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Detailed Contents

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Part I: A Foundation for Making Ethical Decisions **1**

1 Why Ethics Matters in Journalism **3**

Our society needs news professionals who do the right thing

- Two reasons, one moral and one practical, argue that journalists should be ethical.
- In a profession that cannot legally be regulated, responsible practitioners adhere voluntarily to high standards of conduct.
- The goal of this book and course is to teach how to make ethically sound decisions.
- Discussing case studies in class is crucial to learning the decision-making process.
- Traditional ethics standards of the profession apply to journalism on the Internet.
- Ethical journalism and vigorous journalism are compatible.

Point of View: A “Tribal Ferocity” Enforces the Code [*John Carroll*]

2 Ethics: The Bedrock of a Society **16**

An introduction to terms and concepts in an applied-ethics course

- Ethics is about discerning the difference between right and wrong – and then doing what is right.
- Ancient societies developed systems of ethics that still influence human behavior.
- Ethics and law may be related, but they are not the same; law prescribes minimum standards of conduct, while ethics prescribes exemplary conduct.
- A member of a society absorbs its ethical precepts through a process of socialization.
- A person’s values shape the choices he or she makes.

- Ethical dilemmas represent a clash of ethical values.
- The ethical person learns how to make decisions when facing ethical dilemmas.

3 The News Media's Role in Society

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How the profession has matured and accepted social responsibility

- Ethical journalists have reached a consensus on journalism's purpose and guiding principles.
- Journalism, like other professions and institutions, owes society a moral duty called social responsibility.
- In the 1940s, the Hutchins Commission defined social responsibility for journalism – providing reliable information for the community.
- An ethical awakening occurred in journalism during a decade beginning in the mid-1970s.
- During this period of reform, many news organizations codified their principles.
- Today's technological and business environment presents new ethical challenges for journalism.

Point of View: A Manifesto for Change in Journalism [*Geneva Overholser*]

4 For Journalists, a Clash of Moral Duties

39

Responsibilities as professionals and as human beings can conflict

- In the abstract, journalists should avoid becoming involved with the events and the people they cover.
- However, certain situations require journalists to decide whether they should step out of their observer role and become participants.
- In those situations, guidelines can help journalists reach sound decisions.

Case Study No. 1: The Journalist as a Witness to Suffering

5 The Public and the Media: Love and Hate

56

The goal for the journalist should be respect, not popularity

- Even as the news media mature and accept their social responsibility, the public is increasingly hostile.
- Journalists need to be aware of this hostility and the possible reasons for it.
- You should treat the audience with respect and take complaints seriously.
- Stripping away the rancor, you can find useful lessons in the public's criticism.

- The public’s hostility has to be put in perspective; it may not be as bad as it seems.

Point of View: Journalism, Seen From the Other Side [*Jane Shoemaker*]
Case Study No. 2: Roughed Up at Recess

6 Applying Four Classic Theories of Ethics

74

Ancient philosophy can help you make sound decisions

- Introducing four classic theories of ethics.
- Strengths and weaknesses of rule-based thinking.
- Strengths and weaknesses of ends-based thinking.
- Strengths and weaknesses of the Golden Rule.
- Strengths and weaknesses of Aristotle’s Golden Mean.
- The value of blending rule-based thinking and ends-based thinking in the practice of journalism.

7 Using a Code of Ethics as a Decision Tool

83

Professional standards are valuable in resolving dilemmas

- Ethics codes in journalism trace their origins to the early twentieth century.
- Codes adopted by professional associations are voluntary and advisory; codes adopted by news outlets for the direction of their staffs are enforceable.
- The profession continues to disagree about the value of codes.
- Codes can be useful as a part of the decision process, not as a substitute for that process.
- The Society of Professional Journalists’ 1996 code, a model for the profession, contains four guiding principles: seek truth and report it; minimize harm; act independently; and be accountable.

Point of View: Reporting a Fact, Causing Harm [*William F. Wool*]

Point of View: Being Accountable Through a Digital Dialogue [*Mark Bowden*]

Case Study No. 3: The Death of a Boy

8 Making Moral Decisions You Can Defend

105

The key ingredients are critical thinking and a decision template

- You can polish your decision-making skills by drawing on the practical skills of journalism: gathering facts, analyzing them, and making judgments.
- Critical thinking, or thoughtful analysis, is an essential component of the decision process.
- A step-by-step template can guide you to a better decision.
- You must test your decision to see if it can be defended.

