ethical space

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- Jackie Newton: The knock at the door: Considering bereaved families' varying responses to news media intrusion
- Richard Pendry: Sub-contracting newsgathering in Iraq
- Justin Schlosberg: Covering the cover-up: The *Hutton report* in UK television news
- Peter Simmons: Competent, dependable and respectful: Football refereeing as a model for communicating fairness
- Margalit Toledano and Levarna Fay Wolland: Ethics 2.0: Social media implications for professional communicators

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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 organization performance as well as to protect individual well-being.

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EDITORIAL

‘Press self regulation in the UK is as dead in the water as a wooden duck in an MP’s pond’

Picture the scene. One of the main streets of a tropical paradise – Guyana. An Old Colonial Club. Mid morning. I am riveted to my laptop and a live feed of an old man and a young buck testifying to a British parliamentary select committee. Why? Because today, 19 July 2011, 82-year-old Rupert Murdoch, the most powerful media magnate of our time, and his 39-year-old son and presumed heir James Murdoch are giving evidence to the House of Commons select committee on culture, media and sport hearing on phone hacking. The whole world is watching – even in Guyana.

Rupert is playing the old man who cannot comprehend and is full of remorse (but with a young wife and several *consigliere* behind to support) whilst James (‘Mr USA MBA’) is playing the know-it-all and interpreter for the old codger. This is unmissable wall-to-wall viewing even in the tropical heat.

‘Hackgate’ or the phone hacking scandal pulled the Murdoch empire apart at the seams this summer. It could yet lead to its demise. What started as a small fire – *News of the World* royal editor Clive Goodman and his private investigator Glenn Mulcaire being detained at Her Majesty’s pleasure in 2007 for hacking into the phones of the Royal Family and others – could become the fire that consumes the latter day Citizen Kane. That one ‘rogue reporter’ (as News International kept telling the world) became several rogue reporters and eventually a whole rogue newsroom in the *News of the World*.

Back in deep history (2010) the Met. Police investigated and found nothing of concern, a smart firm of lawyers was brought in to give quickly and cheaply a clean bill of health – and they did. The Press Complaints Commission, the self-regulator, ‘investigated’ and found nothing. Things looked good for News Int. and the Murdoch. Yet it took just one journalist – Nick Davies, of the *Guardian*, and his *über*-supportive editor Alan Rusbridger – to keep digging and blow the cover of the Murdochs and News Int. The few hacked and compensated by NI in 2007 soon became nearly 4,000 in 2011.

The smoking gun that turned ‘Hackgate’ from a chattering classes story to a national scandal was the discovery that the *News of the World* had commissioned the hacking of the phone of murdered teenager Milly Dowler in 2002. The line in the journalistic sand had been firmly crossed. The *News and Screws* was now a pariah and a rapid advertiser boycott (helped it must be said by a Twitter campaign) forced Murdoch to close it down within five days after 168 proud years.

Brooks forced to fall on sword

Within two weeks, the Chief Executive of NI, Rebekah Brooks, was forced to fall on her sword: so too the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Paul Stephenson (his case not helped by his having taken a huge hotel gift from a friend) and so also the chair of the PCC, Baroness Buscombe. The Murdochs, *pere et fils*, were dragged kicking and screaming to that Commons committee where Rupert’s *faux* senility, a pretend pie and Wendy Deng’s right hand saved their day at least for another day.

What are the ethical lessons from this Eton mess of a scandal? Firstly, some journalists have few ethics when it comes to getting a story. If you need to hack a mobile phone, you do or get a ‘tec’ to do it for you and on an industrial scale if needs be.

Firstly, newspaper editors know what is happening even if they pretend to look the other way. Goodman revealed this in his 2007 resignation letter to Les Hinton, the then-CEO of News International in Britain (and a former *consigliere* who was forced to resign after 52 years serving ‘Rupe’ because of ‘Hackgate’). Rebekah Brooks was ‘on holiday’ when Milly Downer’s phone was hacked; Andy Coulson, Goodman’s editor, saw no evil – or, rather, says he did not. Coulson, unbelievably as it seems now, was the Prime Minister’s chief spokesman until December 2010 when reality caught up with him.

Secondly, one ‘rogue reporter’ cannot operate in isolation nor without support. Goodman was part of a culture of phone hacking at the *NotW*. But is that newsroom like an isolation ward in the Murdoch

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Empire? The only one with the disease? Is the *Sun* newsroom next door pure as the driven snow? Are the other Murdoch tabloid newsrooms round the world clean and uncontaminated? Almost certainly not. So far, 13 journalists/NI executives have been arrested. That could (and should) rise once the Met Police do their job properly this time round and Lord Leveson's inquiry turns over a few moss-strewn stones. My hunch is that the Empire is rotten to the core driven by sheer competition and the need to make big profits.

Thirdly, press self-regulation in the UK is as dead in the water as a wooden duck in an MP's pond. Dead and buried. It was always a nonsense for the editors to regulate themselves delivering an odd slap here and there to little avail. The fig leaf of lay members of the PCC was always just that. Broadcasters in Britain are subject to the law, so why should the press not be? The newspapers have drunk their last drink in the last chance saloon. Lord Leveson will be the lever for change there.

Police and press: Too often in bed together

Fourthly, the police and the press are too often in bed with each other allegedly aided by greased palms. Sir Paul Stephenson even went to warn off the *Guardian* on the phone hacking story. News International executives went in and out of a revolving door at Scotland Yard – allegedly with pockets full of gold. That had to stop and will stop. Some investigative journalism may suffer.

Fifthly, politicians need also to get out of the beds of the Press Barons. Murdoch had ready access – even if he went in by the back door – to Number Ten Downing Street under Blair, Brown and Cameron. The Murdoch tribe cultivated Cameron in his Dean Chipping Norton country lair. Their attempt to take over the rest of the very profitable Sky Television they did not already own came within hours of succeeding and was only derailed by 'Hackgate'. It was a close call and one that should never occur again. Politicians are elected, media baronies are not.

Finally, journalism works! Nick Davies and Alan Rusbridger did not give up for two years. They dug, dug and dug and ignored the noises off, however powerful the voice. Some journalists have an ethical frame and they will be determined to get to the truth, however uncomfortable for them. The *Guardian* will be garlanded with industry awards. Deservedly. Murdoch may fall.

The Only Way is Ethics.

John Mair
University of Coventry

- The Institute of Communication Ethics was due to discuss 'Hackgate' at its annual conference in London on 28 October. Here, John Mair, chair of ICE, is expressing his own view.

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VIEW

Ethics of showing bin Laden – both alive and dead

Barry Turner explores some of the ethical issues surrounding the representation of Osama bin Laden – both dead and alive

Days after the US military assassinated the most prolific terrorist murderer in history the press engaged in the usual conjecture and hypothesising that follows all such activity. One of the central questions arising out of the already blooming conspiracy theories is the ethical position regarding showing photographs of bin Laden dead, or even in the process of being shot. It makes for interesting ethical debate on what should be shown in the aftermath of violent conflict but as usual misses a very real point regarding ethical portrayal of images in general.

The media has already created Osama the icon using repeated imagery of him in combat fatigues and traditional dress and, in particular, carrying the ultimate icon of terrorism, the AK47 assault rifle. It is this representation that is far more alarming than the sight of a gruesome corpse.

The media for a long time portrayed bin Laden as a former 'freedom fighter' turned bad. If ever there was a misrepresentation of what he was it is this. The Mujahedeen were never freedom fighters. It was never the intention of these fighters to replace the Soviet supported communist government of Afghanistan with freedom and in that respect the US-backed Mujahedeen were nothing more than state-sponsored terrorists, opposing a socialist government's attempts to modernise a mediaeval and tribal fiefdom. If anything, al-Qaida were nothing more than a privatised version of that campaign.

It has for a long time been clear that the US support for the Mujahedeen was one of the biggest US foreign policy disasters in a long line of alliances with criminal and homicidal despots. So why do our press continue to compare Osama the 'freedom fighter' with Osama, public enemy number one?

In recent years bin Laden had become an irrelevance. On numerous occasions the press speculated he was already dead possibly even from natural causes. The inability to operate in a world saturated with surveillance had ironically placed this medieval warlord into a medieval existence where even telephones and the internet were denied him because they would certainly have revealed his location years earlier. This isolation was only relieved by using couriers which eventually led to his being found.

What has the killing achieved then? Yes, it can be argued that if anyone deserved summary justice he must have been close to the top of the list and, yes, it was cathartic for America and many Americans to see 'justice done'. But there is a down side.

The US were keen to get him 'buried' and out of sight as quickly as possible and were greatly aided by his own alleged Muslim faith requiring internment within 24 hours. The US military wanted no interment shrine so they buried him at sea. This has already failed. The house he was shot in has already drawn many tourists and pilgrims turning up and is set to become that very shrine.

The US government quite sensibly decided not to show his corpse. Even if they had it is doubtful that these photographs would ever have been enough to convince the conspiracy theorists who already question whether 'it was actually him'. Showing images of his dead and hideously disfigured corpse are said to have been likely to inflame his supporters into acts of further nihilistic mayhem, as if showing him lovingly caressing the Kalashnikov that became his trademark did not.

This killing has rid the world of a depraved individual, a terrorist for most of his adult life including during the period that the US and the West called him a freedom fighter. The killing has also made him a martyr and the press do not help by their portrayal of him in iconic poses. Before any further consideration of the ethics of showing him dead they should really consider the effects of showing him proudly alive.

Barry Turner is a senior lecturer in law at the University of Lincoln.

