not only directed at the perpetrators and supporters of terrorist acts but can even catch those reporting them. Sections 57 and 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000 refer to being in possession of materials of use to a terrorist. Such material could, for instance, include statements made by terrorists or their supporters, which could be read as encouragement to commit acts of terrorism. This has been redefined in the 2006 Terrorism Act with reference to 'glorification' or 'encouragement'. Terrorists have always been encouraged by and have always glorified in the reporting of their acts in the media.

The IRA referred to gross acts of terrorism as 'spectaculars', in part a reference to the amount of media coverage the act caused. By that model any amount of reporting could be seen to encourage. The journalist does, of course, have a defence in that the intention was ostensibly to inform the public – not to glorify or encourage the terrorists. But, remarkably, the burden of proof is reversed and by Section 118 of the 2000 Act they must demonstrate to the jury's satisfaction that this is the case.

It has to be said that the journalist has only to reach the civil standard of proof and that the prosecution must reach the criminal standard in rebuttal. But the journalist has still been arrested and charged with terrorist related offences – with all the trauma that such an event would cause. Any acquittal may not wipe the slate clean. The fact that the journalist was arrested could lead to prohibitions on entry to many states and may seriously damage their future career.

**Caught in the crossfire**

The Terrorism Act 2006 Section 8 makes it an offence for a person to attend any place in the UK or abroad that is being used to train terrorists. There is no requirement under this section for the person to be actually receiving any training and, therefore, any journalist being present at such a place would effectively be committing the offence. It is clear that a journalist who was perhaps invited to interview any person connected with terrorism would need to be especially careful about where this interview took place. To conduct such an interview at a location used for training or instructing terrorists could lead to the charge of encouragement and glorification as well as the separate charge of attending the place.

These laws undoubtedly threaten effective investigative journalism. Before embarking on any such investigation now the journalist has not only to consider the direct threat to their safety but the other insidious threats posed by such legislation.

The press and broadcasters have always been forced to accept the dangers of reporting on terrorism. Their physical well-being has been at risk when approaching fanatical and violent subjects. They are now clearly threatened by laws ostensibly designed to fight the threat they are reporting on. And they are now at an increasing risk of being caught in the crossfire – not only of the terrorist bomb and bullet but in that of the anti-terror laws.

**Barry Turner** is a lecturer in media law at the Centre for Broadcasting and Journalism, Nottingham Trent University, and lecturer in law for journalists at the Lincoln School of Journalism. He has also written widely on medical law and ethics and psychiatry.

VIEW

# When children become TV sleuths

***Tessa Mayes, journalist and author, questions the use of children in investigative assignments for television***

At the *Guardian* Edinburgh television festival in August, there was much talk of declining standards in journalism and the dwindling of good current affairs programmes. The state of undercover television received less debate time. Perhaps next year it will be a hot topic, especially after ITV's new series 'Undercover Mum' shown this month used children as undercover reporters. Yes, children!

Broadcast on 21 August, 'Undercover Mum' showed children and their mothers turning into sleuths to investigate the pub food industry and the effects of their produce on children. They also visited a dietary expert practising 'controversial' techniques.

It's not the first time children have been used as undercover reporters in Britain. For instance, a couple of years ago the BBC children's programme 'Newsround' used a disabled child to go undercover to test out disability access in shops and banks. So what's the problem?  It's not that children are putting adult undercover reporters out of a job, although it might appear that's what I'm arguing as an undercover reporter.

They can't replace adults. Children will only get the reaction of adult subjects of an investigation to their role as a child posing as somebody, but still as a child nevertheless. They can only make conclusions based on their child's view of a situation as opposed to an adult's awareness of the broader context and other facts relating to an issue. Children have more limited abilities to rationalize about the meaning of a situation which could be unfair to the adults under scrutiny. And, a child can also get things wrong.

This was starkly illustrated in the ITV programme. Amie, a 12-year-old, went undercover to visit a nutritionist called Anthony Haynes, author of *The Food Intolerance Bible*. She had a problem that needed sorting out that was potentially connected to her diet – Amie kept getting constipation and colds. Haynes used his muscle-testing technique on her legs. The programme featured another expert, a GP, who dismissed the efficacy of the technique. Nevertheless, Amie said what Haynes was doing to her legs did make her feel better.

**Confusing the picture**

Yet the use of children wasn't the only problem. From this programme the child participants could easily get a confused picture of the need to offer proper evidence to counter conflicting scientific claims. For instance, confusingly the main 'mum' reporter said that Haynes had convinced Amie 'that there was something wrong' with her in relation to the effects of dairy products to her system as if the opposite was proven i.e. that there was definitely nothing wrong with her in relation to consuming certain foodstuffs. Although the GP may have raised some useful points and questions concerning Haynes's claims and homeopathic remedies, it was never shown there was definitely *no* negative effect on the girl as a result of eating dairy products.

How about submitting her to another kind of allergy test, for example, to bolster the point? Or show some of the evidence of scientific papers and debates on the issue? Instead, the programme quoted from Haynes's own book which apparently suggested that the evidence on muscle therapy was not 'clear-cut'.

The programme seemed to celebrate Amie's undercover role as much as the issue of finding out what kind of dietary advice Haynes provides. As the voice-over purred: 'Amie's about to find out how well she can do undercover.' Surely the disembodied voice meant to say: 'What kind of advice does Haynes offer her and does it stands up to scientific scrutiny?'

One of the 'ordinary' mums was Nina Hobson, a former undercover policewoman. This fact gave the programme an additional angle – a veiled threat that she might not just report on the issue but could prosecute as well, possibly on the testimony of a child's reaction to events. It did not bode well for the idea of the programme's journalistic objectivity. Still, if Hobson had taken her findings to some kind of 'food police' it would not have been the first time a reporter has happily handed over their findings to the authorities, and not just reported on an issue.

Instead Hobson concluded that it's important that we know what we are feeding our families. Which is why she went undercover with other mothers and children in pub food chains to see what kind of DNA content the steaks on offer contained. But what did the mums and their children discover in chains that warranted such heavy handed techniques? After all, if you want to buy food from a pub and take it to a laboratory to be tested, you can go in without undercover equipment (which unfairly, I thought, ended up identifying visually one pub manager) and take home a goodie bag instead.

**What the viewer discovered**

What the viewer actually discovered is that the Hungry Horse and J.D. Wetherspoon pub food chains serve steaks which are part Zebu, an allegedly 'poor quality' type of cattle (according to the voice over) raised in the Third World. The meat is perfectly edible but the programme's definition of a food crime was that the pubs had not flagged up 'Zebu' on their menu, even though there's no legal requirement for them to do that. Although some restaurant managers said the steaks were 100 per cent British this may have been merely a mistake because it turned out that it's the burgers that are 100 per cent British, not the steaks. Even if there was mis-advertising, what's the big deal? Eating a Zebu steak isn't an unsatisfying experience apparently. Even Hobson had to admit in an interview with the *Sun*: "When you breed [a Zebu] with normal cattle it tastes virtually the same.'

What was left unsaid was that the quality of the meat perhaps reflected the price. And anyway, surely food poisoning whether from undercooked Zebu or 100 per cent British beef steaks is a more serious issue when it comes to children.

Then, Hobson, another mother and some children stood outside a branch of J.D. Wetherspoon with a life-size cut-out of a Zebu to ask customers if they knew what was really on the menu. But the thin cut-out looked grey, like a putrid, dead carcass when, in fact, living Zebus come in all colours – grey, white, brown, black or a mixture of colours. When I Googled photographs of the animal, some looked thin and others plump. Still, all this didn't put Hobson off from asserting to a newspaper: "I've been involved in my fair share of murder investigations but I've turned up some even nastier facts filming for "Undercover Mum".' So now a consumer food programme that reveals some mis-information about diets is treated with the same seriousness as if somebody's life was at stake – hardly reassuring for parents.

In the end the programme's message about the need to check the national origins of food and tackle the claims of a 'controversial' dietary expert were obscured behind a more important question: What kind of messages about investigating adults, science and the world were these mothers really teaching when they sent their children undercover? Perhaps they should encourage the children to watch *All the President's Men*, (shown on television the same night: about the legendary Watergate investigation by the *Washington Post* duo, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein), as homework. They might learn something about the importance of scrutinizing all the facts and avoiding sensationalism.

**Tessa Mayes** is an investigative journalist, media commentator and author based in London. She works for the *Spectator* magazine and has contributed investigative reports to *The Sunday Times*, *Cosmopolitan* magazine, the BBC, ITV and Channel 4. She has commented widely on the media writing for *Ethical Space*, *Media Guardian*, *British Journalism Review*, spiked-online.com and end-of-journalism.org. Email: info@tessamayes.co.uk

**Sallyanne Duncan**

# Is a bloggers' code of conduct the answer to regulating bad behaviour on the Internet?

***Could a code of conduct encourage civility and filter out abusive comments on the blogosphere whilst still preserving the free spirit of blogging? Sallyanne Duncan explores the issues***

The case of a blogger who was subjected to death threats filed by an anonymous contributor earlier this year has rekindled discussions concerning ethical conduct in the blogosphere. Kathy Sierra, a renowned technology blogger, experienced a campaign of violent and sexually explicit threats[1] that has raised questions about free speech, civility, sexism and anonymity on the Internet. Although attention-seeking comments and feuding between bloggers are considered to be part of the anarchic blogging culture, some high-profile web experts[2] claim the harassment suffered by Sierra goes beyond acceptable behaviour and have called for greater accountability.

However, this is not the only incident of bad behaviour in the blogosphere, and because of the nature of blogs such conduct can have an enduring effect. Inaccuracies, lies, libelous statements and plagiarism can remain uncorrected, archived and easily accessible, making it difficult for the aggrieved individual to rectify matters. As noted in the Sierra case, anonymity can encourage some to make stronger and potentially more abusive statements than they would were their name attached. Equally, in cases of identity theft where a name is given there is no guarantee that the person who uses it in a post is indeed that person. Invasions of privacy are also a concern, and these may not always be deliberate. Posting personal information about individuals, whether famous or not, may be done quite innocently by a blogger but the consequences could be serious for the named individual.

**Promoting professional standards**

However, poor ethical conduct is not exclusive to the blogosphere. Mainstream media, for example, is guilty of some of these abuses, and many others. The difference is that generally journalists are bound by professional standards, recognized working practices and regulatory systems such as codes of conduct enforced by ostensibly independent authorities – although these self-regulatory methods do not always result in a virtuous practitioner – whereas bloggers are part of a social media that promotes an amateurization of media and encourages unedited self-expression, free of any universally accepted ethical framework. Trust is the key to credibility for both activities. However, for those bloggers who want their readers to trust them they are building their reputation from the ground up, unlike journalists who benefit from 'stored trust or reputational capital' in their publication where the 'trust transaction' between reporter and reader is based on professional standards (Rosen 2005).

But the tide may be turning in the blogosphere. Reaction to the Kathy Sierra case has led to calls for the adoption of a code of conduct to encourage civility and filter out abusive comments, whilst still preserving the free spirit of blogging. This is not the first occasion that a blogging code has been proposed. Several bloggers have drafted various forms of a code in recent years[3] but the Sierra case seems to have attracted more prominent attention. Assessment of the merit of adopting a code, and, indeed, its efficacy as an instrument of ethical guidance for bloggers is once again the subject of debate.

The blogosphere is now more than 60 times bigger than it was in 2003 and, on average, a new blog is created every second[4]. There are two distinct groups – personal blogs that resemble online diaries, and non-personal that focus on specific topics, such as topical news items or specialist interests, and are usually intended for larger audiences. The number of non-personal blogs forms a small part of the social network – a recent survey found that 27 per cent of bloggers said their blogs were non-personal while 73 per cent of respondents said their blogs were personal[5]. It is this minority group that seems to be the focus of advocates of a code, and whilst much of what they produce could not be deemed to be journalism in the traditional sense – blogging is seen to be more about self-expression than reporting the news impartially.

**How mainstream media have embraced blogging**

Nonetheless, blogging is assuming many of the characteristics of journalism. Whatever the topic, individuals are actively participating in collecting, sorting, analyzing and publishing information quickly – once the relatively exclusive province of the journalism profession. In turn, mainstream media has embraced blogging with many journalists, or j-bloggers, now writing blogs as part of their editorial duties. Yet, bloggers tend to see themselves as distinct from journalists, even though they may face some similar ethical problems. Journalists have structures in place to attempt to resolve these issues; bloggers are still finding their way. Koh et al[6] identified four ethical principles from the existing literature on Internet ethics that are relevant to bloggers, some of which are similar to those proposed by the journalism profession. These are truth telling (concepts like honesty, fairness and completeness of reporting), accountability (answerable to the public, revealing conflicts of interest), minimizing harm (privacy, flaming, respect for diverse cultures and underprivileged groups) and attribution (plagiarism, giving proper credit to sources). Note that the principle of accuracy, which is so highly regarded in the journalism profession, is not distinctly identified here.

