

## Journalistic Research

Deni Elliott

*University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812, USA*

Journalistic research strives for completeness, balance, and accuracy with the understanding that each individual report is, by definition, incomplete and weighted toward a particular view by the accessibility of sources and the need to get information out in time. This article establishes ideals of American journalistic research, points out conceptual confusions and social pressures that interfere with journalists performing at an "ideal" level, and describes norms in proposing, conducting, and reporting journalistic research. The lack of external accountability creates special problems for the credibility of journalistic research.

*Keywords:* Journalism, ethics, accountability, codes of ethics, social function

Journalistic research is unique in that the truth that it seeks and presents is an ever-changing set of conclusions. A continual report on a changing world, the practice strives for completeness, balance, and accuracy with the understanding that each individual report is, by definition, incomplete and weighted toward a particular view by the accessibility of sources. Too often journalistic accounts are more analogous to the blind men's experience with the elephant than to a presentation of the whole beast.

This article begins with the ideals of American journalistic research.<sup>1</sup> It then points out conceptual confusions and social pressures that interfere with journalists performing at an "ideal" level. There then follows a description of conventional practices in proposing, conducting, and reporting journalistic research. The article ends with a discussion of how the lack of external accountability creates special issues for the credibility of journalistic research.

### 1. THE IDEALS

Journalistic ideals are best articulated in the codes of ethics (and statements of principles) of major national professional organizations. These codes are not enforceable; that is, neither the societies adopting them nor any government agency can prevent a journalist from practicing journalism because of a code violation. Yet, they are clear attempts to articulate the goals of journalism. The codes are endorsed by all major news organizations and it is not unusual for individual newspapers and electronic media newsrooms to have their own complimentary statements of principles and ethics.

The Society of Professional Journalists, an organization open to all practicing

journalists (editors as well as reporters) begins its code this way:

[The] Society of Professional Journalists believes the duty of journalists is to serve the truth.

We believe the agencies of mass communication are carriers of public discussion and information, acting on their Constitutional mandate and freedom to learn and report the facts.

We believe in public enlightenment as the forerunner of justice, and in our Constitutional role to seek the truth as part of the public's right to know the truth.

We believe those responsibilities carry obligations that require journalists to perform with intelligence, objectivity, accuracy, and fairness.<sup>2</sup>

The American Society of Newspaper Editors begins their code with this preamble:

The First Amendment, protecting freedom of expression from abridgment by any law, guarantees to the people through their press a constitutional right, and thereby places on newspaper people a particular responsibility.

Thus journalism demands of its practitioners not only industry and knowledge but also the pursuit of a standard of integrity proportionate to the journalist's singular obligation.<sup>3</sup>

The Radio-Television News Directors Association begins their code:

The members of the Radio-Television News Directors Association agree that their prime responsibility as journalists—and that of the broadcasting industry as the collective sponsor of news broadcasting—is to provide to the public they serve a news service as accurate, full and prompt as human integrity and devotion can devise. . . . The primary purpose of broadcast journalists—to inform the public of events of importance and appropriate interest in a manner that is accurate and comprehensive—shall override all other purposes. . . . Broadcast journalists shall seek to actively present all news, the knowledge of which will serve the public interest, no matter what selfish, uninformed or corrupt efforts attempt to color it, withhold it or prevent its presentation.<sup>4</sup>

And, finally, the Associated Press Managing Editors Association Code of Ethics for Newspapers and their Staffs begins its section called "Responsibility" this way:

A good newspaper is fair, accurate, honest, responsible, independent and decent. Truth is its guiding principle.

It avoids practices that would conflict with the ability to report and present news in a fair and unbiased manner.<sup>5</sup>

The research goal for journalists is, then, to find and present truthful accounts about issues of importance to a mass audience. The notion of journalism as the provider of necessary information to the masses is expressed in various ways in the literature, but a most succinct and universal statement of journalism's role was made by veteran Washington reporter and retired journalism professor George Reedy, who said that journalism exists to tell people what they can expect from society and what society expects from them.<sup>6</sup> This description is useful because it provides a way of describing the practice of journalism in societies across time and space. Truth or independence is not inherent in Reedy's description.