- In this course, approach the case studies as a laboratory for decision-making.

Point of View: Rationalizations in Decision-Making [*Michael Josephson*]
 Case Study No. 4: Deciding Whether to Identify a CIA Agent

Part II: Exploring Themes of Ethics Issues in Journalism **121**

9 Stolen Words, Invented Facts ... Or Worse **123**

Plagiarism, fabrication, and other mistakes that can kill a career

- Plagiarism and fabrication are morally wrong. *Plagiarism* is stealing the creative work of another. *Fabrication* is making things up and presenting them as fact.
- The offenses of plagiarism and fabrication destroy journalism's credibility and cost offenders their jobs and their careers.
- Committing illegal acts is unacceptable in the pursuit of news.
- Following sound work practices can help you avoid any hint of impropriety.
- Newsroom leaders have a duty to establish clear rules about journalistic misconduct and to enforce them.

10 Conflicts of Interest: Divided Loyalties **137**

Journalists owe their first allegiance to the audience

- Because it gives the audience reason to doubt the journalist's loyalty, a conflict of interest undermines credibility.
- An appearance of a conflict of interest can damage credibility even if the journalist's reporting is fair.
- By following reasonable guidelines, you can avoid most conflicts, real or apparent.
- This chapter discusses situations that commonly lead to conflicts.

Case Study No. 5: Covering Police, Wearing Their Uniform

Case Study No. 6: Carrying the Torch, Stirring Controversy

Case Study No. 7: On Lunch Break, Defending Reagan

Case Study No. 8: A Love Triangle on the Evening News

11 The Business of Producing Journalism **159**

News outlets' dual role: serving the public and earning money

- Technological and economic transition has caused tensions in today's news media.
- These tensions arise from a media company's dual role as a business and as a civic institution.
- Although advertisers finance journalism, they cannot be allowed to influence journalism.

- Media companies' efforts to increase revenue have led to some ethically questionable practices.
- The business and news executives of media companies frequently have a strained relationship, mainly because their cultures are so different.

Point of View: Tangoing Without a Partner [*Gene Roberts*]

Case Study No. 9: Sharing Ad Profits, Creating a Crisis

12 Getting the Story Right and Being Fair

183

Newswriting skills of accuracy and fairness are ethical skills, too

- Accuracy and fairness are ethical values fundamental to journalism.
- You need to keep an open mind as reporting progresses; your duty is not to a certain hypothesis but to the search for truth.
- If you can't prove the facts in your story, you can't use them.
- This chapter discusses other reporting situations that could lead to inaccuracy, unfairness, or both.

Point of View: The Importance of a Second Look [*William F. Woo*]

Case Study No. 10: Duke Lacrosse: One Newspaper's Journey

Case Study No. 11: On TV, a 4-Year-Old's Visit to Death Row

13 Dealing With Sources of Information

208

The fine line between getting close but not too close

- Ethical issues arise in the reporter's efforts to cultivate sources while maintaining an independence from those sources.
- The ethical challenges are acute in beat reporting, in which a journalist works with the same sources over a long period.
- If you agree to protect a source who provides information on condition of anonymity, honoring that agreement is a solemn ethical duty.
- This chapter examines recurring situations in which ethical issues arise in source relationships.

Point of View: Sometimes, Different Rules Apply [*Jeffrey Fleishman*]

Case Study No. 12: *Newsweek* and the Flushing of the Koran

Case Study No. 13: Swimming in a Newsmaker's Backyard Pool

14 Making News Decisions About Privacy

229

The public may need to know what individuals want hidden

- Journalists often have to decide between the public's legitimate need to have certain information and the desire for privacy by the individuals involved.

- Although there are certain legal restraints on publicizing private information, most decisions are made on the basis of ethics rather than law.
- A three-step template can help you make decisions in privacy cases.
- This chapter examines reporting situations in which privacy is central to decision-making.