As the blogosphere's influence grows so does the desire by some advocates of codes to instill a sense of collective responsibility on those who write blogs, but not everyone in the blogosphere is receptive. In fact, bloggers because of their individuality cannot be seen as a cohesive group who share common standards or goals. Therefore, certain ethical principles are likely to have different relevance to different people, and this needs to be considered by those who attempt to devise new codes of ethics for blogging.

**Blogging codes: for and against**

Supporters of a code, with its dependence on interpreting rules and on taking the right action, claim that they wish to bring some order to 'what remains a chaotic landscape' (Edmonds 2006). Rebecca Blood, who favours a set of standards, suggests that the lack of gatekeepers, one of mainstream media's traditional roles, and the freedom from all consequences that make blogs so valuable as an alternative news source could compromise their integrity and therefore, their value. Tim O'Reilly, who proposed a code after the threats to Kathy Sierra, wrote on his website[7] that standards are beneficial to free speech, not detrimental to it. He said: 'If there's one thing I'd love to come out of this discussion, it's a greater commitment on the part of bloggers (and people who run other types of forums) not to tolerate behaviour on the Internet that they wouldn't tolerate in the physical world. It's ridiculous to accept on a blog or in a forum speech that would be seen as hooliganism or delinquency if practiced in a public space' (O'Reilly 2007).

Thus, it could be argued that a code could possibly provide blogging with an air of legitimacy, contribute to credibility and assist with the aspiration of transparency. This last feature has emerged from discussions amongst high-profile bloggers[8] as a key concept of credibility and, therefore, in building trust. It is valued by both personal and non-personal bloggers who, by showing readers links to other pages to illustrate a point or to share information, are not only giving credit but are also fulfilling a community-building function.

Indeed, Blood rejects fairness and accuracy in favour of transparency and claims that bloggers are stronger and more valuable working outside mainstream media rather than 'attempting to mirror the purposes of the institution we should seek to analyse and supplement' (Blood 2002: 114).

Yet, although there is a willingness to embrace a code amongst certain bloggers there is reluctance by any group, such as the Media Bloggers Association (MBA), to take responsibility for its implementation and enforcement, preferring instead to encourage bloggers to comply with 'commonly accepted standards of fairness and transparency'. In their statement of principles the MBA maintains that 'it is up to readers to develop their own trust relationships with bloggers and we ought not to interfere in that relationship'. Their role is limited to presenting standards as aspirations and offering guidance on how to achieve those aspirations through education, robust discussion and mutual support (MBA 2006).

**On the dangers of 'Yellow Blogging'**

Without the establishment of reliable guidelines to enable readers to assess a blog, which could lead to greater transparency and consequently trust, some advocates of codes suggest that the activity will deteriorate into 'a world of "Yellow Blogging" where anyone writes whatever they want without thought of their words' effect on their readership' (Beattie 2002).

Conversely, opponents believe they do not need a code to build trust, that instead, individuals should strive to develop their own sense of ethics, manifested through, for example, personal statements and links to source material, which they could post on their site. They claim readers are able to determine the reliability of blogs for themselves and therefore traffic levels should resolve which receive respect. Others do not prescribe a code but instead recommend that bloggers involve their readers in a 'co-authored' process that addresses relevant personal information they believe their audience needs to know about them, the principles they stand for and the processes they follow. They see this as a means of building trust. 'Blogging presumes a relationship between publisher and audience … that, to be successful, demands mutual respect … [the] kind of relationship that can result in trust and can produce extraordinary credibility for the publisher' (Mitchell and Steele 2005).

Some bloggers believe a code is anathema to what the blogosphere represents. They want to be liberated from the types of rules and restrictions that might be imposed by a code, preferring a disordered world of free, unhindered expression. They claim that those who suggest a code have a poor understanding of the nature of blogging such as its conversational style where the process is to publish then filter information by means of reader comments. Anti-code bloggers claim that because of the diversity of blogs it would be impractical to establish a common code of ethics or to attempt to enforce it. As most bloggers do not have an editor to guide or control them, they take the view that an agreed set of standards would have little effect.

**Is a code of ethics an effective ethical instrument for bloggers?**

It would seem then that, as with mainstream media, a code of ethics would be of some limited use to bloggers, if only in providing general guidance on contentious issues. However, it is clear that this rules-based system with its sense of taking the right action cannot cover every eventuality and is not a good fit for the liberal environment in which bloggers operate. Given the solipsistic nature of blogging, it is unlikely that bloggers would necessarily be concerned with taking the right action, which is a function of codes. Part of the appeal of blogging is that writers can take risks and act as an alternative source of information by taking actions that may not always be considered 'right'.

Also, bloggers inhabit a perceived democratic world in which there is a sense of participation, equality and sharing. They fit into a non-conformist framework where there is a symbiotic relationship between writer/publisher/reader/contributor. Mainstream journalists work in a world that is hierarchical where there is a sense of duty and obligation in which information is transferred to recipients who are distant from the process. They fit into an organizational framework where there is a contractual obligation between the proprietor, the journalist and the audience. This makes enforcement of a code a more viable proposition than in a disparate, liberal entity like the blogosphere. However, both bloggers and journalists have considerable autonomy to make moral choices. For mainstream journalists autonomy tends to be constrained by corporate pressures to produce profits, meaning that content, and therefore the individual's moral choices concerning the manner in which content is reported, is determined by a news agenda that is driven by making money. Most bloggers, in contrast, do not face such dilemmas, giving them greater freedom to publish what interests them, and at times may seem on the fringes of acceptability.

However, if bloggers are to concern themselves with taking responsibility for their actions they need to develop approaches that will assist them in ethical decision-making. Codes do not appear to be the answer because without systematic interpretation and application they are limited in their capacity to resolve hard cases. Problems arise where deadlines are tight and there is the opportunity for uncertainty – as can happen in journalism – but also where there is no final draft because further posts can always be added and where there is the prospect of infinite archiving – as in blogging. Even in the organizational hierarchy of mainstream journalism where individuals have a commitment to duty and obligation journalists struggle with the implementation of codes.

Many prefer to draw on their previous experience instead of relying on codes for guidance.

In the free-spirited, anarchic, environment of the blogosphere then a rule-based system such as a code is probably not the most effective instrument of ethical conduct. If they want to build trust, both bloggers and journalists need to be able to work through complex dilemmas and be able to anticipate the consequences of any action they may undertake. Poor decision-making or blind adherence to codes can lead to harm, and as was noted in a recent survey[9] bloggers generally agree that they wish to limit harm where possible. Currently, as an identifiable set of underlying principles that can be employed as a moral indicator has yet to emerge, acting on the principle of minimizing harm and a commitment to transparency may overcome some of the practical difficulties that occur with applying codes to blogging. Equally, readers need to accept these standards, especially when as commentators they interact with the blogger and participate in the creative process. Therefore, the audience needs to know what their rights and responsibilities are in this process and this would present huge difficulties for blogging code writers.

**Conclusions**

It seems then that a code of ethics would be of little practical use to bloggers. The liberated nature of the blogosphere, the diversity of blogs, problems with enforcement and an absence of a regulatory body, and the participation of the reader or news consumer in the creative process, all point towards a bloggers' code being unworkable. Blogging, along with other online activities, is a new form of communication, and as such it deserves to be able to develop its own forms of encouraging responsible action. It may be that it is appropriate to adopt some standards from mainstream media depending on the type of blog, but some of the principles that are important to journalists will have different meanings – and values – for bloggers.

What is evident from the debate on blogging ethics is that unlike the journalism profession the adoption of ethical instruments like codes should not be about regulation. Blogging is a part-time, voluntary activity for many individuals, so a regulated system of ethics requiring a sense of collective responsibility seems inappropriate. Also, it is difficult to determine how regulation could work without compromising free expression, despite Tim O'Reilly's assurances. Rather than adopting a conformist approach to co-opting an ethical format from another genre such as journalism we should aim to develop alternative ways of thinking about this new medium. For example, bloggers who concern themselves with ethical issues seem to take a more virtuous approach of setting a principled objective for participants to aspire to rather than the rules-based and consequential approaches generally used by journalists.

Indeed, as noted previously some bloggers already declare their personal positions through devices such as terms of use, FAQs, disclosure statements, lists of principles and purpose, and occasionally contracts of conditions of use. Although these tend to focus less on ethical behaviour and more on personal information or how they operate their blogs, this may be a way for standards to emerge. Therefore, bloggers should not mirror existing ethical instruments employed by the journalism profession. Instead those who wish to participate in the debate should attempt to determine the important principles. Then, individual bloggers could decide which principles they wished to adhere to, if any, and what method they would employ to do so.

Core values seem to be emerging from discussions about ethics on blogs themselves, in the academic world and in the media, even though those involved in the debate may describe the issues differently. The four ethical principles suggested by Koh et al – truth telling, accountability, attribution and minimizing harm – are a promising start, but these need to be set alongside the concept of self expression. It is important that discussions, like those generated in response to the threats against Kathy Sierra, continue because such participation and exposure is likely to be a more effective ethical instrument than an unenforceable code. Acceptable behaviour can be established through raising issues of concern, sharing views and reaching consensus, and those who wish to adhere to the outcome can do so and build a trust relationship with their readers. As Belsey and Chadwick (1995) note: 'It is the virtuous disposition which is necessary, not the code.'

**Notes**

1 See Kathy Sierra's blog, Creating Passionate Users. Available online at http://headrush.typepad.com/ and http://headrush.typepad.com/whathappened.html

2 Tim O'Reilly, CEO of Sebastopol's O'Reilly Media and Jimmy Wales, founder of Wikipedia

3 These include Rebecca Blood, rebecca's pocket – Weblog Ethics, available at http://rebeccablood.net/handbook/excerpts/weblog_ethics.html, accessed 24 June 2007; Jonathan Dube, A blogger's code of ethics, available at http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/000215.php, accessed 15 January 2007; Martin Kuhn, C.O.B.E.: A proposed code of blogging ethics, available at http://cyber.law.harvard.

  

edu/webcred/wp-content/CONFREPORT2.htm, accessed 16 January 2007

4 See State of the blogosphere, April 2006 Part 1: On blogosphere growth at www.sifry.com/alerts/archives/000432.html

5 See Ethics in Blogging: Report from Singapore Internet Research Centre, website: http://www.ntu.edu.sg/sci/sirc/workingpapers.html

6 ibid

7 www.radar.oreilly.com

8 See the proceedings of the Conference on Blogging, Journalism and Credibility: Battleground or Common Ground, Harvard University, Cambridge MA, USA, January. Available online at http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/webcred/, accessed on 16 January 2007

9 www.radar.oreilly.com

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## Note on Contributor


Sallyanne Duncan is a lecturer at the Scottish Centre for Journalism Studies based at the University of Strathclyde and course leader of the MLitt and Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism Studies programmes. Contact details: Scottish Centre for Journalism Studies, Crawfurd Complex, University of Strathclyde, 76 Southbrae Drive, Glasgow G13 1PP, Scotland. Tel: +44 (0)141 950 3553. Email: sallyanne.duncan@strath.ac.uk.

**Marlis Prinzing and Stephan Russ-Mohl**

# An overview of media research in an era of globalization

*Around 1,000 communication and media researchers from 150 countries gathered 23-25 July 2007 for the 50th conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) in Paris, to reflect on the past – and look into the future of the field. Marlis Prinzing and Stephan Russ-Mohl, of the European Journalism Observatory, report*

The founding of the IAMCR in 1957 goes back to an initiative by UNESCO – an origin that has left its mark on the organization to this day. Over half a century ago, the idea was to set up an institution that would be in charge of journalism research as well as create a powerful instrument for guaranteeing the freedom of speech and of the press as laid out in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Originally it had 50 participants from 15 countries. The first leaders came mainly from journalism, journalism training and the print media and particularly from European countries. Throughout its history IAMCR has adopted public statements on such issues as the freedom of research, the support for international communication policies in the service of democratic development, and the need to contribute to the improvement of communication facilities in the Third World.

One year before its launch, Fred Siebert and two colleagues published *Four Theories of the Press*, a ground-breaking book in which they proclaimed the superiority of the Western political system over that of the Eastern bloc – a statement mainly justified by the existence of a liberal media system in the West. For almost four decades, the text remained the 'bible' of Western communication research. It was not until the Iron Curtain fell that researchers started to view the world from a less Anglo-American perspective, stressing the influence of nation states and national cultures on the global media environment.

**How history informs research**

The papers given at the Paris conference underlined this insight. Elena Vartanova, of the State University of Moscow, explained how strongly a country's media research is influenced by national history and the socio-cultural context a specific generation of researchers is coming from. Since today's researchers were increasingly adopting Anglo-American standards, the differences in research approaches between countries in Western and Eastern Europe were declining.

In contrast, a provisional appraisal of the differences between Europe's southwest and its centre and north, given by four French researchers, revealed the Great Divide still separating the two regions. While in south-western Europe media studies are dominated by intellectual discourse, the central and northern Europe is primarily engaging in empirical studies in the Anglo-American vein.