In the U.S., society expects deliberative self-governance from its citizens and citizens expect in return governance that reflects a representative democracy. Here, the journalistic enterprise is refined to include the notions of truth and of journalistic independence. Ideally speaking, the journalist (and the news organization as a whole) is committed to nothing other than the search and presentation of important true information to a mass audience. Historically, the role of journalism, as the "fourth estate" of government, has been both to provide citizens with the information needed for educated self-governance and to serve as watchdogs over the citizen's governmental leaders. Over the centuries, this notion has evolved into the



belief that such information is most likely to be true if journalists are free of loyalties to special interests or strong political ideologies and to include reporting on powerful private interests as well as government.

Journalists and news organizations do many things other than approximately fulfill this social function. They tell the morality tales of the twentieth century and address the audience's need for leisure. There is nothing wrong with performing such tasks, as long as journalists are meeting their primary responsibility. Because fulfilling their social function—providing the day's "news"—is the essence of journalistic research, that is the focus for this discussion.

No journalist works in a vacuum. While it is theoretically possible for journalists to produce their work independently, just as it is theoretically possible for a scientist to perform important research in a makeshift lab in the basement, journalists who have an impact on society are usually those who work within mass market news organizations or who provide their services to these organizations on a freelance basis. The journalist works within an institution and a social context, both of which impinge on what research is done, how it is understood, and how it is performed, generating at least three major conceptual confusions.

## II. CONCEPTUAL CONFUSIONS

The first major conceptual confusion in journalism is ambiguity about the meaning of news. In its least sophisticated form, news is described by journalists, as well as by members of the public, as though self-evident and external: a flower in a field, waiting to be discovered and picked. At the other extreme, the scholarly literature dissects the valuing behaviors that accompany the selection of news to the point of skepticism. For example, Merrill and Odell conclude:

No story is objective. Even those in which the reporter attempts to remain neutral and dispassionate (a subjective stance in itself) are filtered through the subjectivity of the reporter and so are biased by his or her value system and predispositions. Journalism, then, consists in essence of the dissemination of personal perspectives, biases, distortions, opinions, and judgments—all structured and selected according to conscious and subconscious value systems.<sup>7</sup>

On a less skeptical note, writers for journalists and journalism students encourage practitioners to channel their valuing behaviors into the development of professional judgment. For example, MacDougall and Reid say:

Professional newsgatherers judge the potential interest and/or importance of an event before deciding whether to render an account of it, thus making it news. These newsgatherers are humans, not deities. They possess no absolutist yardstick by which to judge what to report and what to ignore.<sup>8</sup>

Mencher tells novice reporters to develop their "news sense." News value, he says, can be judged by considering the impact or unusual nature of an event or issue, and the prominence of the people involved. The factors of conflict, proximity, timeliness and currency increase or decrease newsworthiness.<sup>9</sup>

A mark of competent journalistic research is recognition of the newsworthiness of an event or issue along with the assumption of responsibility both for focusing the event in a way meaningful to the audience and for bringing the event to their attention.

There is also conceptual confusion about the nature of journalistic representation. If the social function of journalism is the presentation of information that a mass audience needs, it seems clear that journalists ought to represent bits of reality; journalism ought to be a mirror image of selected aspects of society. A small, necessarily distorted image, it should nonetheless correspond to what is *out there* in a way useful to a mass audience.

However, the news organization's representational role is sometimes misunderstood as like the role of elected officials. That is, journalists are said to represent members of the audience. This "constituency representation theory" is expressed when journalists are said to stand in the place of citizens who, though interested in what happens there, cannot be present at court hearings, town meetings, or other governmental deliberative events. The problem with constituency representation is that the range of interests to be represented is too broad—from the powerful to the powerless, across gender and sexual orientations, ages, ethnicities, and so on—for any journalist adequately to "represent" the many interests, concerns, and attitudes of those throughout the constituency. Unlike the "social function theory" (discussed above), this constituency representation theory offers no useful criteria prescribing what should be reported. It instead shifts the basis for determining good reporting from the news product to the journalist or news organization producing it. In contrast, the social function of journalism moves the representational role away from the audience's interests and desires toward the information that people need to know.