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VIEW

How history can throw light on today's ethical issues

Jane Chapman and Nick Nuttall are the authors of *Journalism today: A themed history* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011). Here they stress their central argument: that contemporary ethical controversies cannot be fully understood without reference to their historical context

Professional journalism is undergoing a reshaping in terms of occupational roles and legitimacy. It is causing a lot of people a lot of pain. Indeed, some commentators believe journalism's very existence is threatened by the potential of internet-based technologies: a potential not only to democratise participation in the public sphere, but also to provide a platform for user-generated content. Against this backdrop of the restructuring of the global news industry and increasing concentration of ownership among transnational corporations, it is appropriate to conduct a simultaneous appraisal of the ethical problems that journalism faces in the light of their historical dimension.

Why, some may ask, do we need to examine the past in order to understand the present? Quite simply, if we are to understand contemporary and future journalistic form and allied occupational issues, then we need to appreciate how its various roles and social positions have emerged and developed over time. Similarly, we need to have a clear idea of the relationship between the media in a democratic society and that democratic society itself.

Traditional histories, inevitably structured around the story of the press and print journalism, tend to subsume the socio-cultural impact of journalistic developments within the broader need to offer a coherent chronological narrative. *Journalism today: A themed history* offers a different approach. The conclusion reached during the book's three-year research period was that a conceptual rather than a chronological approach offered a more coherent way of relating history to the cataclysmic changes now engulfing the profession. Thus journalism and society need to be linked through explorations of relevant trends rather than time lines. This new approach provides a number of insights. For example, it suggests that personalisation, globalisation, localisation, and pauperisation have emerged as the distinguishing hallmarks of modern journalism.

When morality looms large

In any such analysis, morality (both at a professional and a personal level) looms large. It is relatively simple to categorise developments as political, technological or audience-centred but ethical considerations are not so easily pigeonholed. This is in large measure because journalists have a history of clashing with authority. Conflict can arise when they expose the rich and powerful, they antagonise governments or vested interests, or they 'get it wrong' for one reason or another and end up in court. The law is one form of constraint, but from the late nineteenth century journalists themselves devised various codes of ethics that they hoped all practitioners would adhere to: in so doing, they succeeded both in earning the public's trust and in legitimising the profession.

As well as examining such codes *Journalism today* also draws attention to the ways in which journalists are constantly obliged to reconcile a variety of ethical standards while doing the job on a day-to-day basis. For it should be remembered that 'one very important function is the idea that it [journalism] is seen to bridge a gap between events and audiences, and therefore to mediate experience' (Berry 2000: 28). It is in this process of mediation that ethical factors become significant, and how they are 'played' determines to a large extent how journalists are perceived. Are they trusted? Do they command respect? Answers to these questions can be suggested within a historical context that traces the development of ethical codes, primarily in Great Britain and America. Major historical topics that present ethical considerations include how fakery (both within the media and from external sources) has at times threatened to undermine public confidence in print and broadcast journalism, and major themes such as privacy, celebrity, royalty and the press.

Compare, for example, the respectful silence of the media during the 1930s on the vexed question of the affair between the British King and the divorcee Mrs Simpson, and then the continuation of this gagging agreement during the Abdication Crisis, to present day press phone tapping and allied litigation in Britain – where royalty is seen as 'fair game'. Despite the sense that questions of morality are absolute, *Journalism today* suggests that ethics, at least as applied in the journalistic sphere, has a strong relativist element, for it has always been subject to context and contemporary thinking.

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Understanding 'fakes, rakes and people on the take'

If times and attitudes have changed so dramatically, however, why bother even trying to understand them? The answer is clearly that – contrary to much post-modernist thinking – the history of journalism ethics is characterised by continuity of themes. Thus, our understanding of privacy, confidentiality, and challenges to professional standards today, not to mention what this book calls 'fakes, rakes and people on the take', will be richer when we apply the tool of comparative history.

Indeed, when we mine some deeper seams in the knowledge base of the past through a synthesis of primary and secondary sources, the results may seem novel, methodologically eclectic, and may be criticised for sins of omission. Yet if *Journalism today* serves to provide a better understanding and appreciation of the current and historical relationship between journalism and society, then it will have served its purpose.

Reference

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Note on contributors

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Nick Nuttall is former senior lecturer and MA programme leader at the University of Lincoln School of Journalism. He worked for many years in East Africa, the Middle East and Cyprus, writing on travel and communication issues. He has authored a chapter on Truman Capote and New Journalism for *The journalistic imagination* (2007) as well as a chapter on investigative journalism for the latest edition of *The newspapers handbook* (2006).

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Jackie Newton

The knock at the door: Considering bereaved families' varying responses to news media intrusion

Relationships between the news media and the 'newsworthy' bereaved have long been problematic, with the attention of scholars and journalists alike concentrating on the issues of intrusion and harassment during grief. This study begins to consider media approaches from the position of the families themselves and finds that, although there is some evidence of anger at intrusion, there is more evidence of harm caused by neglect, inaccuracy and insensitivity. It also finds that some families have felt excluded by the news media from the stories of their relatives' deaths despite a willingness to engage with journalists.

Keywords: intrusion, trauma, death knock, bereaved, victims, ethics

Introduction

Violence and death are a mainstay of news media, with violent crimes featuring 'disproportionately' in news broadcasts, and murder being the most prominent (Reiner 2007; Jewkes 2010). According to Jewkes, violence 'fulfils the media's desire to present dramatic events in the most graphic possible fashion'; it accords with the negative news values of the Western world (Galtung and Ruge 1965); while Hanusch (2010), detailing the representation of death in the media over centuries, describes it as 'the new black of the modern media age':

> if a death satisfies even more news criteria, for example when it is violent, comes unexpectedly, involves a famous person, or the audience can identify with the death, then its news values will be even higher (ibid: 5).

Many deaths are recorded in the media without 'humanising' factors such as personal photographs, obituaries or comment from their family or friends. Others are given sustained coverage involving many parties and facets in circumstances which require newly-bereaved people to have extended contact with the media (Greer 2007). Even in the absence of interest from news teams it has become common for many deaths to find a public context through the web and social media with grieving relatives and friends utilising memorial sites and other means (Gibson 2001; Duncan and Newton 2010).

Such online tributes have provided material for many news stories, but it may be argued that the only ethical way to cover the story of a tragic death is to speak directly to those closest involved: the family and friends. It seems an obvious statement given the fact that these people are at the very centre of the story and therefore primary sources. However, it could also be construed as a *volte face* from the way we have come to consider the ethics of death reporting, which tends to focus on the protection of the grieving and not on their inclusion.

The 'death knock' is a much-maligned practice, associated as it is with concerns about intrusions into grief and the exploitation of victims' families (ibid; Hayward 2005). McKay (2007) even suggests that any defence of the death knock is 'spurious' and accuses journalists who would justify it of self-delusion or even dishonesty. This is an understandable position. Arguably no human being would want to trample over a bereaved person's right to mourn in private, and journalists have been shown to be no exceptions to this.

However, when journalists 'walk away' (Cote and Simpson 2006) or 'phone in to the office with an excuse,' (Keeble 2009; Castle 1999) are they denying the family the right to involvement in a story that is essentially theirs, not the journalists'? Despite the death knock's dubious reputation amongst journalists, there are further supporting arguments for putting grieving relatives at the centre of the story. They include evidence that sensitive death stories have acted as catalysts to public action and have served as public memorials to the deceased (Linklater 1996; Griffith 2004).

There is also evidence that speaking about traumatic experiences can be cathartic for interviewees, and that victims can gain 'mastery' over feelings of shock and helplessness by 'giving tes-

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timony' (Raphael 1986; Hume 2003; Bird 2003). Other studies have suggested that the media can be pivotal to the public's understanding of tragedy (Riegert and Olsson 2007; Kitch and Hume 2008; Thomas 2005; Griffith 2004).

Methodology

One of the problems with journalists' ethical decision-making in this area is that they rarely take into account the views of those most affected, whose best interests they claim to have at heart. Therefore, this study aims to begin that process by conducting interviews with members of bereaved families whose stories have been repeatedly covered by the media. To inform the parameters of the study, the author attended meetings of two groups of bereaved friends and relatives who were able to offer direction and opinion: Support After Murder and Manslaughter Merseyside (SAMM), a UK campaign group offering counselling and support to those bereaved by homicide, and the Liverpool (UK) branch of Roadpeace, an organisation which campaigns on road deaths and offers support to those bereaved by traffic incidents.

Following these discussions twelve individual interviews were carried out with bereaved relatives, including four with expert witnesses defined as family members who have been through a tragedy themselves, but who also act as organisers, confidantes or counsellors to a wider group of bereaved people. In this case, three of the expert witnesses were either the founders of, or are part of, the current leadership of regional victims' groups, while one was the co-ordinator of a national organisation. Of the eight further interviews, four were with parents who had lost children to murder, one with the partner of a murder victim, and three with participants who had lost a close relative (child, grandchild and partner) in road accidents.

Finally, a group interview was undertaken with eight members of Families Fighting for Justice (FFJ), a UK group which campaigns for more victim involvement in the criminal justice system. This was the preferred method of interaction for these participants who did not want to be interviewed individually and at length. All eight had lost a close relative to murder or manslaughter. Most participants lived in the North West of England, and ages ranged from 20 to 75. In terms of media attention, three of the murder victims were given extensive coverage at national and international level, four had coverage from the national media and the rest featured in the regional media only. Only one of the accident victims received national media attention, with the others featuring in the regional media.

Intrusion

About half of the family members reported some level of upset about approaches and subsequent contact with the media although this was markedly lower in interviews with families of road accident victims. The two interviewees who reported the strongest adverse reactions were both the fathers of murder victims. One (interviewee K) said he had roughly 'escorted' a female reporter from a national newspaper down a series of steps and that she had fallen down the last few.

> I couldn't believe she came to my door at that time and in those circumstances. She shouldn't have been there. You must have no heart to do your job.

Interestingly, both had had a continuing relationship with journalists, which, at least in part, they reported in more positive terms. The second father reported that the journalist left when asked to leave and said he had had further contact with the same reporter who had subsequently been helpful. The only females who voiced an angry reaction to journalists approaching complained about the manner of the approach rather than the fact that they had been approached.