Among the most striking developments in European communication research is the fact that, today, an increasing number of researchers belong to a group of 'modern nomads' which Terhi Rantanen, lecturer at the London School of Economics, referred to as 'migrant workers'. In the UK, they account for one third of all media researchers, a percentage which is likely to be the same for Switzerland. Those researchers with first-hand experience of living and working abroad, confronted with linguistic and cultural barriers on a daily basis, would almost certainly focus on different topics in their research work. However, communication researchers are usually not the most gifted of communicators, as Rantanen underlined: while the Eurostar travels the distance between Paris and London in 2 hours and 15 minutes, it takes the 'train of thoughts' years to do the same, if it arrives at all… Still, thanks to the increasing number of research migrants, the share of those who actually are capable of bridging linguistic and other gaps, is growing – which certainly is a move in the right direction.

**Debates on journalists' professional training**

According to Jan Jirak, researcher at Karl's University in Prague, the Czech Republic offers many training routes for those interested in becoming professional journalists. But this, it appears, doesn't help the editors-in-chief of the country's national and regional newspapers who are struggling to find any candidates willing to do the job at all. (Incidentally, quite the opposite is true in German-speaking countries, where becoming a journalist is still the dream of many.) Gerd Kopper, of the University of Dortmund, drew some depressing conclusions from his study of the press coverage of the European Union in its member states. He observed that the overall journalistic quality was low, with many articles not much more than agency reports, lacking background information as well as clarity of presentation. Most journalists, he argued, lacked the knowledge necessary for writing competently about the EU.

Also of interest were two papers on how the upcoming Asian superpowers were addressing the challenges of transforming into modern media societies. Daya Thussu, media researcher at the University of Westminster, described how India's brand of journalism, especially its television news programmes, is marked by a 'Bollywood-ization', a trend which is mainly due to the absence of institutionalized training routes in journalism. Steve Guo, researcher at the Hong Kong Baptist University, on the other hand, explained how China's Communist Party was controlling all aspects of journalists' training. At present, Chinese journalism students still have to accept the fact that they are not only learning how to assert themselves as future journalists on the country's rapidly commercializing media market, but they also have to happily ingest their daily dose of Marx and Mao.

**Translation from the German by Oliver Heinemann**

**Antonia Carding**

# Handling suicide coverage: The importance of the ethical approach

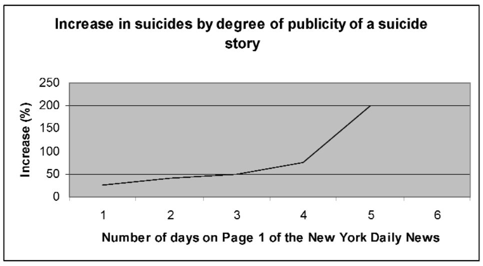
***Since the media and the popular press play such an important role in determining dominant attitudes and agendas, it is more crucial than ever that journalism teaching and practice acknowledge the importance of the responsible handling of suicide, argues Antonia Carding***

Suicide is the most common cause of death in the under-35 population in the United Kingdom making it a major public health concern (National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2002). Global rates of suicide increased by 60 per cent between 1959 and 1995 (WHO 2002). However, statistics should not always be taken at face value; with suicide they show only a small part of a much larger problem. For a person to be classified as dead by suicide, a coroner has to be sure, beyond doubt, that the death was intended by the individual. Therefore many suicides are often recorded as undetermined death due to lack of evidence (Taylor and Gilmour 1996).

In 1989 Schmidtke and Hafner performed an extensive review (131 references) examining the impact of mass media on the incidence of suicide. The evidence for copycat suicides was conclusive. Ten years later, Marzuk et al. (1994) found direct evidence of copycat suicides while Motto (1967; 1970) researched the effect of newspaper strikes and the consequent decrease in suicide rates. He, therefore, argued against the reporting of suicide in the press. This was an unrealistic expectation.

As an alternative to Motto's suggestion, some years later, Etzersdorfer et al. (1992; 1998) published a ground-breaking piece of research around the use of media guidelines when reporting suicide. With the Viennese underground a major site within the city for suicides, Etzersdorfer persuaded the local media firms to carry shorter, non-sensational reports. In months following the introduction of these guidelines, suicide rates dropped significantly.

Phillips (1974; 1982) also completed many studies into the relationship between suicide statistics and media coverage. The studies were unique in that they measured the increase of suicide rates in relation to the amount of publicity a suicide report received in the media. As figure 1 illustrates, reported suicide (%) increased by 150% as the number of publicity days doubled (2-4 days).




(Figure 1: Phillips 1974, 1982)

This significant piece of research clearly demonstrates a positive relationship between suicide rates and continued media exposure to suicide stories. But Platt (1994) has heavily criticized Phillips methodological approach for three main reasons. Firstly, demographic variables were not considered when analysing the data. Secondly, economic factors were not taken into account. Thirdly, all of Phillips' papers used different media sources with a varying number of suicide cases in each. Even so, Phillips' numerous studies into suicide and the media have inspired many other important studies such as Kessler and Stipp (1984) and Gould and Shaffer (1986).

**Media influence on the vulnerable**

Goldney (2001) argues that it is important to acknowledge that the extent of media influence may be modest on suicide rates. Nevertheless, in some cases this influence may play a crucial role in the final choice of suicide or self harm in a vulnerable individual. As Platt (1994) proposes, although the research suggests the relationship between the media and consequent suicide rates is arguable, it is still a factor that could lead to a vulnerable person taking their life.

Hawton and Williams (2001) and the *National*

*Suicide Prevention Strategy* (DofH 2002) state, individuals who suffer from mental health problems, who are often very vulnerable individuals, are far more likely to commit suicide than any other person. It is often these people who are disregarded or misrepresented when suicides are over-simplified in the press (see also Fishman and Weimann 1997). Therefore, the importance of responsible media reporting is an essential part in the British governments' drive to reduce suicide rates by 2010.

In 1999, *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation* (DofH 1999a) was published as a plan to reduce Britain's greatest killers, mental health being one of these. It aimed 'to reduce death from suicide by a fifth by 2010: 4,000 lives will be saved'. In the same year, the *National Service Framework for Mental Health* (DofH 1999b) was also published, in part to further implement this target. Standard 7: preventing suicide, aims 'to ensure that health and social services play their full part in the achievement of the target in *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation* to reduce the suicide rate by at least one fifth by 2010'.

The *National Suicide Prevention Strategy* (DofH 2002) develops and focuses these ideas putting greater emphasis on the media's role in reaching the original target set by *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation* (DofH, 1999a). Goal four of the strategy recognizes the significant role the media plays in suicide rates and further emphasizes the importance of improving the reporting of suicidal behaviour in the media. In 2004 the annual report on progress for the *National Suicide Prevention Strategy* (2002) was published by the National Institute of Mental Health (now known as the Care Services Improvement Partnership). Objective 4.1 stated: promote the responsible representation of suicidal behaviour in the media, with the action being to 'incorporate guidance on the representation of suicide into workshops held with students at journalism colleges; round table discussion sessions with course leaders in mental health and senior journalists' (p. 45).

**Importance of media guidelines**

One of the main areas now being researched and emphasized in national policy is the use of media guidelines when reporting on suicide. Hawton and Williams (2001: 39) suggest there is '…considerable opportunity for creative collaborative work to be done between researchers and media producers in order to develop knowledge in this extremely important area'. UK government policy has promoted this approach in the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2002) with the recommended use of the Samaritans' (2002) and Presswise (2005) guidelines.

However, scepticism about ethical guidelines and codes of conducts amongst mainstream journalists is widespread. A journalist's main priority is to produce a story, in a set time limit that will fundamentally sell papers. Ethical concerns are not of direct, major concern (Keeble 2005). Journalists must look at their own personal integrity and conscience if they are to report truthfully and ethically (Jempson 2000).

Carter and Allan (2000) argue that a journalist cannot balance the role of informing the public while working for a news organization that is primarily profit-making enterprise. In such an environment, the reporting of and suicide is often reduced to the promotion of a few prominent and negative stereotypes about the mentally ill (see also Berger 2005).

Indeed, according to McKeown and Clancy (1995), stereotypical and sensational media representation of mental health issues in the popular press is one of the major contributors to the public's poor understanding of such issues, including suicide. Since the media and the popular press play such an important role in determining dominant attitudes and agendas, it is more crucial than ever that journalism teaching and practice acknowledges the importance of the responsible handling of suicide.

For the bridge to be built between the media and mental health world, newspaper executives, broadcasters, the NUJ and the PCC, to name a few, need to be involved directly with policy and guideline making. This would be the next step towards establishing a positive relationship between these two agencies, ensuring that suicide is represented accurately within the popular press. I am hopeful that the future will allow this gap to become smaller over the coming years as journalism courses encourage a more positive teaching approach to this sensitive subject.

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## Note on Contributor

Antonia Carding MNSci (Hons), RN (Mental Health) is a mental health nursing student within the School of Nursing at the University of Nottingham. Email: totes_carding@yahoo.co.uk. Her supervisor was Dr. Martin Anderson BA(Hons), MSc, RN (Mental Health), Dip HE, PhD, an Associate Professor in Mental Health at the University of Nottingham. Email: martin.anderson@nottingham.ac.uk

  

**Jonathan Rix**

# Labels of opportunity

***In the spirit of academic dialogue, Jonathan Rix responds to two critics of his controversial paper in* Ethical Space *Vol 3, No. 4 on labeling people on the basis of notions of intellect***

The debate in my paper *Does it matter what we call them? Labelling people on the basis of notions of intellect* (Rix 2007) is, as Rowley points out, centuries old. The paper suggests that its inevitable re-emergence is as a consequence of individuals' struggles with changing practices and expectations. Hardly surprisingly, therefore, that as Carson rightly says, it explored issues that for specialists are 'old news'; yet what it contains still strikes many lay people as new. At the start of the paper, I explained how this divide is part of the problem when thinking about issues of impairment. The arguments presented by the disability movement have not become part of the mainstream. They are nuanced, academic and unaccessed by the majority of lay people.

Consider the term 'disabled'. This word has two entirely contradictory meanings that can only be understood if a person has engaged with the Social Model of Disability, as discussed by Oliver (1983; 1990). To the majority of the population 'a disabled person' means a person who is disabled by their impairment; far fewer people are also aware that from a Social Model perspective 'a disabled person' means a person who is disabled by social barriers. It is this latter definition, of course, that disability activists would like more people to engage with.

At the heart of my paper is the point that very few lay people are encouraged by the language they use to re-evaluate their practices and ways of thinking. This is why, as Rowley points out, I was 'careful' to explain the nuances behind the labels I used, such as 'disabled person' and 'people with learning difficulties'. I did not explain them to justify myself. Rather, I explained them because lay people have rarely been exposed to the arguments, and don't understand why one label is deemed better or worse. This does not mean, as Carson suggests, that the paper is saying that: 'Words cannot say it all and therefore they must inevitably fail to truly say who the disabled are' (2007: 30). Words can say a great deal. They can capture the essence of people in many ways. Language can be a key factor in changing thinking and practices. I am arguing that labels – the automated phrases we use – can foster generalized views of individual disabled people, triggering assumptions and ways of thinking about them.

So I agree, as my paper suggests, with Carson's view that: 'Our labelling helps to change our attitudes in ways that then feed back into our labels' (2007: 30), and that labels are not something that we can get away from. But I find it hard to accept his suggestion that: 'Something that we cannot avoid cannot be a "barrier"' (2007: 30). Is he seriously suggesting, for example, that throughout history people have not suffered deprivations because of the label they have been given? How about the caste system in India, or the frequent legalized attacks on Jewish people down the centuries, or being an ex-prisoner trying to get a job? In certain contexts, merely having a label applied to them can totally change an individual's life experience. The label in these instances carries with it disdain for individuals. The disdain exists in many ways, but the label is a central vehicle for expressing and reifying it. Thus it acts as a barrier. This is not to say that labels only act as barriers. Labels can serve some individuals well. Consider a child who suddenly achieves the dyslexia label after years of struggle in the education system. That can open up all kinds of new opportunities.

**How labeling can dominate**

Similarly I cannot accept Carson's assertion that: 'Labelling is not a barrier to our helping people who suffer from disabling conditions any more than it's a barrier to our having relationships with anyone' (2007: 30). As Rowley concurs, the label can dominate how a person is seen. People change their behaviours on the basis of the labels they encounter and their perceptions of the meanings of those labels. This is why, as a number of studies in the 1990s showed (e.g. Simons 1992; Hastings and Remington 1993; Riddell et al 1994; Norwich 1999) people often have strong preferences towards one label as opposed to another. A label is not just a spoken thing. It is so often a trigger for a whole range of assumptions. As a brother growing up with a sister with Down syndrome, I saw the impact that the labels that became attached to my sister had on people and their ways of responding to me. As a parent of a child with Down syndrome I have seen the ways in which people seek out labels to contain him and thereby facilitate their ways of dealing with him. It is, of course, this very power of labels to contain individuals that leads me to question the form of those labels.