The concept of evolving truth also raises some special conceptual problems for the practice of journalism. Print journalism produces a daily report, electronic media, a continual report. No news story is ever really complete. The event or issue itself continues to change. The news story that is as accurate as possible at the time it was reported, may be incomplete an hour or a day later. As new information becomes available it may become clear that the conclusions the reporter reached, and thus laid out for the audience to reach, were erroneous. This raises the question of the nature of the "truth" sought and presented through journalistic research.

The idea of truth as a necessary condition for educated self-governance finds its roots in the enlightenment, most particularly in the writings of John Milton. Milton asserts a self-righting principle in suggesting that when truth and falsehood grapple, "Whoever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?"<sup>10</sup>

Yet, the truth journalists offer is far closer to that described by the Pragmatists. Journalists abstract pieces of factual information, select among them, and then synthesize those selected into reports that may prove useful to their audience. As the events and issues change over time, their utility changes. The truth in journalistic reports is a moving target forever evolving.

### III. SOCIAL PRESSURES: COMPETITION AND MARKET DRIVEN JOURNALISM

In the U.S., the First Amendment guarantees freedom of the press, but that freedom does not guarantee that news organizations will make independent news judgments. Individual news organizations participate in what is called "pack journalism", in which reporters from various news organizations circulate among



the same sources, ask the same predictable questions, and echo a common account. With the right mix of celebrity or drama, they'll call it news. Recent disasters or celebrity crimes provide more than ample examples of pack journalism.

News media are businesses, increasingly part of conglomerates that list journalism as only one of their enterprises. Bagdikian notes:

At the end of World War II, for example, 80 percent of the daily newspapers in the United States were independently owned, but by 1989 the proportion was reversed, with 80 percent owned by corporate chains. In 1981 twenty corporations controlled most of the business of the country's 11,000 magazines, but only seven years later that number had shrunk to three corporations.

Today, despite more than 25,000 outlets in the United States, twenty-three corporations control most of the business in daily newspapers, magazines, television, books and motion pictures.<sup>11</sup>

From a business perspective, the privately-owned electronic and print news media exist to make a profit for their stockholders. News organizations compete to deliver the largest share of readers, listeners, or viewers to an advertiser.

One result of privately-owned, market-driven journalism is that paper sales and program ratings can substitute for news judgment. The representational ambiguity described above becomes even more striking in these cases. In an effort to provide the largest market share of an audience to advertisers (which allows the media to charge higher rates for advertising), news managers can substitute their interpretation of audience desires for the professional journalistic judgment of what people need to know about their world. The result is that the death of thousands in Rwanda takes a back seat to the criminal indictment of one sports celebrity. The argument offered in situations like this is that the news organization *must* give large amounts of airtime or newspaper space to coverage of Tonya and Nancy, or the Michael Jackson pedophile charges, or the O. J. Simpson murder charges. If that is on the competitor's plate of news offerings and drawing an audience, all other news organizations follow with the hope of putting a slightly different spin on the story or being first to present some new fact (or rumor) that will woo the audience from competitors.

It is ironic that news managers shrug off questions about allowing profit incentives to interfere with news judgment. While they may allow themselves to shirk their social responsibilities in the name of profit, similar justifications from other socially essential organizations, such as for-profit hospitals, are reported in outrage in front-page exposes.

In the midst of these conceptual confusions and institutional pressures, journalists conduct and present their research. They attempt to report and present a mass audience with the news.

#### IV. INVESTIGATION

The national codes of ethics address ideals of journalistic investigation. The Society of Professional Journalists cautions that journalists should not "communicate unofficial charges affecting reputation or moral character without giving the accused a chance to reply." The Radio-Television News Directors state: "Broadcast journalists shall seek to select material for newscasts solely on their evaluation of its merits as news." Associate Press Managing Editors says:

The newspaper should strive for impartial treatment of issues and dispassionate handling of controversial subjects. . . . The newspaper should report the news without regard to its own interests. . . . Concern for community, business or personal interests should not cause a newspaper to distort or misrepresent the facts.