This was a case of murder within the family, a sensitive situation which would require a great amount of thought and caution before a call was made on the relatives. Instead, a reporter who had no clear idea of what had happened turned up at their door on the night of the killing without realising that they were the grieving family. The young mother who opened the door had only just learned of the death of one of her immediate family at the hands of another, and felt the reporter was revelling in the incident.

> He was like a teenager wanting to get the gossip. It was: what's been going on up there? Why are the police there? If that guy had come up to me, told me who he was and said what he was doing, that would have been a different matter. It was the way he did it that was so upsetting. If he'd been honest from the start I probably would have spoken.

As unpalatable as this encounter is, it may be attributed to naivety and bad judgement on

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the reporter's part. As such, it is a situation that should not have arisen, and one that could be dealt with by better newsroom practice and an experienced newsdesk. The reporter missed the story by adopting an insensitive and inappropriate approach which could be argued to be just as damaging to the reputation of the news organisation as it was distressing to the family. It is worth noting here that the two women later spoke at length to a more experienced reporter from the same organisation who they felt 'did an excellent job', offering examples of good and poor practice from the same news organisation. This evidence is challenging in terms of journalists' ethical decision-making and practice, yet it is surmountable in the majority of cases. Much more difficult is the evidence from these interviews that some families are being 'excluded' from the coverage of their own relatives' deaths.

> In my case I'd say at least some of the damage done was by reporters going writing stories before they'd even spoken to me. I've had to ring up journalists to tell them my side of the story. Why didn't they contact me? Even if I had nothing to say it would give me some warning that a story was going to appear. Better that than hearing it on the radio or picking up a paper and being confronted with it without warning. At least if you know something is going to be done, you can shield other members of the family from it.

This participant had had a long exposure to the media since his son's murder 20 years ago, with the case maintaining news interest because of appeals against conviction by those found guilty of the murder. Although he had criticisms of the media and the way his son had been portrayed, he believed speaking to journalists was essential for families affected by newsworthy tragedies in order to ensure accuracy and to offer a truer picture of the victim than information from the police or courts would give. Perhaps an even more troubling category for journalists is the families who had been briefed by the police to expect lots of media attention, yet received next to none.

> The police said not to be surprised if when I opened my curtains in the morning there were all kinds of media out there. I thought it was good to be forewarned so I could think about whether to speak to them. When I opened the blinds the next morning there wasn't a soul out there and there never has been. Not that I wanted that, but I think someone should have contacted me before printing what they did.

Two further interviewees reported similar experiences, with one couple who had been braced for a media onslaught ending up 'struggling' to get a story about their son in the local evening paper. Police officers are obviously central to liaison with the media and the families when a tragedy occurs and are arguably preparing them to expect the 'worst' in terms of media attention. This can be problematic when the incident is not judged to be as newsworthy as the police expect. There is also evidence that the police automatically assume that the family will need to be shielded from journalists and take this as their starting point for liaison.

Guidance issued by the National Policing Improvement Agency in 2008 refers to the 'need to protect the family from an unwarranted media intrusion', but makes no mention of the fact that some families want to talk to journalists for the many reasons detailed earlier. Expert witnesses from SAMM and FFJ both referred to families feeling neglected or insulted by a lack of media attention when their loved one was killed. Interviewee A commented: 'It's as if they're not as worthy of attention as the next murder victim, who may get pages of coverage.'

There were similar complaints from members of Roadpeace, who were concerned that many road deaths did not receive the coverage they should because of perceptions in the media that road deaths were 'ordinary' deaths. The organisation says road victims are treated as third-class victims, and that the judicial system sees their deaths as 'trivial'. One interview participant complained that the media often seemed to have more sympathy with the driver than the pedestrian, no matter what the circumstances of the incident.

At the time journalists want interviews, the family may already be feeling they are 'under the microscope' and subject to major stresses from a number of parties in the criminal justice system. Three of the expert witnesses suggested journalists should be made more aware of the situation they are entering, perhaps by undertaking elements of the training currently given to police family liaison officers (FLOs), during which bereaved relatives relive the circumstances of their loss. This is a strategy currently used at the author's own university. Reporters would then understand something of what happens when families who have had

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little or no previous contact with the police find their house invaded by police officers, who may be conducting a search or traumatic interviews. One expert witness described the experience of a woman whose 35-year-old daughter had been murdered:

> Her daughter was a very private girl. She found it very difficult that these men were going through her belongings; they were going through her diary, her computer, they went through all her bank accounts and they even went through her knicker drawer. She cannot forget that, it was so intrusive. Ninety-nine point nine per cent of families would say they want to do all they can to help the police. It doesn't stop them feeling abused.

Public appeals

A number of interviewees demonstrated a very sophisticated understanding of the need to speak to the media when the help of the public is needed. Interviewee A, whose adult child was missing for some days before the murder came to light, wanted to do anything 'positive' to help the police, and saw an appeal to the media as the major part of that:

> I don't know where I got the bravery to do it because I'd never spoken to the press or anything like that. I was just a mum. I do remember always feeling like a rabbit caught in the headlights. I was talking but I didn't know what they expected of me.

Interviewee A made her appeal outside her home and expected that would be enough. However, because the case had made national headlines, she was then 'besieged' by requests from television news teams for individual interviews inside her home.

> I noticed with Rhys' parents (Rhys Jones, the 11-year-old shot dead by a gang member in Croxteth, Liverpool, England, in 2007) that they were sitting behind a table talking to the press. With me it was the camera crews all piling into my home. I felt that was very invasive because my home was the only place I felt secure at the time.

In the Rhys Jones case, the appeal by his parents, Stephen and Melanie, was considered by the police as crucial in bringing forward witnesses who were able to identify the killer (Real Crime 2009). Interviewee A felt the police should be able to guide families through the early stages of their relationship with the media following a tragedy, acting as mediators, although she felt that for some families, particularly those in which there are tensions with the police, this could be counter-productive.

In contrast, Interviewee G, whose adult child had been killed in a road accident from which a vehicle had driven away, was advised not to make an appeal to the media. Her family liaison officer had been deeply affected by the incident and felt he was protecting her from more upset and pain. Although the advice was given with the best possible intentions and was accepted at the time as the least-stressful alternative, Interviewee G believes it was the wrong decision to make: 'I still wonder to this day whether the driver would have been caught if I had made that appeal.'

As discussed earlier there is a concern that some police officers see their role as protecting the family from the media, rather than facilitating contact. Arguably, it gives them a purpose at a stage of the investigation when little else may be clear and the perpetrator unknown. There is some debate as to whether police officers are the right people to be intermediaries at all, given their role as investigators, and the fact that some families will have members who are under suspicion of this or other crimes. As well as this, FLOs have the stress of 'sustained contact with a family in grief', as identified by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (2003) and there is 'a danger of a FLO over-identifying with a family and allowing professional boundaries to erode'.

'Labelling' of victims and their newsworthiness

In a report for the UK's Home Office on the best use of media in serious crime investigations, Feist (1999) acknowledged the importance of offering a rounded picture of the victim to the public in order to gain sympathy and response to appeals. He quotes a senior investigating officer as suggesting police should personalise the qualities of the victim, for example emphasising that the victim was a mother of young children rather than a prostitute. The evidence from the fields of criminology and victimology suggests the police are right to have concerns about the representation of victims.

Greer (2007) documents a series of cases in which the crime was similar, but the victims were given very different levels of media attention depending on their status in the 'hierarchy of victimisation'. Those 'perceived as vulnerable, defenceless, innocent and worthy of sym-

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pathy or compassion' are more likely to fit the category of archetypal 'ideal' victim (Christie 1986) and are therefore more likely to receive supportive media attention. Three of the individual interviewees were distressed by the 'negative' descriptions of their loved ones offered by the media, as were four members of FFJ in the group interview.

One interviewee (gB) described her daughter as a lovely, caring person and a good mother, who became addicted to drugs to cope with her grief following the violent death of her brother and turned to prostitution to pay for her habit. However, after her murder she was merely referred to as a 'prostitute and heroin addict'; a description which was particularly damaging to her children. Arguably the circumstances of two murders in one family would have made more compelling reading than that offered by the 'prostitute and addict' description, but no journalist contacted the family for their story.

One father interviewed found his son had been described as a drug dealer by the person accused of his murder and the defence team as a 'justification' for his death. There are at least two issues to be considered here. Should journalists be more sensitive when the descriptions are true but upsetting to the family (and particularly children in that family); and should they take more care when the facts are disputed to gain evidence from all parties? There is a dilemma here in terms of journalistic truth telling and their commitment to accuracy, particularly when 'sources of information are often not as accurate or as certain as we might like' (Frost 2011).

However, including the grieving families in the story should produce a report with more balance than one relying on police and legal sources alone. Riches and Dawson (1998) suggest that media reports of murders can interfere with the grief process for surviving close relatives, distorting their memories of their loved ones and the tragic incident. This evidence of psychological damage offers a further reason for journalists to make the coverage as accurate as possible and include families in the process.

Other participants whose relatives had been murdered complained about the obsession with sensational 'human interest' aspects of their tragedy while other aspects they considered to be more important, such as failures in police procedure or miscarriages of justice, were almost ignored, despite campaigners actively canvassing for coverage. Interestingly, there was a perception from the participants in the group interview that the amount of media coverage had a definite effect on the way the case was subsequently investigated and prosecuted. It should be pointed out that this particular group was made up of people who felt they had been let down by the criminal justice system in some way, either by failure to find or prosecute their relatives' killers, or by what they regarded as lenient sentences when trials had gone ahead. Nevertheless, there was a feeling that some cases were made *cause célèbres* by the media because they fulfilled some form of news criteria while other very similar cases were largely ignored.

