

Chapter 14

THE CULTURE OF JOURNALISM: VALUES, ETHICS, AND DEMOCRACY

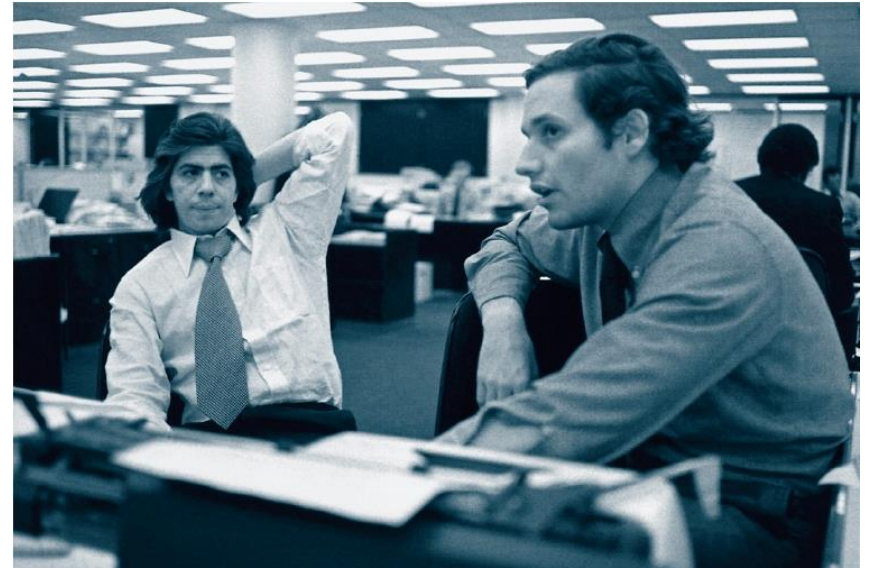
Nellie Bly's Lasting Influence

- A lifetime champion of women and the poor, Nellie Bly pioneered what was then called *detective* or *stunt* journalism. Her work inspired the twentieth-century practice of investigative journalism.



What Is News?

- Definition of **news**
 - The process of gathering information and making narrative reports that offer selected frames of reference that help people make sense of important events, political issues, cultural trends, prominent people, and unusual happenings in everyday life



What Is News? (cont.)

- Criteria for **newsworthiness**
 - Timeliness
 - Proximity
 - Conflict
 - Prominence
 - Human interest
 - Consequence
 - Usefulness
 - Novelty
 - Deviance

Inverted Pyramid



Values in American Journalism

- General belief that journalists should be neutral observers
- Herbert Gans
 - Four subjective values shape news judgments:
 - Ethnocentrism
 - Responsible capitalism
 - Small-town pastoralism
 - Individualism

Values in American Journalism (cont.)

- Reporters have traditionally aligned facts with an objective position and values with subjective feelings.
 - Partisan cable channels undermine reporters who try to report fairly.
 - Beliefs leading to suspicion of press bias include
 - Reporters are out to get their subjects
 - Press is too close to its subjects



Ethical Predicaments

- Deploying deception
 - Two major ethical positions
 - Absolutist ethics (ends never justify the means)
 - Situational ethics (ethical decisions on a case-by-case basis)
- Invading privacy
 - Journalists often straddle a line between “the public’s right to know” and the right to privacy.

Ethical Predicaments (cont.)

- Journalism's code of ethics warns reporters and editors not to place themselves in positions that produce a **conflict of interest**.
 - Any situation where journalists may stand to benefit personally from stories they produce

Resolving Ethical Problems

- Aristotle
 - Golden mean
- Immanuel Kant
 - Categorical imperative
- Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill
 - Greatest good for the greatest number

Resolving Ethical Problems (cont.)

- Steps to arriving at an ethical decision
 - Laying out the case
 - Pinpointing the key issues
 - Identifying involved parties, their intents, and their competing values
 - Studying ethical models
 - Presenting strategies and options
 - Formulating a decision

Focusing on the Present

- 1840s
 - Rise of the telegraph
 - Editors wanted to focus on the present.
 - De-emphasized political analysis and historical context
- Modern journalism
 - Rejects “old news” for new events or ideas
 - News often lacks historical context.

Focusing on the Present (cont.)

- Getting a good story
 - Criticism of journalism for allowing narrative conventions to trump the social responsibility to tell the truth
- Getting a story first
 - Self-promotion for beating competitors to a story is routine.
 - Not always clear how the public is better served by a journalist's claim to have gotten a story first

Relying on Experts

- Relying on outside sources has made reporters heavily dependent on experts.
 - Need for public mediators
 - Reporters frequently use experts to create narrative conflict.
 - Experts historically predominantly white and male
 - Line between remaining neutral and being an expert is blurred.

Balancing Story Conflict

- Balance means presenting all sides of an issue without appearing to favor any position.
 - Presents problems
 - Time and space constraints
 - Misrepresentation of the complexity of social issues
 - Journalists' claiming neutrality makes them appear value-free.
 - Disguises journalists' narrative function

Acting as Adversaries

- Adversarial relationship between leaders, journalists
- Tough questioning style
 - “Gotcha” story
 - Critics argue that it fosters cynicism among journalists when overused, and may cause some reporters to miss other issues or key stories.

Differences between Print, TV, and Internet News

- Broadcast news
 - Driven by technology, not the story
 - Times stories to fit commercials
 - Expected to be credible and provide believable imagery
- Print reporters
 - Report on stories where they occur
 - Cut stories to fit physical space
 - Expected to be detached

Differences between Print, TV, and Internet News (cont.)

- Pretty-face, happy-talk culture
 - Stereotype of the attractive but half-witted anchor
 - Happy talk refers to ad-libbed or scripted news team banter.
- **Sound bites**
 - TV equivalent of a quote
 - Have become the focus of intense criticism

Pundits, “Talking Heads,” and Politics

- 24/7 news cycle has changed the definition of news.
 - Less expensive “talking head” pundit has become the standard.
 - Partisan programming
 - Conservative: Fox News
 - Liberal: MSNBC
 - Middle: CNN
 - Audiences seem to prefer partisan “talking heads.”

Convergence Enhances and Changes Journalism

- Ability to update breaking news instantly
- Problems with online news
 - E-mail interviews give power to interview subjects.
 - Wide-ranging resources have made it easy to intentionally or unwittingly copy others' work.
 - Reporters must meet the demands convergence has made on reporting.

The Power of Visual Language

- Visual imagery of TV news and the Internet often captures events more powerfully than words.
- The Internet functions as a repository for news images and videos.
 - Allows us to catch up on stories
 - May result in overexposure to clips

The Public Journalism Movement

- Key aspects of public journalism
 - Moves from
 - “Telling the news” to helping public life go well
 - Detachment to being a fair-minded participant in public life
 - Describing what is “going wrong” to imagining what “going right” would be like
 - Seeing people as consumers to seeing them as a public

The Public Journalism Movement (cont.)

- Public journalism
 - Best imagined as a conversational model for journalistic practice
 - Began in earnest in 1987 through the *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*
 - Critics claim it weakens:
 - Editorial control
 - Credibility
 - Balance
 - Diverse views

“Fake” News and Satiric Journalism

- Appeal to cynical viewers
- Use humor to critique the news media and our political system
 - *The Colbert Report* satirizes partisan news hosts like Bill O’ Reilly.
 - *The Daily Show* parodies the conventions of evening news programs.



Democracy and Reimagining Journalism's Role

- Some journalists acknowledge a social responsibility.
 - James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*
- Deliberative democracy
 - Citizen groups, local government, and the news media together work more actively to shape social, economic, and political agendas.