Unlike scientific investigation, which begins formally with a hypothesis, journalistic investigation usually begins with a lead or tip from a source. The test for whether a lead or tip is worth pursuing is not its believability, but the story's potential use or interest to the audience. Carl Hausman, for example, provides this list of guidelines for determining if something is news:

1. Do many of your readers, listeners or viewers identify with the subject, directly or indirectly?
2. Does the subject have an immediate and direct impact on news consumers?
3. Is the subject unusual?
4. Is the story timely?
5. Does the story have dramatic elements?
6. Does the story involve great magnitude?<sup>12</sup>

If the tip is determined to be newsworthy (for example, to contain enough of these characteristics to develop into a story), research begins.

The purpose of journalistic research, at this stage, is to compile true pieces of information from which to develop the story. The actual reported story will contain only a synthesis of what journalists discover and piece together. Merrill and Odell explain:

The reporter never selects all the potential truth; he or she leaves much of it, or most of it, unselected and thus unreported, but does get some of it. And it is this "some" that we are referring to as . . . the selected truth. This is what forms the core of the journalistic news story. It is this selected portion of the truth that the reporter weaves into subjective patterns, calling the final product "news." At this level of truth the journalist selects from the potential truth certain things which may actually be used in the story. The journalist never really does use all of this selected truth in the story, but theoretically all of it could be used.<sup>13</sup>

The journalist collects information from human sources—eyewitnesses and experts, in particular—and from documents that confirm or bolster what is being said. The tools that the journalist uses to put together this "selected truth" is a combination of inductive logic and appeal to authority. The proper journalistic attitude is one of concurrent curiosity and skepticism. A journalistic adage offered to novices is "if your mother says she loves you, check it out." At the same time, students are counseled to be open to the possibility that the outlandish and unlikely may actually be true.

Parsigian offers an ideal for journalistic research modeled on social science research:

1. Draw a clear statement of the problem.
2. Conduct preliminary research on the problem.
3. Design the data-collection strategy.
4. Collect the data.
5. Code the data.
6. Analyze the data.



7. Draw conclusions.
8. Write the research report.

Parsigian says that journalists follow some semblance of this system in creating news stories, but that journalists themselves propagate the myth that they operate intuitively, in a way that defies order and description. "One reason for this," she says, "may be that journalists themselves like the idea that they are viewed as craftspeople, artists whose creative source is a mystery beyond human understanding."<sup>14</sup> The problem, Willis notes, is:

[Many] journalists don't follow all of the above steps and quite often jump past the research phases into the interview, which is often a lone interview, and then leap to the last stage of writing the story. Although time considerations and the ubiquitous deadline will, at times, require such corner cutting, the reporter and editor should be prepared for the consequences of a story either full of naïveté or a story that is flat-out wrong.<sup>15</sup>

Journalistic standards for truth reflect the deadline pressure under which most stories are developed. Journalists want the true story, but they also want to be first. In some cases, documents that might back up a source's story are simply unavailable. In those cases, journalists look for other sources to confirm the initial tip. The rule articulated by the *Washington Post's* Watergate investigators, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein—if you can get two independent sources to confirm a piece of information, you are safe in believing it<sup>16</sup>—has been newsroom standard of practice throughout the nation for more than twenty years.

By tradition, mass market news organizations do not pay sources for their information.<sup>17</sup> But the lack of monetary compensation does not imply that the sources are disinterested. Journalists determine the quality of the information they are receiving by determining the extent and bias of the source's agenda.

The source of a tip is often a public relations representative, a "spokesperson" for a corporation, institution, or governmental agency. Such a source may well be telling the truth, but journalists know the source does so with the intent of promoting the interests of her employer. The journalist will therefore strive to get confirming information from someone who has a different agenda. This is often not possible when the sources are governmental and the event or issue involves national security. The jump from "governmental sources say" to "this really happened" is a leap that journalists are often too quick to make.

While all U.S. presidents prefer to put their spin on media interpretations of important events, the Reagan administration was particularly adept at selling stories that later proved untrue. In 1987, for example, U.S. media reported the Soviet downing of Korean Airlines flight 007 as the Reagan administration wished it to be reported: as a deliberate and unprovoked attack by Soviets on defenseless civilians. Only a full week later—and after several editorials and newsmagazine covers decrying the heartless Soviets—did the news media begin reporting information not initially supplied by the government: a U.S. spy plane crossed paths with the civilian plane; the Soviets warned the aircraft and were ignored.