Accuracy as respect

Although there were concerns about intrusion and adequate representation of victims and their families, the largest area of upset mentioned was basic accuracy. Complaints about the media getting facts wrong were frequent and widespread among all interviewees. Six interviewees complained about 'hard, objective errors' (Maier 2005) such as the mis-spelling of the deceased's name. Interviewee F complained about a misunderstanding over relationships within the bereaved family and another about the circumstances of the death. There were also complaints about errors in captions and misleading headlines. Three of the interviewees cited sensational headline writing or presentation as the biggest upset even when the reporter's work was accurate and sensitive.

> I think when it's an individual family one of the things that upsets and distresses them so much is inaccuracy. Spelling somebody's name wrong; stupid little things, perhaps, to the reporter or the editor but to the bereaved family it's like insult on top of terrible injury. And it's going to the neighbours and getting misinformation because nobody outside of your house knows the full story. They can give you a bit of the story but it's probably wrong. And again that distresses people terribly.

One expert witness suggested that even the tiniest error in reporting or headline writing was perceived by the grieving family as a lack of respect for their loved one. This offers a large ethical problem considering the increase in errors catalogued by a number of studies. In a survey carried out by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, 45 per cent of online journalists complained of a 'loosening of standards and less careful reporting'. Maier (op cit) documents

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staffing concerns in organisations which have 'reporters stretched thin by staff cuts' and Russial (2009) records concerns about the lack of editing of online news.

Farnell (2011) reports that sub-editors are seen as 'superfluous' by some newspaper managements in the UK, and quotes a memo sent to Johnston Press editors instructing them to do away with the 'old practice' of checking each story for accuracy. It has already been documented that public perception of errors can begin to affect a media organisation's credibility and therefore could be a commercial concern. This finding adds weight to that argument, but also introduces the ethical concern of the news outlets unwittingly upsetting the most vulnerable of sources, their families and their friends.

Conversely, the relatively new practice adopted in some news organisations of allowing reporters to write straight into templates could be seen to be double-edged in the case of the interviewees and group participants who complained that, although the reporter's work was accurate, the accompanying headlines were either sensational, misleading or plain wrong. It could be argued that a headline written by a reporter who has been out to see the family would be more sensitive and accurate than one written by a disinterested sub-editor.

Interestingly no-one complained about being misquoted by a reporter in the main body of a newspaper or broadcast report, suggesting that in general those families who were interviewed had their views represented accurately. The only participant who did feel she had been misrepresented had spoken to a magazine containing 'real life' stories. Her quotations had been deliberately altered to make her sound particularly northern, although she has no such discernible accent.

Conclusions

The responses demonstrate that this is a complicated area of ethical judgement which requires journalists to consider the myriad shades of grey in the relationship between the media and the bereaved. The 'bereaved' and the 'families' are not homogenous groups, although they may have much in common. While concerns about media intrusion into grief continue to be valid, the findings here suggest that journalists are capable of causing harm in many more ways; through neglect, inaccuracy and insensitivity.

There is some evidence here of poor practice among journalists but not of widespread harassment and intrusion, although the very fact the incidents occurred give no room for complacency. However, there is also evidence of good practice with many families reporting continuing relationships with journalists who covered their relative's death.

Undoubtedly there should be more help and advice about contact with the media for grieving families – but from whom? The police have a specific role in an investigation, and as we have seen, they are not always the best people to be intermediaries, even though their media strategy has worked well in many cases. The organisations involved in this study are generally willing to intercede but have limited resources. At present they can only be called in if the victim's family specifically request their help and few families will have the advance knowledge and presence of mind to do that.

One of the most significant and worrying findings of this study is that bereaved families are often being prepared for media attention they subsequently do not receive, and can feel disappointment and distress at the lack of it. Hume (2005) anticipates the need for such public acknowledgement of death in her study of obituaries in the Guntersville *Advertiser-Gleamer*, a small newspaper with a large circulation in Alabama, USA. It is a newspaper with an egalitarian view of bereavement that prides itself on recording all deaths in the local community and until the late 1960s all were covered on the front page. The then-editor's rationale was described thus: 'Some deaths needed to be there, and the only fair thing was to put them all there.'

While this has made good business sense for the *Advertiser-Gleamer*, and the reports are described as obituaries rather than 'tributes', few publications are able to emulate this feat even on a local level. For broadcasters the time constraints are tighter and their areas of interest wider. Nevertheless, even thinking in these terms is a movement away from the norm; that of hunted victim and rapacious media.

For one young woman who had lost her brother to murder, journalists who approach the family are less likely to cause upset and make ethical errors than those who avoid such encounters:

> As long as they're getting their pay cheque they don't care. The people who do a good

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story, they deserve that pay cheque. The people who are Googling it and asking around for rumours or looking on Twitter – they're often basing their stories around lies. That's not fair.

Note

Individual interviewees' responses were coded A-L. Group interviewees were given the labels gA to gH.

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Note on the Contributor

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Richard Pendry

Sub-contracting newsgathering in Iraq

International journalists in an increasing number of areas of conflict have become dependent on locally-hired journalists and fixers to gather news. News professionals are now targeted for kidnap and murder in much of Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as Iraq. This paper looks at how Iraqi reporters working for an international journalist 'sub-contract' their newsgathering because of risk. It investigates the ethical problems and the advantages of working like this. The article shows how an international editor in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq works with reporters in Falluja and Baghdad on a potentially hazardous story. This work offers a glimpse at the complexities of international and local reporters working together under great pressure. It may be a significant development towards a new way of reporting conflict.

Keywords: war reporting, sub-contracting, local journalists, fixers, Iraq

Introduction

Iraq has been the most deadly conflict for journalists ever. Between the American invasion in 2003 and 2010, some 230 journalists and media workers were killed (Reporters Without Borders 2010). Unlike in previous conflicts, they have become targets for kidnap and murder.

For a time during the most dangerous period, international journalists stopped going out on to the streets entirely. The acclaimed *Independent* foreign correspondent Robert Fisk called it 'hotel journalism' (Fisk 2005).

Iraq is currently somewhat safer than it was, but remains very dangerous for reporters. News professionals are now targeted for kidnap and murder in much of Afghanistan and Pakistan. As a consequence, international journalists in an increasing number of areas of conflict have become dependent on locally-hired journalists and fixers to gather news. This is a practice which *Washington Post* foreign correspondent Rajiv Chandrasekaran calls 'journalism by remote control' (cited by Shafer 2004). By this he means that international journalists, unable to report freely in areas of conflict, hand over newsgathering to locals.

The twist – and this is the subject of this research – is that these local journalists sometimes also find it difficult to work in certain areas. In Iraq, this may be because they are a Sunni who finds it unsafe to go to an area controlled by a Shia militia. A journalist may have been previously threatened by a militia leader, politician or other powerful individual. Sometimes one reporter may have offended a source and it would be better to send someone else instead. Or it may be that it is simply too far, and there are too many checkpoints to get to a story in time (al-Mukhtar 2010).

My interviewees talked about the different ways they hand on a story to someone else who may not be a journalist. This is what one might call 'sub-contracting'. Individuals who are sub-contracted to produce news for a reporter in this way may or may not be professional journalists. The main idea is to avoid risk. In particularly dangerous areas, this process of handing the story on may continue several times until a person feels that it is safe to step out of their house and interview someone in their neighbourhood, often an individual that is known to them. The news that has been gathered in this way then goes back up the chain until it reaches the international journalist, and ultimately the news desk.

This research is not an exhaustive investigation into the full extent of sub-contracting in either international news organisations or the Iraqi media. It is a snapshot in time of one particular organisation that brings together local reporters and the international news organisations. This work offers a glimpse at the complexities of international and local reporters working together under great pressure. It may be a significant development towards a new way of reporting conflict.

Sub-contracting throws up serious questions about the reliability of news coming out of these areas. But it may sometimes be the only

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way of getting news out of some places. And it feeds into a wider debate about the changing nature of the foreign correspondent.

Sub-contracting newsgathering in one newsroom in Iraq

This paper looks at how a network of Iraqi reporters working for an international journalist sub-contract their newsgathering because of risk. Neil Arun is a British editor, based in Erbil, in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, who produces campaigning reports on press freedom, electioneering and security – topics covered only in brief by the international media.

Arun works for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), a news non-governmental organisation, which trains Iraqi journalists. IWPR is funded by Western governments, and its mandate is to bring Western standards of transparency and accountability to public discourse in areas of conflict. Its news stories go on to a website and Arun's reporting team at IWPR can tackle often dangerous subjects in depth because his employers are not driven mainly by commercial concerns.

Success for IWPR is not so much about building its own audience, but having its stories picked up by the mainstream press. Moreover, the organisation's newsgathering model requires Arun to rely on a nationwide network of local reporters, or 'trainees'. These are freelances, employed by a range of other news organisations, both Iraqi and international. Through working intensively with Arun, they are expected to improve their skills as reporters.

At the height of the conflict in Iraq, international journalists were mostly confined to their offices and depended heavily on local reporters. IWPR uses the same model by choice as a method to train local journalists. In the news agencies local journalists work as stringers and often do not get the by-line. In the case of IWPR, the local reporter does get the by-line.

It may appear that the obligation to provide training makes IWPR an atypical organisation in the news business in Iraq. However, IWPR serves both international and local media in different ways. Some of IWPR's freelances are local reporters who work for top international news organisations. And the product IWPR delivers must match the same standards of impartiality and accuracy that is expected of other international media in Iraq.

All Arun's stories are approved by his superiors in IWPR's editorial team, who are experienced journalists having held senior posts with top news agencies, newspapers and broadcasters (Arun 2010). Some IWPR journalists work at fixer level – they give logistical support to international journalists and can have some ability to take notes and gather quotations.