Case Study No. 14: Revealing Arthur Ashe's Secret

Case Study No. 15: Identifying a 13-Year-Old Rape Victim

15 Making News Decisions About Taste

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The conflict between reflecting reality and respecting the audience

- Journalists often have to decide whether to publish, broadcast, or post content that could offend a significant element of the audience.
- Offensive content falls into three categories: perceived insensitivity, offensive words, and offensive images.
- A two-step process will help you make decisions, weighing the news value against the offensiveness.
- Legal limits on offensive content pertain mainly to the broadcast media.

Case Study No. 16: Reporting on a Vulgar List in the News

Case Study No. 17: Covering a Public Official's Public Suicide

16 Deception, a Controversial Reporting Tool

268

A collision in values: Lying while seeking the truth

- To decide whether to use a deceptive reporting practice, you first must acknowledge the deceit and not rationalize about it.
- Before engaging in undercover reporting – pretending to be someone else – you must meet exacting standards.
- This chapter discusses other situations, short of undercover, in which journalists could deceive or could be perceived as deceiving.
- Even if you think it may rarely be acceptable to deceive sources, you should never deceive the audience or your colleagues.

Case Study No. 18: Rumsfeld's Q&A With the Troops

Case Study No. 19: Spying on the Mayor in a Chat Room

17 Covering a Diverse, Multicultural Society

288

An ethical duty to be sensitive in reporting on minority groups

- Covering society's diversity is an ethical responsibility; news organizations have a duty to cover the entire community.
- Careful, sensitive reporting is required to analyze the complex issues of racial and ethnic conflicts.

- You should study techniques that can help you do a better job of covering cultures other than your own.
- Reporters who cover new immigrants can find that the assignment presents specific ethical issues.
- Sensitivity is needed in covering gays and lesbians in the news.

Point of View: Gaining Respect By Showing Respect [*Joann Byrd*]

Point of View: In Writing About Race, Be Precise [*Keith Woods*]

Case Study No. 20: When a Story Gets Its Subject Arrested

18 Ethics Issues Specific to Web Journalism

313

Online, there are huge opportunities – and pitfalls

- Traditional ethics standards apply to all platforms for reporting the news, including the Internet.
- Verification is vital even in a medium that emphasizes speed.
- Blogging by journalists can provide benefits, but it also can undermine their credibility as impartial observers.
- An Internet “conversation” with the audience is valuable, but unmonitored comments can cause problems.
- Journalists and citizen bloggers share the Internet, but their standards diverge.

Point of View: It’s the Ideas, Not the Names, That Count [*Carole Tarrant*]

Case Study No. 21: For a Reporter-Blogger, Two Personalities

19 Ethics Issues Specific to Visual Journalism

336

Seeking truth with the camera while minimizing harm

- The public must be able to trust the truthfulness of the news media’s photographs and video.
- Because an image can be distorted either by stage-managing the scene or by manipulating the image, responsible photojournalists have adopted standards to assure the integrity of their images.
- Recognizing that some images can offend, journalists weigh these images’ news values against the likely offense.
- The presence of photojournalists and their cameras can cause psychological harm, even if the images are not disseminated.

Case Study No. 22: Would You Run This Photograph?

Case Study No. 23: Just How Fast Do Ice Boats Go?

20 Ethics in the Changing Media Environment

360

A review of the challenges faced by contemporary journalists

- “Infotainment” – focusing on the sensational – remains a problem because it siphons news organizations’ resources from important stories that the public needs.

- The future of journalism may depend on devising a business plan that makes Internet sites profitable enough to support larger staffs of journalists.
- Although aspiring journalists should learn multimedia skills, the industry should realize that performance standards could be lowered if everyone is expected to report every story in all media.
- News websites, the dominant news platform of the future, face lingering ethics issues.
- The traditional definition of journalism takes on new importance in an environment in which the audience has access to many sources of information and needs to find a source it can trust.
- Journalists, though no longer the gatekeepers, still have the responsibility of helping their audience make sense of the news.

Point of View: Decision-Making in the Digital Age [*James M. Naughton*]

Point of View: A Difference in How Rumors Are Reported [*Kelly McBride*]

Case Study No. 24: NBC's Controversial "To Catch a Predator"

Conclusion: Some Thoughts to Take With You

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Capsules of advice for aspiring journalists

Case Study Sources

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