Carson's commentary focuses on tensions and contradictions that I have highlighted as being created by the process of labeling, and suggests that these are contradictions in my argument. For example, he reframes my analysis as if I think it is a simple matter of one thing being good and another being bad – as if, in other words, I am simply saying there are good and bad labeling practices. This is a pity. It misses the subtlety of the process. Similarly he suggests that I am simplifying diversity. He suggests that I am characterizing 'us' as the normalizing society, who create labels en masse and are an 'aggregate of bad intentions'. Nowhere do I make this suggestion. However, neither do I refute it, so perhaps I left space for the misconception.

I believe that the vast majority of individuals who work with people with learning difficulties are doing so for the very best of intentions. That 'we' (or is it 'they' to you?) get it wrong is an essential part of the process, but it does not make us malevolent. My use of 'we' and 'them' is not intended to position the 'normalizing society' in conflict with 'the disabled' as Carson describes. It is intended to express a fundamental effect of labels. I am saying that by our use of labels we divide ourselves into 'them' and 'us'. This is not exactly controversial. This is the nature of labels. They are, as Carson seems to agree, a key process in how we structure society and our own thinking.

If I use a label to describe another individual's difference then that individual and those to whom I would also apply that label become 'them'. Society is made up of multiple versions of 'we' and 'them'; they overlap, dissipate and congregate. People with a learning difficulty are part of the 'we' or the 'them' depending on the context. It is unlikely, of course, that they are part of the 'we' involved in this academic discussion in *Ethical Space*, but such issues are discussed, for example, in self-advocacy groups around the country. It would be a mistake, as Carson suggests, to simplify this diversity, so that 'we' become this mass of humanity and 'they' becomes 'the disabled'. This, however, is a risk encouraged when using current labeling, which places the deficit within the individual and does not contextualize that individual and their experience.

**Filling a gap in the original paper**

Both Carson and Rowley point to a very real gap in my original paper, namely that I fail to suggest the sort of language that might achieve the goals I set out in my paper, in other words, 'labels that clearly position the barriers faced by individuals within the social structures around them, not within the individuals themselves' (2007: 28). The intention of the paper, of course, was to unpack the ethics of the current situation for an audience unfamiliar with the debate, rather than to examine the possible solutions. There is just so much that can be fitted into one paper and to present, explain and analyze solutions will require considerably more space. The following, however, should give a taste of what I envision.

My son's label is 'Down syndrome'. As a label it tells you nothing. For it to have meaning you have to know about the statistically defined characteristics linked to it. Knowing these characteristics will, however, still be of little use when you meet my son. Because they are statistically defined characteristics you will either have to go through the list ticking them off, or you will have to deal with the characteristics he presents, just as you would with anyone else who had those characteristics, regardless of how they were labeled. However, if we were to seek a label that might 'encourage those who hear them to engage with possibilities' (Rix 2007: 28) we might choose to describe him as a 'person supported by signing and visual communication'.

This, of course, does not cover everything, but it would be a start. It would help both of you. I do not believe that labels such as this would, as Carson suggests, be 'taking us away from who we really are' (2007: 30). Instead they would help users of the phrase to re-consider the label and the people to whom it refers and their relationship to those people. I feel sure too that if such terms were adopted Rowley would be proved right and that 'over time the core ideas that underpinned their adoption [would] become diluted or distorted as they are passed on from generation to generation' (2007: 33). My original paper was not calling for terms that provide absolute answers. It was encouraging the next step forward. It was part of an on-going process. It was attempting to stimulate new ways of thinking and engaging with people who have… Well, which label would you use?

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## Note on Contributor


Jonathan Rix is a lecturer in inclusion, curriculum and learning at the Open University. He has co-edited four books on inclusion in the series Values into Practice (RoutledgeFalmer 2005) and Inclusive Education (David Fulton 2003). He has researched into effective inclusive pedagogies, including the use of simplified language in classrooms and has a strong interest in early intervention with people with Down syndrome. He is currently researching parental perspectives on early intervention and the notion of identity and agency in this context. Contact details: Faculty of Education and Language Studies, Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA. Email: j.r.m.rix@open.ac.uk. Tel: +44 1908 655903

FACE TO FACE

# Coping with copyright complexities in the digital age

***Frances Pinter, founder of Pinter Publishers, has recently been appointed to ICE's executive board. A Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics' Centre for the Study of Global Governance, she is currently specializing in the area of intellectual property rights. She talks to Kristine Lowe about her lifelong work in publishing and the ethical challenges in the digital age***

**You are currently exploring ways in which flexible licensing regimes relating to intellectual property rights may be able to co-exist with traditional business models, while also generating new ones. Could you explain the background here briefly?**

Traditionally intellectual property rights (and here I am talking of written works) were held by the writer and his/her rights were protected by copyright – which meant that for a specified period of time he/she controlled the economic exploitation of the intellectual property. Copyright was there to protect the author. But publishing was an expensive, capital-intensive proposition, and over the 300 years since the concept of copyright was introduced authors have tended to enter into agreements with publishers where they have either granted exclusive rights to publish or (in some fields and with some publishers) granted the copyright itself to the publisher.

**And in the digital age?**

In the digital age this practice is coming under question. Authors now can reach their markets without publishers via the Internet. This has turned into a serious threat to publishers. However, the need for certain publishing services remain (e.g. commissioning, editing, designing, nurturing talent, marketing, branding, validating etc – even before thinking about whether or not a printed edition is required and its distribution).

Layered on top of this debate is an ethical one which questions whether or not it is right for knowledge to be locked up and made available to only those who can afford to pay. While connected to the digital opportunities, it really would be a separate debate except for the fact that it has provoked people to think about how to work within copyright regulations but adopt a more flexible licensing regime, i.e. a 'some rights reserved' principle rather than an 'all rights reserved' one. With this in mind what are known as Creative Commons licenses allow creators to effectively announce to the world that anyone and everyone can read the text online for free, but further use (reuse or selling) may be restricted depending on the terms of the 'open' license which is the author's prerogative to decide. See the Creative Commons website (www.creativecommons.org) for more explanation – but bear in mind it is only the most popular of dozens of new licenses.

**What would the benefits of flexible licensing be?**

Lots more open access to readers with writers and publishers making their money through different routes. We are only just beginning to see how these models work, but some books are now being published online with free access under Creative Commons licenses and their print sales have actually exceeded expectations. In music, unknowns put their songs out on Creative Commons licenses, and then, when they've become successful online, they are snatched up by the main record labels.

**Can you build a sustainable business model on flexible licensing schemes?**

Yes, but at the moment there is too much fear of a) non-exclusive licensing and b) dealing with risks that do not conform to previously well-known risks.

**Intellectual property rights are going through a huge transition at the moment due to technological innovations which allow for more file sharing, e.g. with music and video, open source software. And you see more and more A-list bloggers, as well as columnists, writing under the Creative Commons license. Any ideas on where all this is heading?**

Yes, but I give presentations on this – and I can't answer this briefly. Basically, much more material online will require different methods of mediating so people can have some sense of what they are getting. This is why publishers are still so important. They provide branding, and, providing they do this responsibly, there will still be a role for them.

**Is this development for the better, or are there potentially damaging consequences?**

There are huge risks. There is already chaos on the web. Wikipedia entries are constantly being hijacked by extremists (not to mention congressmen who have been caught trying to dress up their own biographies!). Everyone is talking about how the web is democratizing the world, but it also highlights disparities of wealth and opportunity. Meanwhile, book and journal publishing is under threat and some good companies may go under.

**Aren't firm intellectual property rights necessary to secure the rights of the creators, such as authors and musicians; are they not entitled to the fruits of their labour, or can these rights come in conflict with other moral considerations?**
There is a need for a balance. Yes, of course creators are entitled to the fruits of their labour. But 300 years ago legislators decided that 14 years was about the right term length for copyright. Then it was extended to 28 (upon request). In the 20th century it was extended several times, and now in the US it is 70 years beyond the death of an author. This creates a whole host of problems – 'orphan' works, where the rights-holder can't be found, lay unexploited, and when was an author ever incentivized to write for the benefit of his great- great grandchildren? More to the point, copyright terms have always been increased exactly at the time when Mickey Mouse would have otherwise gone into the public domain. On each occasion Disney made representations to Congress, and guess what happened?

**What are the biggest issues and ethical considerations in the field you work in today?**
Setting aside the Disney type stories there is a real issue about how the world wishes to level out access to knowledge. This cuts across issues concerning, for example, patents – e.g. how knowledge is generated and disseminated – discriminating against the indigenous knowledge produced in the global South and a whole host of really serious questions about how to redress the imbalance of life chances amongst the young. The digital era holds huge promises if used by people who understand that it is in the interest of the whole world to improve capacity levels everywhere. Those who are out to protect old-fashioned interest based on outdated business models are unlikely to win out, but they can impede progress.

**Your work for the Soros Foundation brought you in close contact with countries in other parts of the world. Did you get an impression of how their business and media cultures might be different from ours? What were the challenges connected with this?**
Business and media cultures are basically part of the inherent local culture of a country or region. There is the overlay of global media and that influences and is influenced by local cultures. But the dynamics of this are complex and I learn afresh in each new environment I enter.

**You are also involved in the International Communications Forum (ICF). On its website it states: 'The ICF is devoted to media ethics and freedoms of expression and information. It believes that these need to be accompanied by a high sense of responsibility and respect for every audience.' Why do you think the organization's work is important?**
The International Communications Forum (of which I am a Vice President) believes that bridges need to be built by individuals first if we are to find any basis for harmonious ways of working with one another. Through meetings of minds and hearts ethical standards can be agreed and promoted across all cultures, even if in different ways.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges in media ethics and to freedom of expression and information today?**
I suspect my academic colleagues have a better take on this. My own hobbyhorse is that the professional ladder itself does not lead to a respect for ethics and the pressures to move up are too hard on young people entering the media. Cynicism is so much in fashion that I wonder how we can ever turn this around.

As for freedom of expression, I think we underestimate how lucky we are in the West. People with real problems of expression are under ruthless totalitarian regimes.

**You have worked with social sciences such as international relations in one way or another, both as an academic and as an entrepreneur of substantial projects, through most of your life. What are the most important things your career has taught you?**
In my career I have come to meet lots of people from diverse backgrounds. I've learnt that it is a lifetime exercise to find the areas of commonality and the areas of difference – and to respect these.

**You have just been appointed to the ICE executive board. What do you think are the most valuable assets you bring to the board?**
Diversity of experience, in the academic, business and non-profit sectors.

**Having covered a wide range of issues in your career, what issues in communication ethics concern you most at the moment?**
Cynicism and increasing risk aversion leading to turning away from ethical issues.

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**Frances Pinter: career to date**
2002-2006: International House Trust – Chief Executive Officer
2002-2002: EIFL.net (Electronic Information for Libraries) – Interim CEO
2000-2001: London School of Economics – Visiting Fellow, Centre for Civil Society
1994-2000: Soros Foundation (Open Society Institute) – Director, International Publishing. Facilitated the development of the independent publishing sector in 30 post-communist countries
1973-1994 Pinter Publishers – Founder and Managing Director. Established Pinter Publishers Ltd. at the age of 23. Became a leading mid-sized social science publishing house including imprints Belhaven Press and Leicester University Press
1976-1979 Oxford University, Centre for Criminological Research – Research Officer
1974-1976 Open University – Part-time Tutor, International Relations
1971-1972 LSE – Part-time Research Assistant, International Relations and Social Psychology Departments.

  

**Peter Simmons**

PAPER

# Loath to Admit: Pressures on the Ethical Disclosure of News Release Sources by Journalists

***Non-disclosure of news release sources deceives the public and is ethically objectionable. The S.967 Pre-packaged News Bill in the US endorsed the principle of self-regulation by journalists when disclosing the source of government video news releases. Senate committee hearings for the Bill raised generic ethical issues relating to the use of news releases as a vehicle for information exchange. Professional bodies for public relations and journalism advocate disclosure of source to the public, but their members perceive advantages in non-disclosure. Public relations values the credibility of implied news organization endorsement, and journalists resist being seen to be using public relations as a source for their news. If self-regulation of disclosure is to work in the public's interest, professions and news organizations have to commit seriously to ethical practice.***

Keywords: news releases, sources, journalists, ethics, pre-packaged news, self-regulation

**Introduction**

In his opening remarks to the US Senate S.967 hearing on Pre-packaged News Stories, Senator Daniel Inouye said that the true value of information to society 'can only be realized if our ethical standards require, and our laws enforce, a level of transparency and openness that protect the American public from being misled' (Inouye 2005: par. 8). The first draft of the S.967 Bill amending the US Government Communications Act (May 2005) proposed stringent regulations to clearly separate government information subsidy from editorial news. The final draft (December 2005) watered down the original Bill's requirements, effectively favouring reliance on ethical standards and reporters' discretion, over laws, in achieving transparent disclosure of government sources of news.

Many in the professions most directly affected by the Bill – journalism and various public relations specialties – will call this a victory of common-sense over unnecessary government regulation of the media. But would the public be better served by tighter regulation and guidelines for the use of the thousands (Bivins 2005) of print, audio, video and electronic news releases distributed to news media each day? Should journalists' discretion be more clearly guided by codes of practice relating to news releases?