Others are experienced journalists who produce copy for international news agencies. However, their work does not require them to produce much colour (descriptive writing) or context, and these are skills they are learning from Arun. These reporters have had to adapt their working methods to the extraordinarily dangerous situations they face daily.

The reality facing local Iraqi journalists is stark. By far the majority of the news professionals killed in Iraq since the American invasion in 2003 have, in fact, been Iraqis (Reporters Without Borders 2010). 'International journalists have some kind of security immunity,' says IWPR freelance Uthman al-Mukhtar. 'The police, the army and the government cannot touch them, unlike us. We are caught between the security forces and the militants with all their ugliness and extremism' (2010). This is well understood by the local reporters, who feel threatened by both terrorist groups and the security forces answerable to the government. In such situations, the rules normally taught in journalism school do not always apply.

Research method

I spent a week in May 2010 with Arun as he worked with reporters in Falluja and Baghdad to investigate shadowy militia fighters. An election had been held across Iraq. But the result was inconclusive. People feared that the country would split once more along sectarian lines. Arun wanted to investigate whether paramilitary fighters – then on ceasefire – were planning to resume their violence. I filmed interviews with Arun and his staff about how they manage their reporters across Iraq. I also hired Iraqi news camera operators in Adhamiya, a district in Baghdad, and Falluja to film interviews with Arun's reporters as they worked. My interviewees were:

- Neil Arun, an international journalist and editor at IWPR, who had previously worked at the BBC in London.
- Uthman al-Mukhtar, an award-winning freelancer based in Falluja, which is a former centre for the insurgency and still dangerous for foreign journalists to work in. Al-Mukhtar works for a major US news-

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paper.

- Baghdad-based reporter Khalid al-Ansary who also works for an international wire agency. Al-Ansary has previously worked for the BBC and *The New York Times* and is one of Arun's most accomplished reporters.
- Salman Adil Turki, a local editor and Arabic speaker, who works in the newsroom in Erbil with Arun liaising with reporters who do not speak English – and so the majority.

I used intensive, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions for my informants. According to Wimmer and Dominick, the main advantage of working like this compared to unstructured or informal interviews is the wealth of detail it provides (2006: 135). This method of interviewing is also thought by these authors to be most likely to provide accurate responses on sensitive issues (ibid). I chose to work with IWPR in Erbil mainly because I had good access. This was a sensitive subject for my interviewees. I have used the terms stringer, fixer, local journalist or reporter and local producer interchangeably in this piece.

One day's reporting

I filmed Arun and his reporters at work on 10 May 2010. It was one of Iraq's most violent days that year. Car bombs killed more than 100 people in Baghdad and at other locations across the country.

Baghdad

On that day, Khalid al-Ansary was working in Adhamiya, a Sunni district of Baghdad which was until 2008 also a base for al-Qaeda (Antelava 2009). The last time he was here with a camera, he was threatened by paramilitary fighters. On the day of our filming, al-Ansary was working on a story about the Sunni 'Awakening' militia, known as Sahwa. These were fighters who were formerly with al-Qaeda. The Americans paid them to fight al-Qaeda, and the government's concern has always been that they may switch their allegiance back to al-Qaeda.

The car bombs in Baghdad meant that it was difficult for al-Ansary to move around the city. We watched him on the telephone to Arun and then followed him as he interviewed a leader from the militia. The man agreed to film a discreet interview in a car park off the main street. The leader said that his militia's ranks were under threat from the Shia-dominated authorities and from al-Qaeda. He warned his organisation would return to violence if Sunni Arab demands for political representation were ignored. It was indeed a dangerous place for al-Ansary to be.

The car park attendant ran off when he heard Khalid speaking English to Arun on the telephone because he thought the interview would attract the attention of the security services. Al-Ansary's interviewee said separately that they were probably being watched by an informer for the security forces. Al-Ansary's work that day did not end in Adhamiya; Arun wanted him to go an extra mile for the story. He asked him to find out about tensions in Abu Ghraib, a dangerous Baghdad suburb notorious for its prison.

So al-Ansary called an individual – not a news professional – to get the information he needed. It had been a long time since a reporter worked in Abu Ghraib without pre-planning. Like most Iraqi journalists, al-Ansary felt that the best way to gather news safely from Abu Ghraib was on the telephone.

Falluja

We also filmed with Uthman al-Mukhtar, an award-winning reporter from the town of Falluja, a former centre for the insurgency and attacked twice by American forces with devastating results in 2004, where journalists need to work carefully. Another Iraqi camera operator followed al-Mukhtar as he worked on the same story about the Awakening.

Research questions

Traditionally, one of the most important services provided by frontline journalists has been their role as eyewitness. It is extremely valuable for a reporter to be able to say: 'I saw this with my own eyes.' But when several people construct a story, who then 'owns' it? How is it possible to check whether information gathered by the sub-contracting method is true? Might it not be tempting to make something up, rather than take a risk? Are local newsgatherers always transparent with their editors about whether they have sub-contracted out a story?

Is, though, the authenticity of the information gathered in this way necessarily compromised? After all, an unreliable witness could just as readily lie to a foreign journalist as to a local journalist. Does a skilled local journalist have a better chance of spotting the lie? Could there be advantages in working like this? Are local reporters in any case overdue to be acknowledged for the work they do? A solo foreigner who does not speak the language cannot

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achieve much on their own. A growing body of work acknowledges that fixers and other locally hired journalists are indispensable to international journalists (Palmer and Fontan 2007, Garton Ash 2010, Murrell 2010).

How sub-contracting newsgathering works

Reporters sub-contract their reporting for three main reasons: difficulty, danger and distance. But primarily danger (Arun 2010). The way it works is like this:

Salman Adil Turki gives the example of a story featuring an insurgent (2010). The local journalist cannot go to the insurgents' neighbourhood because reporters working for international news organisations are widely believed to be spies for the Americans. So the reporter calls up a cousin or a distant friend living in the insurgent's neighbourhood. That cousin will speak to an individual who is known to him. The cousin relays what he believes to be an accurate version of the questions Arun and Adil Turki originally sent to the reporter.

There is no direct contact between reporter and interviewee, so everyone is protected. This is important because the role of the reporter is widely misunderstood in Iraq. Under President Saddam Hussein, all journalists worked for the government. So Iraqis expect reporters to have an agenda. The idea that someone can go around asking strangers questions to write a factually accurate, impartial piece of news is not widely accepted (Adil Turki 2010). '[Sometimes the reporter's contact] doesn't want to step out into the street and accost a stranger, a neighbour, and ask him some politically leading questions [the answers to which] are then going to appear in the press,' says Neil Arun (2010). In Adil Turki's example, the news that has been gathered in this way then goes back up the chain until it reaches Arun, who edits it into the finished piece.

'The information for the story almost becomes like this thing that is transmitted through a circuit of relatively static reporters,' says Arun. 'It's like the way you see soldiers hauling sandbags when they are building a wall. They stand in a line and the sandbag gets passed from soldier to soldier to soldier' (ibid).

This way of working can lead to problems. It can be hard sometimes to work out exactly who is filing a story. Arun relates the example of an Iraqi reporter with reasonably good English, who telephoned one day to pitch what he called a 'cracking story' about some Mahdi Army militia men who were running a motor workshop and car wash (ibid). This was an incongruous human interest story about members of paramilitary group. However, Arun has, to this day, never met the man who was offering the story. This person was a reporter – and he obviously had excellent access to the Mahdi Army. So was the man with the car wash story a militia member? A relative of a member of the militia?

Though Arun was keen to chase up the pitch, he questioned the reporter about where it came from. When the reporter did not answer the questions, he decided to spike (journalists' jargon for 'not use') the report. Arun says that the reporter may have felt his links to the militia could have endangered him, but for Arun there was no easy way of telling who he really was, nor to what extent was he objective (ibid).

Of course, how much a foreign journalist ever understands his/her fixer's motives and affiliations has long concerned international correspondents. BBC World Affairs Correspondent Allan Little distrusted some of the fixers he had to work with in former Yugoslavia. 'You can tell very quickly when someone's trying to spin you a yarn. I worked with one young woman in Croatia who I could tell...was partisan. There [were things] she was not translating and other things she was translating incorrectly' (Little 2011).

However in Iraq, sub-contracting sometimes comes unstuck because the reporter's contact simply has not understood the questions. There are just too many links in the chain. Turki says when this happens, he goes back over the questions once more with the journalist. 'We go back to the reporter again and say: "Go back to your middle man, give him these questions again,"' he stresses (Turki 2010). He confesses it can be a time-consuming process.

The main risk with sub-contracting newsgathering is that inaccuracy creeps in somewhere along the line and may be undetected. Sometimes a report that comes in from a local reporter just does not 'sound right'. Arun says that his instinct often tells him there may be a problem. 'Sometimes it just smells funny. It can seem too good to be true. You ask for something and you get exactly what you asked for' (Arun 2010).

For example, he may get a reporter who in one day manages to file vox pops (journalist jargon for random interviews) from six parts of the city. 'You wonder then whether he really did that reporting himself, or did he sub-contract out to someone else?' says Arun. In such a case,

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he simply asks the reporter how he acquired the quotations. Among many Iraqi journalists, sub-contracting is viewed as nothing to be ashamed of. It's a survival skill. Arun and Adil Turki say they take precautions to make sure the information they receive is accurate.

Arun says the first safeguard is working with reliable reporters, either recommended by international news organisations and preferably who have been checked out by IWPR themselves. The second defence, as he puts it, is to compare a story with what is already out there. Arun and his colleagues often commission other reporters to check details in the story. If he knows another reporter in the same town, he may have Adil Turki call him up and ask whether a certain shop mentioned in the story is on the street that the first reporter said it was (Arun 2010). The story is spiked (rejected) if there are any suspicions that the story is not right. It might also be spiked if the story itself checks out – but the way it was sourced is not transparent (ibid), as in the case of the Mahdi Army car wash.