The U.S. government used similar disinformation barrages to justify bombing Libya, and the extreme secrecy with which the U.S. conducted the recent Gulf War may mean that we will never be able to distinguish completely between governmental misinformation and "what really happened."<sup>18</sup> While news media are

quick to report governmental falsehood when discovered, they sometimes have little choice in dramatic national security situations but to report the world as the U.S. government tells it.

The journalist must weed through source agendas to glean accurate information, seeking (whenever possible) independent experts who can provide comment and interpretation that allow readers to know how they should think about a story's substance. Because few journalists or members of their audience are independent observers of events and issues of importance, the primary vehicle for knowledge and belief is the expert who provides rational appeal to authority. Hardwig says:

Appeals to epistemic authority are an essential part of much of our knowledge. Appeals to the authority of experts often provide justification for claims to know and for claims that beliefs have a rational basis. Because experts are superior in their areas of knowledge, they have a kind of authority over laypersons, and over experts in other areas as well—an epistemic authority.<sup>19</sup>

Journalists become a link in this chain of authority appeals. Part of the mark of competent journalistic research is the ability to find appropriate authorities for the story in question.

Because even the most dispassionate eyewitness can be wrong, journalists prefer documents as sources, particularly as the story becomes more serious, accusatory, or detailed. Documents can be as straightforward as a copy of a memo that substantiates a source's story. With a computer-literate generation of reporters, journalistic research is rapidly expanding beyond examination of relevant documents to the use of quantitative social-science techniques including the synthesis of bits of information from different sources. For example, in 1985, Elliott Jaspin, then a reporter for the Providence (RI) *Journal* reacted to an accident involving a school bus by developing a computer program to compare those licensed to drive school buses in the state with records of traffic violations and felony convictions. His stories detailed drivers who had as many as 20 citations for traffic violations in a three-year period and those who had been convicted of drug and sex offenses.<sup>20</sup> Such a compilation would not have been possible if Jaspin had limited his technique to speaking to sources.

If journalists have the ability to check out information independently of sources, there is less chance that they will be manipulated. Manipulation certainly has been a problem. In the mid-seventies, for example, the New York Police Department was able to gain public support for its push for more officers, because news media cooperated in reporting a made-for-media crime wave. Although there had been no significant increase in crime, police made more of an effort to report crimes, which media then reported, creating a perception of increased danger for citizens. As a result, citizens supported law enforcement requests for more personnel.<sup>21</sup>

The distinction between truth and accuracy is an important but slippery concept for the researching journalist. The journalist may report information accurately but fall short of the truth. For example, even though the news media reported accurately what NYPD were telling them, they failed to convey the truth that citizens were not under a new threat.

A third type of journalistic research, participatory journalism, places the journalist as eyewitness or victim in the potential story. The journalists, in some of these cases, mask their identity and purpose as they tail public officials to an out-of-town conference, take jobs in meat-packing plants, or pretend to be high school students,



prisoners, or mentally ill patients. The assumption is that the credibility of the journalist's information will be undeniable, particularly if it is recorded by a hidden camera.

There are many ethical problems with participatory journalism,<sup>22</sup> but there are epistemic problems as well. The journalist's experience is anecdotal. It rests on the assumption that the audience (and the journalist!) can discover and share important truths by being insiders. In some cases, the insider perspective can reveal information not otherwise available, but in other cases the journalist's inability to ask clarifying questions can distort the information.

## V. THE REPORTING OF INFORMATION

A news story, the report of journalistic information, is not meant to replicate the actual process of investigating any more than a scientific research article is meant to replicate the actual process of scientific research. The reporter provides the audience with a conclusion, usually stated in the "lead" and "nut graph" (those first few paragraphs of a news story that give it in a "nut shell") and then, through a combination of logical inference and appeal to authority, shapes the remainder of the story as an argument that leads to the stated conclusion. The lead tells readers or viewers what the journalist believes to be true. The rest of the story shows why the journalist believes that. In many cases, the story will also provide contextual information: it will tell the audience why the story ought to matter to them.