The Medicare Video News Releases (VNR) case that prompted the US government to revisit VNR legislation stimulated debate about VNRs; it also raised some generic ethical issues relating to the news release as a vehicle for information exchange.

In a textbook on corporate reputation management Doorley and Garcia (2007) discuss the ethics of the VNR in terms that most PR practitioners and journalists find familiar.

> ... to the degree there are ethical issues inherent in VNRs, they are primarily issues affecting journalists' use of the VNRs and their disclosure of the source of the content. From a professional communicator's perspective, the ethical standards regarding a VNR are the same as those regarding a print news release: the source of the material should be clearly identified by the communicator, and the content should be accurate and truthful. If these standards are met, the VNR generally passes ethical muster (Doorley and Garcia 2007: 43).

They focus on the news release *per se*, and the responsibilities of each of the professions involved, rather than the professional conventions, imperatives and pressures that result in the presentation of news release viewpoints as news, without disclosure of the source.

This paper considers the practice and ethics of 'media release journalism' – the presentation of news release material as news, without journalistic scrutiny or attribution of source. It reflects on the formal positions expressed by peak broadcast news journalism and public relations bodies in testimony to the S.967 hearing, and some of the unspoken professional realities affecting the desirability of the disclosure of news release sources. In particular it considers public relations expertise in producing print, audio and video news releases that are indistinguishable from editorial news, and the vested nature of information produced by public relations.

The paper argues that ethical self-regulation of disclosure must transcend journalists' need to fill larger news holes, the ready availability of third party news release material, and journalists' reluctance to be seen to be using public relations material. Unless self-regulation is supported by genuine commitment to disclosure by the professions and news organizations, 'media release journalism' and deception of the public are likely to increase.

**The Medicare VNRs case and GAO decision**

In January and February 2004 US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), through their PR subcontractors, pre-packaged VNR news stories (in English and Spanish) presenting favourably the effects of the Medicare law, without reference to the government as the source of the information. Each story package was distributed with a suggested script for the news anchor to lead in to the story. The first said 'the Federal Government is launching a new, nationwide campaign to educate 41 million people with Medicare about improvements to Medicare … Karen Ryan explains' (GAO 2004: 6).

Not disclosed was the fact that Karen Ryan was a public relations consultant hired to play the reporter in the story (Alberto Garcia played the reporter in the Spanish version). The videos ran excerpts from the government's advertising campaign and interviews, with Karen Ryan narrating. The story closes with what became the most contentious aspect of the presentation: 'In Washington, I'm Karen Ryan reporting.'

The VNRs were 'clearly designed to be aired exactly as the agency produced them' (Poling 2005) and were used, at least in part, on 40 TV stations in 33 markets (GAO 2004: 9). They ignited a debate that led to an inquiry and decision by the US General Accounting Office in May 2004. The GAO decision found that although the agency had a right to disseminate information, the VNR campaign violated the prohibition of the use of appropriated funds for publicity and propaganda because the VNR footage did not disclose their source:

> In neither the story packages nor the lead-in anchor scripts did HHS or CMS identify itself to the television viewing audience as the source of the news reports. Further, in each news report, the content was attributed to an individual purporting to be a reporter but actually hired by an HHS subcontractor (GAO 2004: 2).

The GAO decision led to the introduction of a Bill to amend the Communications Act (S.967) in April 2005 and debate and hearings that focused on Government sponsored VNRs. However, the case raised some generic ethical issues relating to the practice of 'media release journalism', and disclosure by journalists of any news releases as a source of news. These issues are important to the professions involved in the exchange of information by news release, and the public who consume 'news'.

**The ethics of 'media release journalism'**

As Jempson (2005) has said, people need to be able to trust journalists to check sources and motives. When news release material is used in editorial news without disclosing the source, journalists fail in their ethical duties relating to the presentation of information to the public. When the source is not disclosed, news release material acquires the implied endorsement of a more credible and neutral party – the newspaper or newscaster – because readers assume that editorial is the creation of journalists. As gatekeepers for the public interest, journalists are positioned as having the professional responsibility for what appears as news. In the case of print news, average readers not familiar with the way journalists work would find it difficult to discern that a story was based on a press release (Zawawi 2001). However, this applies equally when video, audio and electronic news release material is used for news without disclosure of source.

Simmons and Spence distinguish between proper scrutiny, checking and attribution of news release material by journalists, and 'media release journalism' which involves 'the printing or broadcasting of media release ideas and material without fulfilling some or all of journalists' public responsibilities' to attribute source, avoid plagiarism, and disclose all essential facts and conflicts of interest that might affect independence (2006: 172). They say that media release journalism represents ethically objectionable practice by journalists and news organizations, even if the material is accurate and true. It is ethically objectionable because journalists knowingly present information to the public from a source of lesser objectivity and credibility than news that is prepared and created by journalists. Thus the audience is deceived into thinking that news release content is news scrutinized and created by journalists.

The hearing on the S.967 Bill heard similar views. The Commissioner for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) said that the issue of concern with news is that 'absent proper disclosure, listeners and viewers may believe that these stories are produced by *bona fide* news organizations, rather than third parties who may have a vested interest in the content of the story' (Adelstein 2005: par. 1). Government-funded pre-packaged news stories need to clearly identify the source for viewers, according to the GAO's Susan Poling. She said that it is not enough that the material is not objectionable, nor that the broadcaster is aware of the source of the material (Poling 2005). The Commissioner for the Federal Communications Commission said that consumers had 'a right to know who is trying to persuade them' and that Congress had been unwavering in its requirement that radio and television broadcasters announce who 'paid for or furnished' any 'valuable consideration' (Adelstein 2005: par. 5).

Journalists are not alone in their ethical responsibilities here. Where media release journalism occurs as a result of the placement of news releases, with the strategic intention that they will be used as journalistic comment without disclosure of the source (for example, in small and regional newspapers without the resources for independent research and corroboration), it constitutes ethically objectionable behaviour by the public relations practitioner.

> ... insofar as the public are subjected to deception as a result of the PR strategy of presenting, through the collaboration of lazy or unscrupulous journalists, media releases as journalistic comment, then the PR practitioners responsible for producing and disseminating those press releases, are party to the deception and thus culpable of unethical professional conduct (Simmons and Spence 2006: 177).

The actions of PR practitioners who take advantage of circumstances that result in media release journalism are ethically objectionable, because they effectively collude with the journalist to perpetrate a deception.

**S.967 Prepackaged News Stories Bill**

The first draft of the S.967 Bill included a requirement that government VNRs would in future require the conspicuous display of the words, 'Produced by the US Government …visible for the entire duration of the pre-packaged news story', and prohibited the removal of the display of source (S.967, 2005). The Bill was designed to ensure 'that broadcasters and others airing stories are aware of the government's involvement, and, most importantly, that listeners and viewers understand the nature and source of the information being presented' (Adelstein 2005: par. 9).

PAPER

By October 2005 the disclosure requirement in the Bill had been softened. The Bill retained a requirement to disclose source to broadcasters, but journalists and broadcasters would largely retain discretion in the disclosure of source to viewers and listeners.

> Any pre-packaged news story produced by or on behalf of a Federal agency and intended for broadcast over the air or distribution by a multi-channel video programming distributor within the United States shall contain a clear notification within the text or audio of the pre-packaged news story that the pre-packaged news story was prepared or funded by the 'United States Government' (S.967, 2005: 5).

The disclosure requirement applies to users of the 'complete, ready-to-use audio or video news segments produced by the government but does not apply to users of "B-roll" footage or segments of the VNR used "within their own creative work"' (Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation 2005: 2).

**Industry prefers self-regulation of disclosure**

The less strict disclosure requirements in the final Bill are consistent with the preferences for journalist self-regulation of disclosure to the public that were expressed by public relations and broadcast industry representatives at the S.967 hearing. The main argument used by the public relations (and its sibling VNR production) industry representatives against the initial Bill's strict disclosure requirement was that with specific proscription of the way disclosure should be announced, broadcasters would be less likely to use the VNR material at all.

  

Consequently the viewing public would not receive information that it should receive.

> We believe these provisions may have the unintended consequence of actually impeding the free flow of important information to the public (Phair 2005: par. 9).

> I am concerned the 'Truth in Broadcasting' Bill will decrease, not increase the information available to the public. It will limit, not expand the transparency of government activities (Simon 2005: par. 8).

Phair and Simon argued that proscription of the specifics of disclosure would result in less VNR uptake by broadcasters because the regulated government-label presentation of disclosure would not match the individual formats and styles of the broadcasters.

> Rather than deciding whether the story, or a portion of it, should air, based on news standards, stations will be factoring in whether they are comfortable changing the look of their broadcast (Simon 2005: par. 8).

> Disclosure to the public is ultimately the responsibility of broadcasters. It could come in many forms, depending on the content and context of the VNR and the broadcaster's news production formats, and as long as the result is to keep the public totally informed about the sources of information (Phair 2005: par. 11).

The president of the Radio Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) testified on behalf of the broadcast industry at the hearing. She did not mention issues of house news style restricting use of materials from third parties, but stressed the importance of retaining the independence of broadcasters in determining what is broadcast.

> The determination of what to include in any particular newscast constitutes the very core journalistic function of a broadcaster, and is a matter far removed from government supervision. The government must be cautious, therefore, in taking any action that would interfere with the editorial judgments of electronic journalists or otherwise dictate news decisions or content (Cochran 2005: pars 13, 14).

Cochran's (2005) central assertions to the hearing were that improper use of third party material by electronic journalists occurs but is insignificant in its frequency, and that the broadcast news industry already has adequate guidelines on the proper use of material from third parties (such as VNRs). She said that 'news organizations often receive topic suggestions and materials from third parties' but that for most operations these were not a significant source of news. She said that third party VNR material is mostly used as background footage for stories produced by news rooms, and only – very rarely – in their entirety. She referred to electronic journalists as 'trustees of the public' (par.12), and said that 'electronic journalists have every incentive to protect the editorial integrity of the audio and video they air without government intervention' (par. 15). Her testimony asserted that the RTNDA ethics code (before the Medicare VNRs case) included a clear requirement to 'disclose the origin of information and label all materials provided by outsiders' (Cochran 2005: par. 7), and that guidance on disclosure of audio and video material had been expanded in revised VNR guidelines released in April 2005 (ibid: par. 8).

All industry representatives at the hearing expressed support for the legislation's intent to ensure that the source of news release material is disclosed to the public, but favoured self-regulation by journalists and broadcasters over specific regulated enforcement of the way that the source would be announced. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and RTNDA strongly suggested that the ethical use of third party sources is vital to their profession. The PRSA expressed the importance to the PR profession of 'trust with the media and the public' (Phair 2005: par. 14), and the RTNDA said that 'electronic journalists have every incentive to protect the editorial integrity of the audio and video they air' (Cochran 2005: par. 15). The remainder of this paper considers the main industry arguments at the S.967 hearing, and working realities and pressures for public relations practitioners and journalists that undermine the ethical use of news release material.

**Helping the flow of information, in the style of the news**

Industry representatives at the S.967 hearing presented the free flow of 'information' as a desirable outcome, without discussion of the quality of the information flowing freely to the public. Public relations plays an important part in making the activities and views of organizations and other entities accessible to the public through the media. But when information flows as news, the public's interest is best served when it can make decisions about the credibility of the information based on clear identification of the source and balanced discussion of motives.

News release information comes from a source with an interest in presenting the information in the way that it is presented in the release. Public relations relies on the flow of information, but the provision of information is a means to an end, not the ultimate goal of public relations.

> It [information] must always be seen as 'instrumental' or contributing to persuading and mobilising the target audience to buy a product, support an issue or vote for a particular candidate (Linning 2004: 67).

The ability to craft news releases in a style that is indistinguishable from news is a foundational skill in public relations. The transfer of information from organization through public relations officer and journalist to media consumers can occur rapidly and almost seamlessly. According to Poling, the popularity of VNRs may be attributed to the ease of their distribution (2005: par. 11).

'The goal of a VNR project is to receive the widest possible airings of the key messages within' (Simon 2005: par. 18). Public relations people are taught that 'reporters and editors have no obligation to use any of the information from a news release in a news story' (Wilcox and Cameron 2006: 357), and that the key to effective news releases is in the placement of the release.

> ...knowing when something is newsworthy and when it is not, and knowing your contacts in the media and their schedules and guidelines, are the most important elements of news release writing (Bivins 2005: 103).

Bivins tells readers of his public relations writing text: 'As a writer of news releases you will become a reporter' (ibid). Critics of public relations media practice have drawn attention to public relations college training 'where students are trained to write, act and think like journalists' (Holtzhausen 2002: 258), and students of public relations and journalism learn skills together without adequate explanation of the 'professional differences of attitude and motive' (Moloney 2006: 159).

> The emphasis on writing skills and journalism training is a dominant focus in the training of undergraduate public relations practitioners, particularly at schools and colleges of journalism and mass communications. Through this training the image of the public relations practitioner as journalist is created. Students are taught to use the Associated Press style book, and all the formats of news releases, video releases and other media forms. (Holtzhausen 2002: 258-9).