Gabriel Gatehouse also had problems with sources when working with stringers at the BBC office in Baghdad. In 2009-10, Gatehouse checked a series of Reuters reports of a car bomb in another town and realised that the details he was receiving from his 'second source' were always identical to the first (Gatehouse 2011). For whatever reason, the stringer was cagey about whom he was talking to. 'You would intuit something was wrong because AP and AFP always had a different version of events from us. But with Reuters it was always the same,' says Gatehouse. 'So we had to find another source' (ibid).

As a rule, Arun says, his reporters were forbidden from sub-contracting their stories. It was permitted only in exceptional cases, where a reporter had no other means of gathering the information. Then too, only the most reliable reporters were allowed to use the method – and only under the careful supervision of the editors. Material gathered in this way would be attributed clearly in the published story, for instance to 'sources interviewed over the telephone'.

While IWPR's editors placed tight curbs on sub-contracting, they learnt from local journalists who came to them for training that the practice remained relatively widespread in the Iraqi media. After I returned to the UK, Arun told me an interviewee had complained that he had not been accurately quoted (Arun 2010). When questioned, the reporter said he had sub-contracted out the interview in question. Now the two reporters were arguing over who was responsible for the disputed point. Both were banned from working with IWPR.

There are other problems. It is difficult to get across the nuances of questions which are emailed to local reporters – let alone where third parties are involved. In other cases, it is difficult to go beyond the tribal and sectarian loyalties of the local reporters. In the ethnically divided city of Mosul, for example, Arun has used both Arab reporters and Kurdish ones. At times of high tension in the city, it was harder to get certain reporters to do a tough story on their own side.

Arun admits that his less-than-perfect solution in this case was essentially to blend together the accounts of the two or more reporters, giving them both a by-line. He hoped that the sum of the parts was more or less objective (ibid). Further interviews conducted with Iraqi journalists who have not worked with IWPR revealed more about how sub-contracting works in the local media.

Beyond danger, Iraqi journalists also give pressure of work and making extra money as reasons for sub-contracting. One Baghdad-based reporter, who wanted to remain anonymous, does produce work on behalf of other colleagues. He supplies pieces for news websites, newspapers and television and says sub-contracting is widespread (anonymous journalist 2011). This journalist said people were more likely to sub-contract out interviews with people in the street than official interviewees – who are more likely to sue.

This reporter described sub-contracting as a pact between colleagues, hidden from outsiders. He said colleagues often asked him for what he describes as 'small favours' such as talking to a soldier at a checkpoint or taking pictures for him while working on a security story with his cameraman (ibid). Another Baghdad reporter, Saeed Ahmed, says: 'Some journalists outsource stories to immature journalists, although they know that these beginners might file bad copy' (2011). He knew of one story, where a colleague was asked to interview families about damage to their property after violence in the city. His acquaintance sub-contracted the story out to two reporters, and it was eventually published under his byline. On the question of possibly tainted material Arun stressed:

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> There are times we didn't run material because we suspected it was tainted. There was a case recently where I asked for some quotes on the American withdrawal. I asked a reporter in Baghdad to vox pop people about their memories of American soldiers on their streets. He turned up with a telling quote, of an American soldier hurling a water bottle at a car that had got too close to his convoy – as a slightly violent way of telling it to back off. That event, I found out later, takes place in *The Hurt Locker*, which is available as a bootleg DVD across the country.
>
> I have no idea now whether the reporter saw *The Hurt Locker* and instead of doing his own research, decided to put that rather cinematic event into the mouth of a person whom he interviewed. Or perhaps the person whom he interviewed saw the Hurt Locker and made it up, based on the film. Perhaps it happened all the time, because American soldiers were constantly using water bottles, short of using their guns, to keep traffic back. I have no idea. But those are the things that keep you awake at night after you've filed a story. You suddenly sit bolt upright in bed as you're drifting off to sleep and wonder whether you've been had (2010).

The 'circle of trust'

During the course of the research, I learnt that Uthman al-Mukhtar in Falluja sometimes relied on a network of trusted reporters to gather quotations. He calls it a 'circle of trust'. Al-Mukhtar and his colleagues gather news for each other because of security concerns, or because of the large distances they must travel. Anbar province, where Falluja is located, covers a third of Iraq. 'It would take me four hours with a speed of 140 km per hour to get to Rutba to report on a story,' he says. 'By that time, there would be nothing to report. So, I resort to the Circle of Trust' (al-Mukhtar 2010).

'It is a well known term among my journalist colleagues.' He indicated that he could only use the sub-contracting method selectively, given that his clients at international agencies were more likely to object to it than those at local outlets. 'Editors in Baghdad [that I work for] had serious reservations about us using this technique' (ibid).

Al-Mukhtar trusts the people who report on his behalf. He also maintains that the system works because his colleagues know what kind of interviewees he is looking for and the kind of questions he likes to ask. 'They know the style of my work. They know the kind of stuff I want' (ibid). He recently had to outsource a story to a trusted colleague when he was investigating the killing of two al-Qaeda leaders in an area outside his normal patch. So he commissioned a reporter who was from the same town as the dead men.

Al-Mukhtar acknowledges that sub-contracting out this particular piece of work did affect the end result. 'I have to admit the story wasn't quite the same I would have filed if I had gone myself,' he says. 'If I had heard with my own ears the cries of the baby, or the moans...of the old man' (ibid).

Conclusion

When reporting in Iraq became almost too dangerous to do at all, John Burns, of *The New York Times*, said he believed that the growing use of local journalists merely made a problematic situation even more so. 'Reporting on any war at any time is difficult. These are new complications on top of old complications' (cited by Shafer op cit). In fact, international journalists have always relied on fixers and other locally hired help. *Sunday Times* reporter Jon Swain describes fixers as indispensable (Swain 2009).

Allan Little, of the BBC, says: 'Without fixers working alongside, I don't think we'd be able to function at all' (op cit). Little believes that the use of fixers and locally hired news gatherers actually 'hugely strengthens' the traditional model of the foreign correspondent (op cit). This may be true for the diminishing number of foreign correspondents. But locally-hired Iraqi journalists are increasingly autonomous (Murrell op cit). And this way of working is spreading.

'[Fixers are] still doing the same stuff they always did but they are doing something additional now as well. They are going by themselves to places we as Westerners can't secure access to. So they're doing more than ever' (Little op cit). Certainly Uthman al-Mukhtar in Falluja believes he fulfils an important role. International journalists are unable to walk down a street in Falluja without being escorted by body guards, he says. Reporting like this is superficial. 'If they interview an individual, they won't get the whole truth. But we can, because we are in direct contact with people's daily life and we understand everything about what they do' (al-Mukhtar op cit).

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And when even local journalists cannot cover a story safely, sub-contracting may arguably be the best way to get information from dangerous areas – provided all the sources can be trusted (Arun 2010). At the time of writing, the situation in Iraq has eased somewhat for reporters. According to Salman Adil Turki, there is less need to outsource stories because there is less violence. Journalists he knows are now concentrating on stories about politics. 'If you know a bunch of MPs you don't have to sub-contract or outsource any story,' he says (op cit).

The sub-contracting model offers unexpected benefits only where it overcomes the serious ethical challenges explored here. Arun and his team did recognise the benefits of sub-contracting out a story in exceptional cases. However, they also evolved ways of verifying that any material gathered in this way was accurate. 'We would go back endlessly with questions if it wasn't clear with quotes and context' (op cit).

They made sure reporters were transparent about their methods – and they reflected the method of sourcing in the published story. All of my interviewees acknowledged that it would be better to ask people questions directly than to rely on phoning sources. 'In an ideal world you would go on the street and do your interviews with people, your vox-pops and interviews with officials and you would write the story within five to six hours,' says Turki (op cit). In reality, the reporting process takes much longer. Perhaps this is the future of war reporting.

As Arun says: 'Just as warfare in Iraq has evolved rapidly, in the same way reporting has also evolved. We're still learning what this beast is, when we come here from the West and look at it. There's no existing genus that it fits into. It's a strange animal' (op cit).

Future research

It would be useful to conduct a similar exercise with other international journalists in areas of conflict to see how far this model has spread and how it works elsewhere. I am hoping to follow this work up with a trip to the North Caucasus to see how international news agency journalists based in Moscow work with local news gatherers.

Because of security concerns, there are no international journalists based in the North Caucasus. The work-around is for an international editor based in Moscow to run a network of freelances who operate under pseudonyms. Many of the local reporters have been threatened or attacked after their reporting displeased the Russian authorities.

It might also be revealing to investigate the weight given by news desks to local journalists as opposed to employees who are international journalists.

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Note on the contributor

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Justin Schlosberg

Covering the cover-up: The *Hutton report* in UK television news

The* Hutton report *of 2004 was the outcome of an inquiry set up to examine 'the circumstances surrounding and leading up to the death of Dr David Kelly'* (Hutton report 2003)*, a government intelligence analyst and biological weapons expert. Kelly was the identified source for an allegation made on BBC Radio Four's* Today *programme that sparked one of the most vociferous and public attacks on the BBC from a sitting government in its 80-year history. Whilst the report sparked allegations of 'whitewash', the controversy surrounding Kelly's actual death was to remain marginalised for the best part of seven years. During this time evidence has accumulated casting increasing doubt over the safety of Hutton's explanation. This paper presents findings from a study of television news coverage of the controversy between 2004 and 2010, based on qualitative and quantitative content analysis of news texts.

Keywords: *Hutton report*, television news, cover-up, conspiracy theories, propaganda model

Introduction

Television news in the UK remains by far the most trusted and consumed news format – particularly the public service terrestrial outlets of BBC and ITN. The failure of these broadcasters to give due attention to conflicting evidence in the case of David Kelly raises important questions concerning the core objectives of the liberal democratic project. In particular, to what extent are the news media able to hold authority to account when non-media institutions of accountability fail to do so?