The need for journalists to formulate the conclusion of their argument quickly and under deadline pressure, is most obvious in the "stand-up" that television reporters traditionally provide at the end of their news reports. Television news reports usually end with the reporter, on camera, summing up the news story. These tags are recorded at the scene of the investigation, long before the reporter has taken the collected pieces of information back to the television station for editing into a "news package". According to one television reporter:

A stand-up tag is the final thing. So it either forces you to make a conclusion you don't necessarily have the facts to make, or it makes you draw a namby-pamby conclusion because you don't want to get yourself into trouble. The worst part of television, across the board, is that it forces you into conclusions that you don't necessarily have the data to make—the typical, in one word or another, "remains to be seen" stand-up.<sup>23</sup>

Another concern about the reporting of journalistic research is what is not reported. Relevancy is the purported criteria for separating reported information from what is not reported. But relevancy is not an objective standard; it reflects the reporter's notions of what is part of the story's newsworthiness. Is the sexual orientation of a candidate for public office relevant to a story about her political ambitions? Such questions bring charges of bias no matter how they are answered.

## VI. ACCOUNTABILITY ISSUES

It is not unusual to hear people say that they "don't believe what they see or hear in the media." Such statements disregard the incredible dependency that we have on news media for information beyond our severely limited individual spheres of

experience. Are people dying in Rwanda? Did the Soviet Union collapse? Did the Challenger explode? For the millions of us who are not eye-witnesses to these events, news media are the authority upon which we rely to develop and sustain beliefs about such questions.

As dependent as we are on news media "truths", journalistic research lacks the external accountability (funding agencies, peer review) that provides checks on scientific research. External checks are after-the-fact and carry no necessary weight. National press organizations and other news organizations provide commentary when some reporting has violated conventions, but there is no formal control over offending news organizations. The law offers virtually no way to prevent the media doing harm. It is exceedingly rare for a court to issue an injunction that disallows information from being published, despite claims of falsity. What the law does offer is after-the-fact relief for untrue statements in journalistic accounts through civil suit for libel.

Libel law differs from state to state and, even at the federal level, from one Supreme Court session to the next. But, generally, "libel" means the publication of false material harming an identifiable individual. In most cases relevant to journalism, money damages are awarded only upon proof that the newspaper acted with actual malice or reckless disregard for the truth. Because standard journalistic process acknowledges the search for truth amid deadline pressure and the availability of sources, journalistic untruths usually do not qualify as legal libel.

The journalistic trade press—publications such as *Columbia Journalism Review*, *American Journalism Review*, *Quill*, *Editor & Publisher*, and *Broadcast Magazine*—provides opportunities for media critics and practitioners to take journalists to task. Competing news organizations report their competitors' sins with more than a little glee. Ombudspeople, who serve as internal critics and readers' representatives at 33 U.S. news organizations, provide commentary. National professional organizations, such as those noted at the beginning of this article, reward outstanding journalistic behavior and publicly decry behavior that does not conform to conventional expectations. But no news organization or individual journalist need take these criticisms into account.

The basic tool of accountability for any journalist is internal to the news organization. A published news report is the result of team effort, with every member of the team responsible for the accuracy and clarity of the report.

The reporter with a tip or an idea for a news story conducts research with the approval of an editor who decides how much reporter time to put toward checking out the possible story. Research is continually negotiated between the reporter and editor. The editor may help the reporter map out a research plan; the editor expects to be told about the research as it unfolds.

Editors pitch their stories to other editors at meetings in which the managing editor or news director "budgets" space in the newspaper or time in the news broadcast. This again provides opportunity for independent observers to hear about developing stories, poke holes in developing arguments, and ask for reasons to believe purported conclusions.

The copy editors (in print publications) or producers (in electronic news programs) offer yet another layer of critical input to a story. These gatekeepers are concerned with fact accuracy, but also with whether a story logically hangs together.



The rise of specialty reporting opens a new area of accountability in news organizations. Specialty reporting means that the medical writer is an M.D., the science and technology reporter is an engineer or scientist with a Ph.D., the court reporter is a lawyer, and so on. While a luxury reserved for the wealthier news organizations, specialty reporting gives their audiences a level of built-in accountability. Specialty reporters are better able than ordinary reporters to evaluate what their sources tell them.