The public relations industry survives in large part because of its ability to provide a helping hand with media stories. The value of the placement of news release material varies with the audience and the medium, but the stakes and the motivation for public relations people are high. In her testimony to the S.967 hearing the PRSA president said PRSA believed that VNRs play an important part in strategic communications planning and the free flow of information, and that most of their 20,000 members and the 120,000 public relations practitioners in the US hold the view that sponsors of the causes and interests served by VNRs should be disclosed to the media (Phair 2005).

She also said PRSA believed that the public should be kept 'totally informed about the sources of information" (Phair 2005: par. 11). What was not discussed at the hearing was public relations practitioners' attitudes to, and perceived value of, non-disclosure of news material source to the public. News release material presented to the public as editorial news, without attribution of source, acquires the implied endorsement of the news organization. This enhances the credibility of the material and makes it a more powerful instrument of persuasion. Linning has said that the ability of public relations to secure third party endorsement for people who cannot or are not prepared to says things is public relations' greatest asset (2004: 65).

When news release material is published with a journalist's by-line and without acknowledgement of the source 'the public relations consultants concerned do not generally object to having their material presented in this way to an unsuspecting audience' (Richards 2005: 63). While the public relations industry peak body might claim in good faith to support full disclosure of news release as source, it better suits public relations campaigns if the helping hand with media stories is unseen, because the news release material acquires the credibility of the news organization.

**'Not a significant source of news'**

Calculating the exact amount of influence that news releases and public relations have on news is methodologically problematic because it tends to rely on self-reporting by journalists and public relations practitioners, or analysis and tracing of the origins of news, or tracking media use of a sample of news releases. Davis says that public relations' influence on news production has always been greater than 'scholars recorded, journalists admitted, or news consumers were aware of' (2003: 31). When asked about the extent of public relations' influence on the news, journalists point to garbage bins crammed with press releases as evidence of their media gatekeeping, while public relations practitioners talk of high success rates (Zawawi 2001).

Quantitative tracking studies have consistently found that public relations material has a large influence on news. In 2005 and 2006 the Centre for Media and Democracy tracked US television stations' use of 36 VNRs from three public relations companies working mostly for profit making corporations. They found 77 stations used the VNR material in different ways without disclosing the client source. Collectively, the stations had audience reach of more than half the US population.

> In each case, these 77 television stations actively disguised the sponsored content to make it appear to be their own reporting. In almost all cases, stations failed to balance the clients' messages with independently-gathered footage or basic journalistic research. More than one-third of the time, stations aired the pre-packaged VNR in its entirety (Farsetta and Price 2006: par.1).

Much of the news read in newspapers is believed to originate in press releases (Wilcox and Cameron 2006) and researcher estimates of the amount of news content influenced in some way by public relations have been as high as 80 per cent in the US (Cameron, Sallot and Curtin 1996). An Australian study of major metropolitan daily newspapers found that 47 per cent of news articles were the result of press releases and other activity, and that the articles overwhelmingly reflected the perspective of the entity issuing the release, rather than a balance of viewpoints (Zawawi 2001).

In her testimony at the S.967 hearing Cochran said that third party materials are 'not a significant source of news for most operations' (par. 3). Referring to conversations with news directors, she concluded that VNRs are used in their entirety 'very rarely' (Cochran 2005: par. 10). 'Very rarely' and 'significant' have no precise definitions in this context, but these descriptions are inconsistent with other indicators, and Simon's testimony at the same hearing. He said that 5 per cent of the VNRs his company distributes air 'in their entirety', and referred to monitoring service claims that no more than 10 per cent of news is VNR footage (Simon 2005: par. 18). Griffo refers to claims from the CEO of Medialink that material from his company's VNRs has been used by every TV station with a newscast in the US (2004). The public's interests in understanding the amount of influence that VNRs have on editorial news were not served well by industry accounts at the hearing.

**Pressures to use third party material**

The pressure to use news releases is increased where news budgets are tight, and there are demands on journalists to increase output. More output means less time to investigate, check sources, and corroborate facts. The decline in news-gathering resources is perhaps the most important factor driving the use of public relations material, and local stations with smaller budgets are often mentioned as the most receptive to VNRs (Poling 2005; Cutlip, Center and Broom 2006). The FCC Commissioner said that government and private corporation news stories are attractive to newsrooms trying to deliver more news with fewer resources for journalism, and described VNRs as 'one symptom of the commercialization of the media' (Adelstein 2005). Moloney described a 'structural process of marketization operating on newsrooms, which is sucking in PR material to fill larger news spaces' (2006: 153).

The State of the News Media (2006) describes an environment of declining resources for the gathering of news in the US. It reports widespread newspaper job cuts, local radio stations offering little reporting from the field, a narrowing of local TV news story content, and that blogs and web based news struggle to produce original news. 'Even in bigger newsrooms, journalists report that specialization is eroding as more reporters are recast into generalists' (State of the News Media 2006: par.12).

The report refers to the problem of the loss of traditional, inquiring, rigorous journalism, and 'the decline of full-time, professional monitoring of powerful institutions' (ibid: par.17).

  

The amount of time and other resources available to journalists to create their own news is a critical factor affecting the proper, ethical use of third party material such as news releases. Industry representatives at the S.967 hearing did not mention the temptation for journalists to use public relations materials as a way of filling news holes, or the temptation for public relations practitioners to target under-resourced newsrooms with pre-packaged news. Industry largely focused attention on policy commitments to the principles of proper conduct, without mention of the day to day realities for working professionals that increase the likelihood of media release journalism.

**Guidelines for the proper use of material from third parties**

Journalists and editors can quickly decide on the utility of news release material, and have a range of options for their use. They can ignore releases completely, broadcast or print them without alteration or checking, or use the material as the stimulus for a story of their own creation. In their training, journalists are taught that news releases are not written as balanced news, that they represent the preferred account of the organisation issuing the release, and should not be treated as objective information. News releases are discussed as possible starting points or ideas for a story, but that without independent verification of claims made in the release, additional information should be sought. When independent verification is not obtained, but news release material used, journalists are taught to disclose source.

> In many cases, the press release contains quotes from an official or source within the organization. If you can't reach the source to get comments yourself, you may use the quotes. But you should attribute them to the press release (Rich 2000: 76).

The Radio Television News Directors Association and Foundation Code of Ethics says that professional electronic journalists' first obligation is to the public and that journalists should 'present news accurately, in context and as completely as possible' (RTNDAFa 2006: par.5). The requirement to 'clearly disclose the origin of information and label all material provided by outsiders' (par.6) was expanded in April 2005 when RTNDA released new guidelines (RTNDAFb 2006) on the use of non-editorial video and audio material. The new guidelines require journalists to scrutinize the material source and production values more closely, and to label all material from 'corporate and other non-editorial sources' (par. 4). They also provide suggestions on how to appropriately disclose the source.

The Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics (Society of Professional Journalists 2006) is much less specific about disclosure requirements, but includes three related points when it says that journalists should: 'Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability' (par. 3); 'Never plagiarize' (par. 3); and 'Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur lines between the two' (par. 3).

PAPER

Despite the ubiquity of press and news releases as a means of communicating with journalists and media, codes of journalism ethics generally fail to instruct journalists clearly on their appropriate use. A survey of professional journalist codes in Australia (Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance 2006), the UK and Ireland (National Union of Journalists 2006), Norway (Norwegian Press Code 2005), and Canada (Fédération Professionnelle des Journalistes du Québec 2006) finds that codes neither mention press and news releases specifically, nor provide clear instruction on their use. The German Press Council mentions press releases specifically, but only briefly; '[press releases] issued by public authorities, political parties, associations, clubs or other lobby groups must be clearly defined as such if they are published without having been edited'. It also says that 'the credibility of the press as a source of information calls for particular care in dealing with PR material and in producing editorial supplements' (German Press Council 2005: Guideline 7.2).

Richards has said that there is a case for arguing that Australia's main code of journalism ethics should deal explicitly with the use of public relations news release material, but that codes are just one of many influences on the ethics of journalist behaviour (Richards 2005). He suggests that codes will be ineffective without programs involving all employees and managers in news organizations in processes that explore their meaning and application (ibid). One very important barrier to ethical conduct in this regard, deserving close scrutiny by journalists and their news organizations, but not mentioned in the S.967 hearings, is journalist resistance to disclosing public relations material as a source of news.

**Journalists don't attribute public relations as source**

Industry leaders at the S.967 hearings testified that existing codes and regulations adequately protect the public's right to disclosure of third party news sources, and that journalists and news organisations should self-regulate on matters of disclosure to the public. Their testimony did not refer to the journalism profession's known resistance to be seen by their publics to be using public relations material as a source of news. The reasons for the resistance are not the subject of this paper, but the resistance is important in discussions of journalists' ethical disclosure of third party sources, and the need for guidelines and regulation.

Researchers refer to the need for journalists to build confidence that they work in the public interest (Jempson 2005), to scrutinize information provided by public relations firms (Zawawi 1998; Moloney 2006) and to acknowledge their sources (Macnamara 2006).

Although many journalists have to deal with increasing news holes, reliance on public relations material is not considered good journalism, and journalists prefer not to be seen to be using public relations sources. TV stations don't like to appear to be using video material not produced by their own people (Wilcox and Cameron 2006: 83), and reporters who use the material contained in releases are often reluctant to attribute news releases or public relations companies as their source (Macnamara 2006).

> …local television news directors are pressed to fill ever-larger 'news holes' with smaller staffs and budgets. Consequently, local news operations are increasingly dependent on public relation sources, although they are loath to admit that reality (Cutlip, Center and Broom 2006: 265).

Journalists' known reluctance to be seen to be using public relations contributions in the creation of news is a barrier to the ethical presentation of news release material to the public. Ultimately the ethical use of third party materials in editorial news will be determined by journalists' and their news organizations' insistence on scrutinizing and disclosing their sources. They need resources to scrutinize and willingness to disclose.

**Conclusion**

There is ample evidence that news releases from public relations have a substantial impact on the news the public read, watch and listen to. The level of this impact was arguably understated by industry representatives at the S.967 hearing. As Bivins says, PR people continue to provide news releases because they are effective (2005).

It's more than 10 years since Cameron, Sallot and Curtin's (1996) important review of public relations and the production of news. More research needs to be done to determine the nature and extent of the influence that third party news sources have on editorial news.

Failure to disclose source is ethically objectionable because it results in deception. Regardless of the perceived veracity or consequence of third party material, the public has a right to know its source. The important responsibility for disclosure of the source of government VNRs, and other forms of news release, rests with journalists and news organizations.

At the S.967 hearings, industry representatives did not mention some important factors that affect the ethical use of news releases. Resources for researching and creating news are diminishing and placing pressure on many journalists to fill larger news holes, and expertly crafted and targeted public relations news release material provides a tempting way to fill them. But journalists resist being seen to be using public relations material. Disclosure of third party source, where the third party is public relations, is inherently undesirable for many journalists because they feel it exposes some sort of professional inadequacy. So journalists are tempted to use public relations material, and tempted not to disclose source if they do.

When news release material is presented to the public without disclosure of the source, the message acquires the implied third party endorsement of the journalist and news organisation, thus increasing its credibility to the public. Public relations materials seek to persuade; non-disclosure of the real source enhances the credibility of the message. Thus, both individual journalists and public relations practitioners perceive their work to be enhanced when news release material is used without disclosure of the source.

That the S.967 hearing – which brought together the FCC and peak public relations and electronic journalism bodies to examine disclosure issues – did not explore these news production realities, reflects a focus on the concerns of the professions involved to preserve the status quo, not on the interests of the public who attend to news.

In the longer term the blurring of public relations and journalism destroys both. Each needs the public to trust that journalists are independent for published or broadcast content to be credible (Moloney 2006). Moreover, if self-regulation of disclosure is to work in the public's interest, professions and news organizations have to commit seriously to ethical practice. Use of 'According to a press statement ..' needs to become a badge of journalistic integrity, rather than the mark of a second-rate journalist.

Genuine leadership commitment will be required if disclosure practices by journalists are to be improved from within the professions. Change will not be achieved by paying lip-service to principles. The codes of public relations and journalism practice should provide clearer and more specific guidance on the proper use of news release material, and be supported by ongoing professional and organizational accountability mechanisms that promote ethical practice.

If self-regulation of disclosure does not work in the public's interest – and the public's interest is not protected by effective external regulation of disclosure – the public, and indeed public relations, will have to look elsewhere for what we now call news.

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## Note on Contributor

Peter Simmons is Postgraduate Courses Coordinator, Organisational Communication, School of Communication, Charles Sturt University, Australia. His recent research and publications have focused on public relations evaluation and research, ethics of public relations and journalism, and the influence of communication practices on perceptions of justice. Contact details: Peter Simmons, School of Communication, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, NSW, 2795, Australia. Phone: 61 2 63384521; fax: 61 2

  

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Journalists Under Fire: The Psychological Hazards of Covering War**
Anthony Feinstein
The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore
ISBN 0 8018 8441 1 pp 195

Feinstein's title invites a dismissive response. Given the misery in the world created by warfare, why should journalists who happen to cover war merit a particular study? Is bashing on about post traumatic stress disorder one more symptom of the incurable navel-gazing, self-inflating nature of the profession?