Examining limitations in reporting an apparent 'cover-up' also presents a useful point of entry to the study of conventional media power in the digital age. It has been suggested that in an increasingly multi-platform, 24-hour news landscape, the capacity for elites to control information, determine the news agenda and define the framing of events has waned (McNair 2006). It is also suggested that the digital news landscape presents ever-growing opportunities for grass roots 'citizen' journalism to influence mainstream output (Thurman 2008). Such views are countered by those who argue that multiplying news outlets have fostered, paradoxically, growing homogeneity in content (Boczkowski and de Santos 2007). But it is the relative absence of certain reports from the mainstream agenda altogether that presents the most compelling challenge to contemporary liberal pluralist accounts.

The controversy over how Dr Kelly died has, however, occasionally and briefly broken mainstream media barriers. As such, the case study allows us to assess both how the story was covered, as well as how it was marginalised. The latter question is critical to any attempt at grappling with perhaps the most elusive aspect of ideological power: the capacity to define the limits of public debate (Lukes 1997). But in researching stories left off the news agenda, a requisite challenge is to establish the grounds on which they *should* have been paid more attention, should such grounds exist.

In other words, how can we be sure that the controversy was intrinsically worthy of greater exposure, or that its marginalisation was not simply an accidental by-product of randomness in the news selection process? In the analysis that follows, I attempt to show that marginalisation consisted at least partly in journalists' active selection of evidence in favour of the official verdict, over that which undermined it. This was given added weight by interview findings which revealed that, overwhelmingly, journalists themselves maintained faith in the official explanation of death, and there is little basis on which to doubt their sincerity. It was this fact above all else which accounted for how they regarded the story in terms of news value.

In effect, the newsworthiness of the story was intimately related to whether or not journalists subscribed to the official explanation of death, rather than the controversy's inherent news value. Much of the following discussion is, therefore, concerned with epistemological considerations in attempting to understand why the official explanation of death was so believable, in spite of existing and growing evidence to the contrary.

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Within the sample population for content analysis, the criteria for selection were reports, studio features or interviews that focused either on the report itself, or on the death of Dr Kelly. The sampling period begins on the day of the report's publication (28 January 2003) and continues to the campaigners' final legal submission to re-open the inquest into Kelly's death (25 March 2011). Interview respondents were sampled from the full range of journalists, news executives and sources who were engaged in the coverage of the report. In line with requests for anonymity, some responses are unattributed.

Content analysis findings are discussed in relation to questions of *how* the story was both covered and marginalised. Interview findings are employed as a basis for speculating as to *why* this particular controversy was not afforded the weight of journalistic 'outrage' evident in the whitewash frame and countless other stories. The evidence points to an ideological rather than organisational filter which warrants further research.

An establishment in crisis

At the heart of the offending report on the *Today* programme at 6.07 am on 29 May 2003 was an allegation made by BBC journalist Andrew Gilligan. In a live 'two-way' discussion with the programme's anchor, he asserted that the government 'probably knew' one of the claims on which it based its case for the invasion of Iraq earlier in the year was inaccurate. The implicit suggestion was that the government had lied in order to bolster support for a war that was by any measure the most unpopular since the invasion of Suez in 1956.

The war certainly provoked unprecedented public protest and although it was notionally endorsed by both sides of the House of Commons, leading Labour and Conservative politicians detracted; the Liberal Democrat party opposed it outright; key Cabinet members resigned; and officials across the board voiced their discontent through various leaks and anonymous press briefings. In other words, the prospect of war drew lines both across and through the British establishment, a situation that was broadly reflected in the pre-war press (Freedman 2009).

Although the war itself ushered in a degree of default consensus in media coverage (Lewis 2006), the immediate aftermath of regime change saw wholesale fractures re-emerge. The catalyst for this was the failure to find weapons of mass destruction (which provided the base justification for war) and the deteriorating security situation inside Iraq. Gilligan's report coincided with both and as a result spread like wildfire across the global media. In the words of Alistair Campbell, the government's chief media strategist speaking on BBC's *Newsnight* on 28 January 2004, 'this was a story that went right round the world. It was in virtually every newspaper in the world and we were accused of being liars'.

Clearly, the stakes could not have been higher, nor could the controversy have involved more senior and powerful figures within the British state. In light of this, it is perhaps not surprising that the actual death of Dr Kelly – sudden and unnatural as it was – did not attract the spotlight of either the *Hutton report* or subsequent media coverage. Instead, the report served as a quasi-legal adjudication on the conflict between the government and the BBC.

In the event, the government was broadly vindicated and the BBC wholly castigated, resulting in the unprecedented resignation of its two most senior figures. This provoked widespread allegations of 'whitewash' in television news programmes. But despite this spectacle of watchdog journalism, the news media widely accepted without question the official primary cause of death, to the neglect of evidence that had emerged during the inquiry which severely undermined it. This included the testimonies of two paramedics who had examined the body and maintained that levels of blood at the scene were inconsistent with death by arterial bleeding. A campaign was subsequently launched by a group of senior medical and legal experts who argued that evidence for the accepted cause of death was unsatisfactory. More importantly, they argued that the inquiry itself had not properly dealt with the cause of death and the government's refusal to hold an inquest or release medical and police documents was tantamount to an obstruction of due process.

What is most pertinent about the controversy that surrounded the *Hutton report* was not so much the 'original sin' of corruption (sexing up/lying), but corruption of the accountability system (whitewash/cover-up). This is what distinguishes coverage of Hutton from that of subsequent inquiries related to the Iraq War. It is also partly for this reason that the analysis starts, in a sense, at the end: the *Hutton report* marked a culmination of months of media fever over an establishment effectively at war with itself.

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The basis of cover-up

It is important to stress that this study makes no assessment as to the validity of any positive arguments regarding the cause of Dr Kelly's death, nor the wider question of whether it was suicide or murder. My aim is to consider the events purely in respect of what was known to journalists or could reasonably have been uncovered and to assess their responses in kind. In the following section, I draw particular reference to how television reported the conflicting medical evidence presented at the inquiry. But it is worth mentioning at the outset that apparent attempts to suppress information received no mention at all in the sample analysed. This is in direct conflict with journalistic discourse that tends to place significant weight on the news value of *uncovering* the cover-up. According to David Cohen, feature writer for the *Evening Standard*:

> It's the ultimate in journalism to be able to bring down a Prime Minister and most leaders are threatened not by something they did wrong but by the cover-up. Almost always it's the cover up. That's what got Nixon.

It is not within the realms of this discussion to provide a detailed exposition of all the available evidence pointing to a cover-up. But the following list serves as a sufficient basis for calling into question the failure of television news to hold this important aspect of the story up to scrutiny.[1]

Tampering of evidence

Shortly after Kelly's body was found, his dentist reported to the police that Kelly's dental records file was missing. According to the Attorney General, Dominic Grieve, who investigated the incident prior to rejecting campaigners' submission for a new inquest:

> Dr Kelly's notes should have been stored in a cabinet alphabetically but they weren't there. The dentist looked through about fifteen notes either side of where they should be but they were not found. Two other members of staff also looked but couldn't locate them.[2]

Two days later, however, the dentist reported that the records were found 'in their right place'. According to a Freedom of Information response by the Thames Valley Police, a total of 15 fingerprint marks were found on the file, nine of which were either unusable or eliminated to a member of staff.[3] That left six clear DNA fingerprint marks from unidentified persons. The Attorney General makes no mention of this crucial finding in his report, simply concluding that he is 'unable to explain this aspect of the enquiry'.

Suppression of evidence

Despite releasing the post mortem report in late 2010, the majority of medical and police documents pertaining to Kelly's death remain classified on the basis of protecting the interests of his family. These include photographs taken of the body at the scene where it was found, the full reports by forensic biologist Roy Green and toxicologist Dr Alexander Allan, as well as witness statements submitted in absentia by controversial figures including Mai Pederson, an alleged US army intelligence agent who was a close confidante of Dr Kelly (Baker 2007). It is a core contention of this thesis that given the conflicting and uncertain evidence surrounding the death of Dr Kelly – a senior public servant who suffered an unnatural death in extremely controversial circumstances – the public interest in disclosure would outweigh any emotional distress that it may cause for the bereaved.

Disinformation

In the summer of 2010 Tom Mangold, investigative journalist and long term critic of Kelly 'conspiracy theorists', added an online comment to an article he wrote for The *Independent*, explaining that the lack of fingerprints found on Kelly's knife was attributable to DNA-resistant 'gaffer tape'.

> The pruning knife used by David to cut his wrist was covered in gaffer-tape, as are many knives, to prevent the fingers slipping on to the blade and provide a firmer grip. It is almost impossible to retrieve finger prints from this kind of material (Mangold 2010).

It was repeated as material fact by Andrew Gilligan in an article written for the *Daily Telegraph* (Gilligan 2010). However, a subsequent Freedom of Information response from the police confirmed that there was no such tape or any paraphernalia attached to the knife.[4] The fact that none of Kelly's fingerprints had been found on the knife was established by Liberal Democrat MP Norman Baker four years earlier (Baker 2007). Whilst a host of unsuspicious variables might have caused the lack of fingerprints, the reporting of the alleged tape around the knife is revealing insofar as it is not attributed to any source and was later found to be erroneous.

