

## Chapter 7 Journalism Today

### Media Credibility

- Media must maintain credibility for two main reasons:
  - People depend on the media for their information.
  - Media must be credible to succeed as businesses

### Ethical Decision Making

- When a story is wrong or unethical, the news organization that reported it suffers a blow to its reputation.
- Guiding questions; a journalists can ask several questions when facing an ethical decision. Two of the most important are:
  - Who will be hurt and how many?
  - Who will be helped and how many?
  - What is the objective of the story?
  - Will my decision contribute to the reason for writing the story?
  - What do we usually do in cases like this?
  - Is there a better alternative?
  - Can I look at myself in the mirror tomorrow?
  - Can I justify this to family, friends and the public?
  - What principles or values can I apply?
  - Does this decision fit the kind of journalism I believe in and the way people should treat one another?

### Macro and Micro Issues

- Macro Issues - Main reason for writing a story; the objectives
- Micro Issues - Wording of a story or its headline, what visuals accompany it and where it is placed; less consequential, but still important.
  - Placement - A story placed on an inside page is less damaging to the accused than on a story on the front page
  - Space - A short story is not as noticeable as a longer one
  - Graphics and Visuals - The type and number can set a tone

### Ethics Issues

- Plagiarism and Fabricating Information: Never Acceptable
  - Plagiarism - Copying somebody else's work or taking somebody else's ideas and trying to pass them off as one's own.
  - Illegal for a journalist to use another's work
  - Fabrication - Making up information
- Using Sources
  - Journalists seek sources with different opinions so that all sides of an issue are presented.
  - Using friends and relatives
    - Compromises a journalist's integrity and lessens the credibility of the story and the reporter.

- Scratching backs
  - Journalists need to know where to draw the line between being friendly and being friends with sources.
  - Sources do not consistently give information and their time freely or out of the goodness of their hearts.
  - How to get information out of sources without cozying up:
    - Be up front with sources from the start.
    - Be respectful, friendly, accurate and honest.
    - Avoid surprises.
    - If you go to lunch with a source or to a social gathering, be there as a journalist, not a participant.
    - One of the best ways to get to know something is through feature writing.
    - Don't be afraid to write negative, legitimate newsworthy stories about your sources early on.
    - Remind yourself: Public officials need me more than I need them.
    - Be transparent.
    - If you feel that you can't pursue a negative story for fearing of alienating important sources, discuss it with your boss and ask that another reporter be assigned to that story.
    - If you're a supervisor, make sure your reporters know they can talk to you about these issues.

- Quoting

- Journalists use sources' words in their stories in the form of direct quotes, partial quotes, indirect quotes or paraphrases; all require attribution.
  - Direct quotes and partial quotes must appear inside quotation marks to signify they are the source's exact wording.
  - Indirect quotes do not use quotation marks because they paraphrase or restate in different words than what the source said.
  - Profanity - Journalists guard against repeating profane words unless they show something about the character or passion of the speaker.
  - Attributing to Anonymous Sources - Journalists make clear at the beginning of an interview that everything is on the record and attributable.

- Recording Interviews: Tape Recorders and Video Cameras

- Journalists do not secretly record their interviews with sources because the tactic is devious and unfair.

- Lawsuits for invasion of privacy can arise when reporters use video cameras or tape recorders in places where the people being recorded reasonably can expect their words and actions to be private.
- Eliminating Conflicts of Interest
  - A conflict of interest exists when journalists, their friends or relatives, or news organizations are in a position to benefit directly from the stories they cover.
    - Accepting Gifts: "Freebies"
      - Most journalists refuse to accept money or anything else of value from the people about whom they write.
    - Accepting Trips: "Junkets"
      - Generally cause stories to be compromised or unrealistic; experience usually does not reflect that of a general consumer
  - Participating in the News
    - Journalists want to avoid conflicts of interest that compromise their objectivity.
    - Journalists should remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility
    - Reporters should not hold public office, either elected or appointed.
- Freelancing
  - Journalists at most news organizations are free to accept outside jobs, provided they do not conflict with the journalists' regular work.
  - Journalists can work as freelancers, but they cannot sell their work to their employers' competitors, such as other media in the same market.

#### Maintaining Objectivity

- Objectivity has two components:
  - Absence of bias and accuracy
    - To alleviate bias, reporters avoid topics about which they have strong opinions.
  - Integrating balance, fairness and accuracy within stories.
    - Objective facts without context can create inaccurate impressions.

#### Reporting or Exploiting Grief

- Interviewing Victims
  - Reporters often harm a news organization's reputation when they scramble to get an early interview