It's not as if obvious remedies are not to hand. Unlike veterans of conflicts or their innocent victims, war correspondents find an outlet and ready publishers for their traumas – bookshops are stuffed with their recollections. But within the profession, many are sceptical of their status as members of the human race. Thrill-seeking adrenaline junkies? Self-publicizing Scud-studs? There's a sneaking suspicion that monsters of professional self-regard tend to be drawn to cover wars. Plenty of caustic anecdotes from disenchanted partners are gleaned by Feinstein to back up this observation:

> They fill the house with loads of stinking kit. Sometimes they even give you infectious, unpleasant tropical diseases. They dominate all social occasions with endless retelling of adventures at the front. Lots of voyeuristic descriptions of violence in inappropriate situations (p. 133).

OK this is fun, but such a response is unfair to Feinstein's careful, sympathetic and illuminating study, if not to the profession. His work on this subject began in the late 1990s, when he found little academic research about trauma in war journalists, and scant evidence that many news organizations had paid it much attention. In fact, one theme of the book, as the former *New York Times*'s war correspondent Chris Hedges states in his foreword, is 'the callousness and cruelty of news organizations, which crumple up and discard those who return to them in pieces. It is about a news culture that does not take care of its own'.

Of course there are significant exceptions, and Feinstein received help from a handful of news organizations in pursuing his study. Although initial funding for the first phase came from the Freedom Forum, the bill for Phase 2 was met by CNN International. In any case, responsibility cannot simply be laid at the door of the news corporations. Journalists share responsibility for this news culture and its macho definitions of professionalism – e.g. heavy substance abuse and stoicism about shocking experiences.

David Loyn, in his recent study of war journalism, *Frontline* (Penguin 2005), speaks for many journalists in displaying a contempt of counsellors:

> The nature of the life of 'nomadic risk-takers' is so alien to these 'city-dwellers' that they too often address the reason why people go out there at all rather than trying to fix the specific problem (p. 386)

Feinstein is emphatically a city-dweller, and although he obviously enjoys talking to war journalists, he appears to find them a trifle scary: 'They operate within a unique belief system…their threshold of what defines risk has been shifted so far along the continuum of our shared beliefs as to make it difficult to detect…' On alcohol abuse he finds them irredeemable: 'While war journalists listened respectfully to the PTSD and depression data, the information on alcohol and its interpretation within rigid medical orthodoxy [which he defines as 14 units for men, 9 for women] prompted howls of laughter and occasionally outright derision' (p. 82).

**The sample – mainly male**

The first phase of his study was based on a sample of 140 war journalists – incidentally a category that some, such as the BBC's John Simpson, dispute – out of 170 names supplied by the BBC, CNN, Reuters, APTN, NBC, ITN and RPT. More than 70 per cent of his sample was male, and mainly in the late 30s and early 40s. Data was collected in 2000-2001. The subjects had covered conflicts as diverse as Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Somalia, Gulf War 1, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Sierra Leone. Questionnaires were administered, followed up by face-to-face interviews with one in five respondents. He also applied the same methodology to a control group of 107 'domestic journalists' with no experience of war zones.

Feinstein finds that 29 per cent of his sample of war journalists met the criteria for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to none of the domestic journalists and 5 per cent in the general population. That is, the war journalists were displaying symptoms from the three categories that define PTSD: intrusion, avoidance and arousal. Intrusive symptoms include recurrent disturbing images, dreams and hallucinations. Avoidance symptoms involve attempts to shun people, places and actions, and memory loss and feelings of detachment. Arousal covers problems with sleep, anger, concentration and hyper-vigilance – that is, a persistent wariness about dangers.

Depression, heavy drinking and other substance abuse are marked side-effects. Some 41 per cent of war journalists drank over the recommended limit – twice the figure for domestic journalists, with 14 per cent on double the weekly limit. Women were even more at risk: 52 per cent of women war journalists drank heavily, compared to only 7 per cent of domestic female journalists. Feinstein also found a tendency for drug use – cocaine in particular. Over half his sample were divorced or single compared to a third in the control group.

Of course, the number of war journalists who do not suffer from PTSD and are not on the road to alcohol or drug addiction is comfortably in the majority. 'I don't necessarily buy the theory that we are all traumatized,' Maggie O'Kane, of the *Guardian* tells him (p. 182). In fact, that's broadly in line with his findings: most war journalists cope with their experiences. Even so, Feinstein uncovers one area where women journalists are very vulnerable: 'In two of the three mothers that I interviewed, childbirth was the catalyst for the recrudescence of repressed traumatic memories' (pp 125-126). Ironically the tough, admirable O'Kane has written movingly about the intense terror she felt walking her baby on Hampstead Heath that someone was going to hurt him and how it took becoming a mother to allow her to understand the anguish of parents she had observed in Kosovo.

**News organizations' duty of care**

What does Feinstein say about the moral responsibilities of news organizations and their duty of care towards their employees? Within the corporate news culture Feinstein makes perfectly reasonable calls for more vigilance from news organizations to pick up early signs of psychological distress: confidential mechanisms for detection, voluntary treatment plans and the planting of questions in annual medical check-ups. But he leaves the safe ground of empirical psychiatry when he argues that, apart from the humane principle of caring for their staff, news organizations need to do this 'to ensure the facts are not distorted by a journalist's depression, anxiety, substance abuse, or post-traumatic stress disorder, for all these conditions may act as a biased filter through which a particular event, emotional in itself, is viewed'.

The concept of the journalist as emotionless 'filter', devoid of social context, history, ideology jumps up like a claymore mine. Damn such 'filters'. Surely the appropriate professional filter for journalists about the contemporary world is paranoia about authority, empathy for the victims, and anger at the stupidity, historical illiteracy, ambition and greed which brought us to this pass? Held together, of course, by a steely effort to construct credible 'facts'.

**John Tulloch**
University of Lincoln

**Journalism Ethics and Self Regulation**
Chris Frost
London; Pearson/Longman; pp 334
Second edition
ISBN 1 40583 536 2

Since Chris Frost first published *Media Ethics and Self Regulation* in 2000 much has changed. Ethics is now part of most degree courses in journalism, which themselves have multiplied, and the number of books on media or journalism ethics grows annually. Before Frost there was little published on media ethics this side of the Atlantic. A number of essay collections, notably Matthew Kieran (ed) *Media Ethics*, published two years previously and Andrew Belsey and Ruth Chadwick's edited collection published in 1992, are still valuable. A number of journalism textbooks included a consideration of ethics: Richard Keeble's chapter in his *Newspapers Handbook* (Routledge) and David Randall's *The Universal Journalist* (Pluto) included a section on ethics (though he was at pains to suggest that we need not call it ethics) were an indication of what was to come.

Most journalists viewed ethics as something for the academy and told rather lame jokes about the book of journalism ethics being one of the shortest in the world, or the oft-quoted comment, attributed to the former editor of the *Sun*, Kelvin MacKenzie, about ethics being a county east of London where the men wore white socks. Ethics was not, it seemed, part of the real world.

Within the growing number of journalism

  

degree courses both in Britain and Ireland there was an ambivalence. On the one hand, ethics gave such programmes some academic respectability. How could even the most traditionalist academic doubt the validity of a subject that has Aristotle, Plato, Kant, Hobbes, Locke, Russell, Bentham, Moore, and Hare, at its centre? For journalism academics ethics, when well taught, allowed academic respectability, while also engaging with the issue of standards of journalism out in the real world.

The study of journalism would be respectable, even if the practice was often not. On the other hand, a fear of being sneered at by journalists for teaching something as other worldly as ethics often meant it was disguised under module titles such as Contemporary Issues in Journalism, This writer can recall an Irish tabloid editor yelling across a room at a reception: 'Are you still teaching that ethics s***?' The same editor was recently sitting on a committee drawing up a code of ethics for a proposed Irish press council. *Plus ça change*.

**Journalism studies in search of a definition**

When Professor Frost's work first appeared, journalism studies was, to some extent, still trying to define itself as a degree subject that looked at the 'how to' rather than simply looking at the end product of media activity, as media studies had tended to do. Journalism and journalism studies have come a long way since the beginning of the century, thanks to debates engendered by journals such as *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* and *Journalism Studies*, no less than this journal. That work of definition is still going on. What has emerged, I believe, is a view that media studies and communication studies are not necessarily the most useful base for what is emerging as a new subject that merges theory and practice, the professional and academic, and views journalism as a practice independent of the media.

The student of journalism today is the practitioner of tomorrow. Ethics has a central place in this new subject that is about educating reflective journalists rather than just training journalists. Journalism educators are saying they want more than a critique of journalism, they actually want to influence the practice and possibly produce better journalism, with all the implications that might have for civic culture and civic participation.

Frost was not afraid to suggest that ethics was an intellectual subject with rigorous methodology and a history that went back to the Greeks. He was not afraid to integrate the thinking of Aristotle and Kant into discussions about the right and the wrong, the good and the bad within journalism. *Media Ethics and Regulation* offered a textbook to those in journalism education who were looking for something more than general discussions about codes of conduct and moans about falling standards.

*Media Ethics and Regulation*, however, was somewhat confusing because while it was a text book in a classic sense, with a synopsis at the start of each chapter, bullet points and questions for students, it was also a critique of the present voluntary regulatory system in Britain – a critique offered by someone who had been involved in the NUJ, including its Ethics Council, at the highest level.

**On journalists' cultural ethic**

*Media Ethics and Regulation* examined the role of law and the enforcement of ethical standards. The usual way is either through law, a statutory regulatory body or a mixture of both. Most Western-style democracies 'have developed a cultural ethic for journalists that cover in some way most or all of the issues of truth, privacy, harassment and fairness. In some cases, the society concerned will enforce that ethic by legislation and it is one of the more interesting and revealing areas of study for those seeking difference in national cultures and identities', (p. 106) he said.

It was possible for the press to be answerable under the law but not to the state or government. The British press, he pointed out in 2000, was already tightly controlled and the effect of this distorted the view as to what is ethical and what is not. 'Journalists have become so busy trying to slip around the wording of this law or that that they rarely step back and look at the ethical dimension of what they are doing' (p. 107).

He asked why was it that whilst the press was allegedly free, constrained only by a voluntary self-regulating body, broadcasting was hedged in by statutory regulatory bodies and laws about what could and could not be broadcast.

In 2000, his view was a highly controversial one: that regulation of the British press should be put on a statutory footing, with the law applied at one remove, by giving regulatory bodies statutory powers; its membership selected according to criteria laid down by law and its methods of hearing complaints and punishing offenders also laid down by statute, similar to that under which broadcasting operates.

His argument had a certain appeal for journalists, if not for editors and proprietors. A statutory body would have an appeals mechanism. An appeal system would give journalists the chance to fight their corner. Frost was clearly of the opinion that voluntary systems, as he had experienced them in the UK and within the UK's press culture, acted in their own and the industry's self interest. On the one hand, cases were sometimes not properly tested because it would not be in the interest of the self-regulator to do so.

On the other, it might bring in a judgment in a case that was not in fact unethical in order to maintain its position and knowing that the only punishment would be the publication of its adjudication. In this instance, the system might be protected but the journalist would not and could not appeal the decision. The self-regulatory systems might well hang the individual journalist out to dry to protect what it considers a greater good, its own preservation. A statutory system would give the journalist an appeals mechanism, through the courts.

Now Chris Frost has brought out a second edition, renamed *Journalism Ethics and Regulation.* This is a bigger book, by about 60 pages, with an updated bibliography. But has it weathered the changes of the past seven years and does it justify a second edition?

**Introduction to classical theory**

It is still a valuable textbook, but it is not alone anymore; it has been joined by works by Richard Keeble, Karen Sanders and Tony Harcup, amongst others. There have also been debates and discussions on ethics in journals and at conferences. It still performs the essential task of introducing students to classical theory, asking the big questions about ethics and morality and dissecting issues surrounding press freedom.

His view of media regulation has not changed over the years: 'The media cannot be exempt from the need for regulation to ensure acceptable standards and so any debate about media regulation concerns the amount of regulation and how it should be enforced' (p. 187).

Frost still favours a statutory body, established by law, as it would be enforceable and would offer an appeals process, but would be able to offer guidance rather than simply set limits. 'Not making the body statutory would be a difficult case to make,' he suggests (p. 198). He also puzzles as to why, in a world of huge capacity for radio and television, with the old argument about scarcity of bandwidth gone for good, why no one is seriously suggesting that the regulation of broadcasting cease to be statutory. If it is possible for broadcast journalists to operate within a statutory regime, why cannot their print colleagues?

His history of regulation in the UK, both for print and broadcasting is interesting, especially when one is reminded of the recommendations of various Royal Commissions on the Press or other inquiries that were quietly forgotten, such as the recommendation of the 1961 Commission which suggested a tribunal to hear complaints from journalists or editors about pressure from advertisers. It was suggested that it might be possible to extend this to complaints from editors and journalists who had been improperly obliged by their employers or superiors to suppress opinion, distort the truth or otherwise engage in unprofessional conduct (pp 215-216). However, one might question the amount of detail included, and whether it is necessary in order to make an argument. Often, it is the sheer amount covered that is the one problem with this book.