The growth of specialty reporting has also made inroads into the convention of never "reading back" quotes to a source. The concern that the source might "take back" something essential to the story has given way to the realization that many stories are technical in nature and need to be technically correct.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

Although journalists act as Pragmatists, the primary check on journalistic research is Milton's self-righting principle. The journalistic truth is a truth that makes a difference to an audience, reserving for the journalists a continual opportunity to get it right. The importance of journalism's social function both inspires individual reporters and allows society to tolerate journalism's errors. Willis sums up this importance succinctly:

It does often foment revolutions—sometimes mild, sometimes major. The fury in this country in the 1960s to do something about racial inequities resulted in the Voting Rights Act and other civil rights legislation. Much of that fury came about because of the media's heavy coverage of how those rights were being denied blacks in the South. Television was especially effective in getting this message across, as its cameras caught the violence directed at blacks. It was unpopular news for America, but then revolt is always disturbing, as was the Revolutionary War in America. But it was necessary then, and in some areas of life, it is needed now. The news media have a job to do in awakening America to the fact that, in so many areas of life, people in power and the institutions they control have deviated from values like responsible capitalism and altruistic democracy.<sup>24</sup>

Citizens also have an important role in maintaining journalistic accountability; they should demand that journalists fulfill their social function.

## NOTES

1. This discussion is particular to the U.S. because the First Amendment creates a uniquely unfettered press. Many of the points, however, apply to the Western press in general, but not to colonized or unstable nations where government restricts journalists' ability to investigate or to present their findings.
2. Society of Professional Journalists, 1987.
3. American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1975.
4. Radio-Television News Directors Association, 1973.
5. Associated Press Managing Editors, 1975.
6. Quoted in Elliott, Deni (1986) *Responsible Journalism*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, p. 34.
7. Merrill, John C. and Odell, S. Jack (1983). *Philosophy and Journalism*. New York: Longman, p. 172.
8. MacDougall, Curtis and Reid, Robert (1987). *Interpretative Reporting*, 9th edition. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, p. 16.
9. Mencher, Mel (1992). *Basic Media Writing*, 4th Edition. Madison, Wisconsin: Brown and Benchmark, p. 80.

10. Altschull, J. Herbert (1990). *From Milton to McLuhan, The Ideas Behind American Journalism*. New York: Longman, p. 41.
11. Bagdikian, Ben (1990). *The Media Monopoly, Third Edition*. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 4.
12. Hausman, Carl (1990). *The Decision-Making Process in Journalism*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publisher, pp. 13-14.
13. Merrill and Odell, p. 173.
14. Parsigian, Elise Keoleian (1987). *Journalism Quarterly*, Winter, p. 721 reported in Willis, Jim (1991). *The Shadow World, Life Between The News Media and Reality*. New York: Praeger, p. 235.
15. Willis, *ibid.*, pp. 235-236.
16. Ward, Hiley (1991). *Reporting in Depth*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, p. 16.
17. This is one of the differences that separates mass market news organizations such as ABC Nightly News and the New York Times from "infotainment" programs such as DateLine and Hard Copy and from tabloid publications such as the *Globe*, *Star* or *National Enquirer*.
18. For the first time in U.S. history, the press was backstage to the so-called "theater of operations." Because the government was successful in limiting the movements of an often compliant press, in many cases, there was no independent press monitoring of military operations. This is in striking contrast to the extensive and independent coverage of the Vietnam War, which is credited with bringing about the end of U.S. involvement there.
19. Hardwig, John. "Relying on Experts," in Govier, Trudy (1988). *Selected Issues in Logic and Communication*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, p. 126.
20. Benjaminson, Peter and Anderson, David (1990). *Investigative Reporting, 2nd Edition*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, p. 13.
21. Demers, David Pearce and Nichols, Suzanne (1987). *Precision Journalism: A Practical Guide*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, p. 13.
22. Such techniques encourage a breakdown of trust in societal relationships, bring the credibility of journalists into question, and exploit unsuspecting individuals, guilty and innocent alike. Journalists have no equivalent to the Internal Review Board for Human Subject Research which is required as a check on human research at any institution receiving Federal funds, nor do they have the legal standard of reasonable suspicion required of law enforcement investigators.
23. Biagi, Shirley (1987). *NewsTalk II, State of the Art Conversations with Today's Broadcast Journalists*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth, p. 113.
24. Willis, p. 249.