**Change of heart over press regulation**

Since the first edition was published, there has been a considerable change of heart concerning press regulation. Back then it was seen to have failed and few disagreed with the QC, Geoffrey Robertson, who, writing in his book *Freedom, the Individual and the Law*, described the PCC as a 'sophisticated public relations exercise' designed to convince parliament not to pass a privacy law. Today, it is generally considered that there has been an improvement in the behaviour of the press, though given Geoffrey Robertson's comments maybe it's the spin that is working. However, Frost seems to accept that there has, but does not believe this changes his basic premise concerning a statutory regulatory regime.

Frost might be somewhat optimistic when he suggests the improvement is due to 'fuller education and training for journalists and a more reflective approach to journalism from both practitioners and academics; there have been more books written about journalism ethics and standards in the UK in the past ten years, for instance' (p. 233). Fewer complaints to the PCC might simply reflect an acceptance of lower standards.

Back in 2000, one can understand why Frost included so much; he was filling a gap. However, the second edition might have been an opportunity to visit, or revisit some areas differently. Sources, for instance, are covered in only three pages. Here Frost makes the reasonable assertion that 'only the journalist is in a position to explore the motives of an informant and decide whether his or her identity should be kept secret'.  However, such a view is far from widespread. The NUJ's National Executive made the extraordinary decision a few years ago to never allow an individual who was not a member of the union to become a member as he had exposed a confidential source who had admitted to a murder. The NUJ took the absolutist view that the identity of a confidential source must remain confidential and that there are no circumstances that can be breached. More consideration of this argument, especially with students in mind, would have been valuable.

There are few contemporary ethical thinkers. Only one mention of Sissela Bok, the professor of Ethics at Harvard, who has written extensively about issues that concern journalists, or John C. Merrill who has written much on media ethics, in an international context. Surprisingly there is no mention of Onora O'Neill, the professor of philosophy at Cambridge, who gave a series of Reith Lectures on public trust, which included some very interesting views on the media and journalism and was later published. Such thinkers would allow students and working journalists to understand that ethical thinking, in the classic sense, is ongoing and did not end with the death of Kant.

**Missing – some major foreign issues**

As I write this review, the BBC's Gaza correspondent, Alan Johnston, has been released from captivity. There is more concern today about the killing and kidnapping of journalists. British media workers have been killed and held in captivity or otherwise harassed. There are huge ethical issues surrounding this, but it receives scant attending from Professor Frost: less than one page. And why the death of Martin O'Hagan, the first journalist killed in the UK – Belfast actually – gets only four lines is puzzling. There is no mention of the issues surrounding embedded journalism. In fact, the section that goes outside specific UK concerns covers just media regulation. Despite cutbacks on foreign desks, journalists still cover foreign news. Many of them are freelance, which raises its own issues. Other issues concerning foreign coverage include the question of whether journalists should give evidence to international war crimes tribunals. Some British journalists have been faced by this quandary, but it is not dealt with in this book.

Another area that might have been worth considering is documentaries. As a genre they are increasingly popular, more mainstream and involve journalists. There are major issues for journalists, such as the ethics of filming reconstructed events, for instance.

When reviewing the first edition, I wrote that Professor Frost had given much attention to the coverage of Princess Diana and none to Northern Ireland – the point being that 30 years of political violence and how it was covered raised important ethical issues. That has been addressed in the second edition to some extent. However, referring to Britain as the 'mainland' is not something that will endear Professor Frost to his Irish friends, nor will referring to Northern Ireland as the 'province'. The ancient province of Ulster has nine counties, only six are within Northern Ireland. Journalists should use words carefully.

*Journalism Ethics and Regulation* is still a very useful textbook and will remain the first reference work used by many students. Whether such an encyclopaedic approach is necessary today when more is being published concerning ethics is worth considering. While Frost is very strong and philosophical in some areas – privacy and truth and objectivity for example – in others the book reads like a regulatory code itself. Covering domestic violence, the reader is told never to give the address of a refuge, and that's it. On suicide, we are told to be sensitive and be aware of the problem of copy-cat suicide, but there is no analysis, or questioning, just an instruction.

At the end of the day, Professor Frost had the problem all authors face when considering a second edition: how much to change. His problem was exacerbated by the fast-changing nature of his field. For instance, his remarks about a proposed regulatory regime in Ireland were out of date even before the book was in the shops, due to the calling of an election. He is correct to maintain his basic premise concerning a statutory regime, but he might have probed a little deeper the nature of the so-called improvement in press behaviour.

**Michael Foley** is a lecturer in journalism at the Dublin Institute of Technology, where he teaches journalism practice and media ethics. He is also a member of the NUJ's ethics council.

**Remaking Media: The Struggle to Democratize Public Communication**
Robert A. Hackett and William K. Carroll
New York and London: Routledge, 2006
ISBN: 0 415 39468 6 (hbk); 0 415 39469 4 (pbk); 0 203 96992 8 (ebk) pp 235

This book is primarily concerned, as its sub-title indicates, with long-standing efforts to reform public communication (the 'media'). The authors are particularly interested in exploring how agents of media reform may be thought of as constituting a social movement in their own right, both nationally and internationally. Of special interest to readers of this journal, however, will be their examination of how 'such democratic values as participation, equality, representative diversity, civic engagement, and genuine choice' might be actualized through the processes of media reform (p. 2). The ethical implications of their argument are clear and, while it is not their aim to present any detailed ethical critique of the media, large parts of the book do furnish the materials for such a critique.

Hackett and Carroll examine a range of interventions for media reform in Canada, the UK and the US. They identify a number of critical themes that inform movements for media reform across these countries, including: the failure of a democratic public sphere; the centralization of media power; the homogenization of the media; inequalities of race, gender and social class in professional journalism; the undermining of community (fragmentation of audiences, decreases in local reporting); and the erosion of communication rights. Together, they argue, these themes provide evidence of a democratic deficit in the mass media. Hackett and Carroll's task is to examine how citizens have mobilized to counter this deficit.

They achieve this in two ways. First, they appeal to a 'shamelessly eclectic' range of theorists (p. 15) that includes Bourdieu, Gramsci, Habermas (and Nancy Fraser's feminist critique of his public sphere theory) and Melucci's work on social movements. Interestingly, these theorists have also become the foundation for much work in the study of alternative media, which is one of the sites in which Hackett and Carroll locate struggles to democratize public communication. Employing Habermas's concepts of lifeworld and system, they argue that alternative media – as well as projects of media education and 'culture jamming' – aim to change the lifeworld through which we experience media. Alternative media do so by focusing on the field of the media itself; media education works by changing the 'environing conditions' through which the media are understood.

**Alternative media practices**

Changes within the lifeworld, however, are not the authors' primary concern, despite the valuable and convincing account they give of alternative media practices as democratic media. Their emphasis is on system change, through media reform coalitions and parliamentary or congressional activities, and through interventions in the media itself, such as media monitoring projects like FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting), journalists in trade unions and professional associations, and the US public journalism movement.

Two detailed case studies of media reform organizations reveal the opportunities, obstacles and tensions that arise in struggling for system change within the profession of journalism. First, an account of the US advocacy group Media Alliance shows how, in its first two decades, its campaign aimed to achieve change from within the media field itself. The group supported the rights of journalists in the workplace and offered training to journalists that sought to counter the regime of objectivity that, Media Alliance argued (in common with most critical media scholars), prevented a practice of journalism that was thoroughly representative. Though it was founded in the mid-1970s by 'marginalized insiders' within the profession, in the 1990s Media Alliance largely shifted its strategy to interests in the lifeworld, campaigning on behalf of marginalized communities for better representation by the media.

The failure of Media Alliance's initial strategy can be explained in part by the bureaucratic and ideological power of the corporate media. The group's marginalized insiders must work within the demands of the market and within long-standing organizational, institutional and professional structures; job security becomes a significant barrier to internal reform by professional journalists. A similar constraining logic has prevented any long-term success by the US public journalism movement. It is not only at an institutional level, however, that constraints

  

appear.
The professional ethos of journalists, Hackett and Carroll argue, also militates against anything but piecemeal reform from within. At an individual level, the norm of objectivity can be seen as shaping not only journalism practices, but also the personal-political outlook of journalists. To be seen as politically engaged in media reform is to be seen as associating with 'the left' and to be abandoning the core principles of the profession. A culture of independence thus emerges, which is further sustained by personal ambition and rivalry. Together these forces produce journalists that are largely uninterested in coalition and co-operation (it is noteworthy that the bulk of trades union activity amongst journalists does not address issues of representation or a democratic deficit in reporting: instead, it focuses on 'bread and butter' matters such as conditions of employment).

**Supporting rights of journalists**
Hackett and Carroll's second major case study is that of the UK's Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (CPBF). Like Media Alliance, the CPBF has supported the rights of journalists in the workplace and has also campaigned against libel laws that restrict journalists' practices. Its main thrust, however, has been system change. It has presented a 'radical democratic critique of both commercialism and concentrated ownership' (p. 125) and, while its successes in the policy arena have been few, for 25 years it has encouraged and enabled coalitions of media-activist groups that have been successful in policy terms. The CPBG has also raised and maintained the profile of media democratization particularly in the broadcasting sector – in the civil and political life of the UK. To this degree at least, the work of the CPBF bears out Hackett and Carroll's optimism that it is through coalition across a broad range of organizations (not all of which need be media-centred) that media democracy activism flourishes.

But this range of activism does not need to come only from coalition. Like Media Alliance in the 1990s, the CPBF has also engaged in lifeworld interests such as the media representation of marginalized social groups, media education and monitoring, and support for alternative media. It is in its support for alternative media that the work of the CPBF demonstrates the pragmatic complexities of democratic media activism. From an internal debate in the 1980s about the future of community radio emerged two opposing positions. One endorsed independent, community-run stations that would operate without waiting for government approval. The other argued that such stations (those based in the lifeworld) would weaken pressure on the government to reform its public-service broadcasting commitments, as well as leading to non-unionized, self-exploited labour. This could, it was argued, lead to a fragmented broadcasting system along US lines, where commercialization and competition could ultimately replace public accountability towards communities.

Hackett and Carroll identify here a 'fault line, a tension between supporting independent media, and supporting public broadcasting' (p. 126), which goes to the heart of the struggles for media reform. As we have seen, attempts to reform journalism from within have run up against bureaucratic and ideological barriers; campaigning on policy does not necessarily result in changes to everyday journalistic practices: the professional and social identities of journalists appear too resilient for that. On the other hand, attempts to reform outside the system appear just as difficult. Alternative media projects may have the internal, ideological commitment to generating new forms of journalism that are more inclusive in terms of the sources they access, the stories they cover and the narrative forms they employ. But how can these new paradigms of journalism (Hackett and Carroll cite 'peace journalism' and David Beer's 'alternative futures' journalism) effect any lasting change on professional journalism in the system?

**The ideology of objectivity**
Common to both system changes and lifeworld changes is the limited autonomy of their protagonists: within their profession, journalists are limited by state regulation and the demands of capital, as well as an ideology of objectivity. At the margins, alternative journalists are limited by resources (capital again), as well as by the dominance of an ideology of journalism that is taken for granted by professionals and public alike (that is, it is hegemonic). Sensibly, while holding out hope that the struggles for democratic media reform are far from over, finally Hackett and Carroll argue that those struggles can only be won through coalitions that involve insiders and outsiders (that is, they must be both counter-hegemonic and reformist).

Alternatives to thinking about and doing journalism must be presented to policy-makers, professionals and the public alike, at the same time as structural media reform is sought. If, as Hackett and Carroll argue, democratic media activism is a social movement in its own right, it must still draw on the resources of other social movements, such as those in the fields of cultural representation, communication rights and freedom of expression. Media reform, they seem to argue, is too important simply to be left to media reformers, though it will still need its leaders.

Hackett and Carroll have achieved that rare thing: a book on media reform that goes well beyond the narrow constituency one might expect, given its subject matter. It will certainly be of interest to critical media scholars, for whom this is a key issue (one such, Robert McChesney, provides a foreword), but it shares none of the polemic that is often associated with studies in this field. Instead, the authors are subtle yet determined in their careful exposition of theory, and in their accounts of democratic media reform on both sides of the Atlantic. For scholars of alternative media the book has much to offer, not least that it provides an overdue critique of alternative media as agents for reform and places them within (not outside, as has been done often) a larger movement for reform. For scholars of journalism it has much to say about the place of the profession in media reform (though more would have been welcome). Finally, its admirably clear and approachable style suggests a book that would be especially welcome in the classroom, where students would encounter an object lesson in the careful construction of argument and critique that blends theory and practice in a way that is still regrettably rare in many critical media studies.

**Chris Atton**
School of Creative Industries
Napier University, Edinburgh
c.atton@napier.ac.uk

  

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- develop specific tools, quality frameworks and training methods and provide them to its members; assess initiatives in related disciplines and offer guidance and ethics training for communicators;
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