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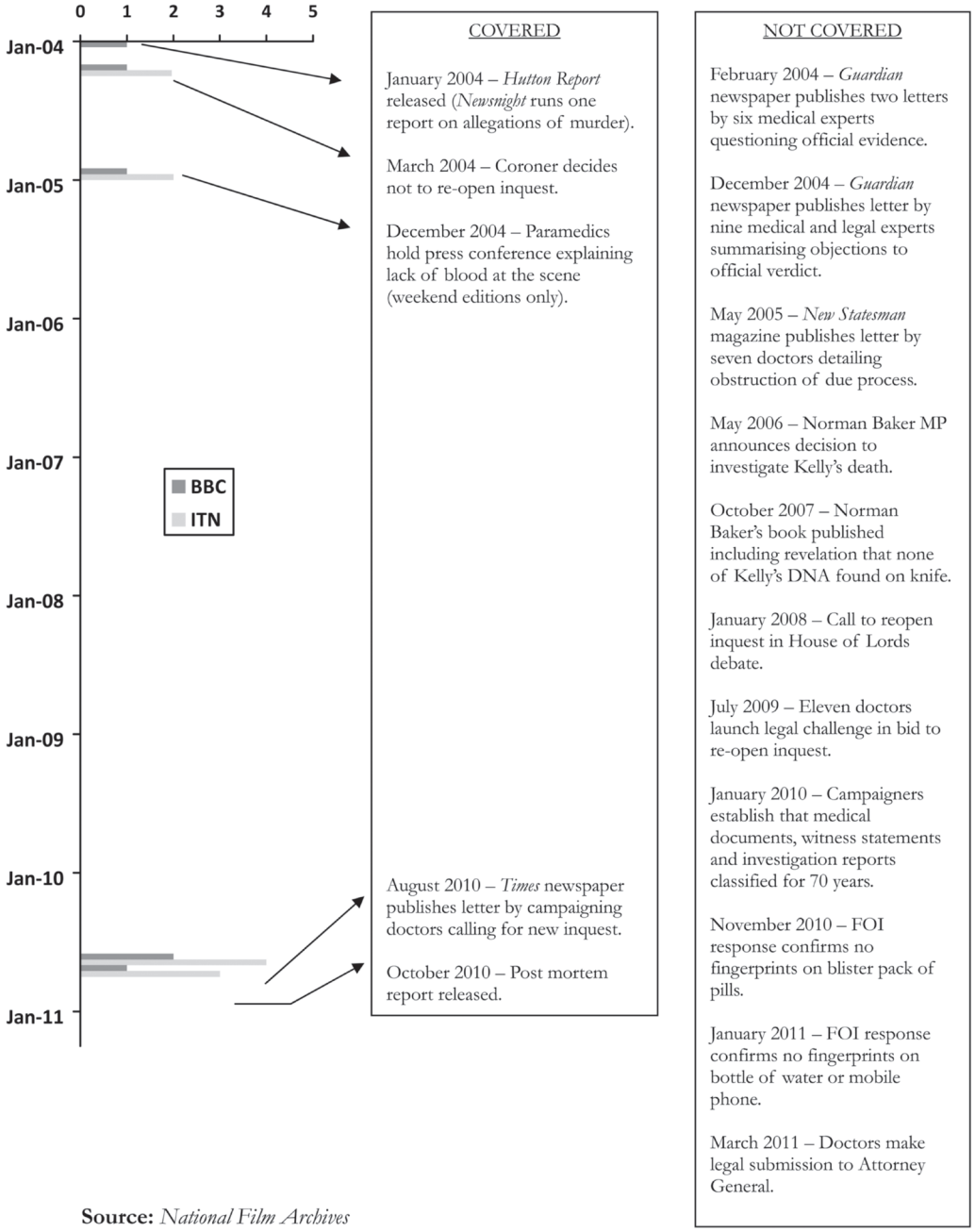
It is important to stress that the information presented above does not *prove* that evidence was tampered with or suppressed, or that attempts were made to disinform the investigation and the public. But they do point to the *possibility* of a cover-up and as such stand firmly within the bounds of acceptable journalist scrutiny. Indeed, it is the responsibility of fourth estate journalism to report not just what we know about a controversial case such as this, but also what we don't know – provided the distinction is adequately qualified (see Reynolds v. Times). But apparent subversion of due process, excessive secrecy, and disinformation did little to prompt journalists' concern.

Clearly this starting position is an antagonistic one, at least in respect of the core subjects of my research: broadcast journalists. But although the analysis is focused on and critical of journalism, it does not follow that the problem is rooted in journalism alone. It is perhaps significant on this point that the medical controversy has not attracted the attention of some of the most radical and outspoken media critics. These include David Edwards and David Cromwell, whose Media Lens website (www.medialens.org) provides monthly alerts and dissections of media output, aimed at illuminating 'a propaganda system for the elite interests that dominate modern society' (Media Lens n.d.).

A contained controversy

An overview of the coverage suggests that whilst ITN outlets were more likely to cover the medical controversy than their BBC competitors, the story gained minimal coverage overall, surfacing briefly and sporadically in 2004 and then re-emerging in the summer and autumn of 2010 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of reports referencing the medical controversy



Source: *National Film Archives*

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As noted above, the story's lack of news currency was in some sense a function of its believability. That is, journalists tended not to view the controversy as a story because they did not give sufficient credence to the allegation of an unsafe verdict. There is little if any basis on which to doubt the sincerity of these views. But was the evidence in favour of the official verdict given more prominence in news reports than that which cast doubt over it? Table 1 displays an overview of the conflicting evidence presented at the Hutton inquiry and Figure 2 illustrates the number of times evidence for and against the official verdict was cited in the sample of news programmes analysed.

The data suggest that evidence for and against arterial bleeding as a principal cause of death was given more or less equal weight in news reports, and conflicting evidence over whether or not Kelly suffered an overdose was weighted in favour of the official verdict. The most significant finding, however, was that journalists overwhelmingly endorsed Hutton's conclusion that Kelly was suicidal at the time of his death.

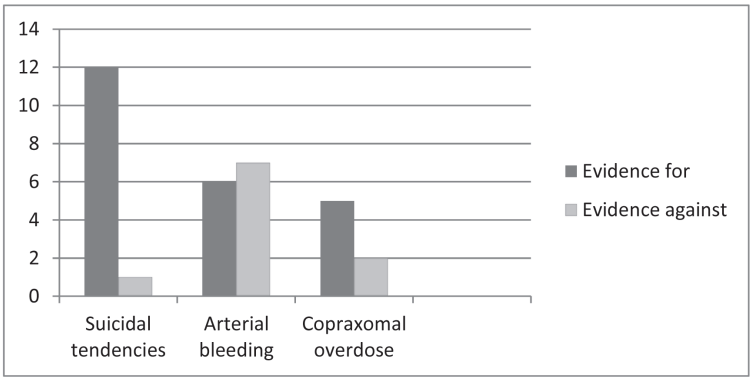
In fact, conflicting evidence heard in relation to Kelly's mental state was skewed against the view that he was suicidal. The only relevant witness who considered him to be so was a consultant psychiatrist who had never actually met

Table 1 Conflicting evidence presented in testimony to the Hutton inquiry

Suicidal tendencies	EVIDENCE FOR	Pressure of being publicly 'outed'.
		Shame of having breached civil service code.
		Depression over a life's work in ruins.
	EVIDENCE AGAINST	Expressions of optimism in private communications leading up to death, plans to meet with daughter and travel to Iraq
		Kelly described as 'relieved' following appearance at Foreign Affairs Select Committee and 'normal', 'calm' and 'relaxed' on the day before his disappearance.
Arterial bleeding as principal cause of death	EVIDENCE FOR	Pathologist testimony notes incised wound on wrist, severed ulnar artery and the presence of blood at the scene.
		Body observed as lying flat surrounded by knife and wrist watch.
	EVIDENCE AGAINST	Paramedics find minimal blood and no visible wound.
		Death caused by severed ulnar artery extremely rare and statistically insignificant.
		Body initially found slumped against tree suggesting it had been moved and evidence tampered with. No fingerprints on knife or wristwatch.
Ingestion of pain killers secondary cause	EVIDENCE FOR	Blister pack of thirty coproxamol tablets found next to body with only one pill left.
		Silent heart condition identified in post mortem.
	EVIDENCE AGAINST	Toxicology report finds levels of coproximal less than a third of that considered fatal.
		Less than one pill found in stomach contents.

Source: *Hutton inquiry transcripts.*

Figure 2 Number of citations in news programmes of evidence for an against official verdict



Source: *National Film Archives*

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Kelly, let alone interacted with him during his final days and hours. His testimony was based in large part on that of other witnesses, namely Kelly's close family. But whilst they had spoken of him as 'withdrawn' and 'subdued', this was primarily in the context of the period leading up to his appearance before the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on 14 July 2003. Following that, Kelly's daughter and son-in-law, with whom he was staying at the time, described his demeanour repeatedly as 'normal', 'calm', 'relaxed', 'relieved', and eating and sleeping 'very well' right up to the day of his disappearance. According to his sister, Susan Pape, who spoke to Kelly by telephone two days before his death:

> In my line of work I do deal with people who may have suicidal thoughts and I ought to be able to spot those, even on a telephone conversation. But I have gone over and over in my mind the two conversations we had and he certainly did not betray to me any impression that he was anything other than tired. He certainly did not convey to me that he was feeling depressed; and absolutely nothing that would have alerted me to the fact that he might have been considering suicide.

Although Kelly's wife had described him as 'shrunk into himself' and 'heart-broken' on the day he died, she did not consider him suicidal at the time, and stressed that 'he had never seemed depressed in all of this'.

Clearly then, the coverage of evidence relating to David Kelly's state of mind before his death did not reflect the balance of evidence heard, and if anything, was inversely proportionate to it. This picture is even more acute if we consider the immediate aftermath of the report's publication and the week of headlines that followed it. During this period, evidence in favour of Kelly being suicidal was cited seven times within the sample, whilst evidence against received no mention at all. Moreover, at every turn television news reported Kelly's suicide by arterial bleeding as fact. Indeed, it was the one finding of Hutton's report that was regularly stated in all outlets without any caveat or qualification (see Table 2).

Even when the medical controversy was covered, notably in August and October 2010, the issue was framed principally as a balanced debate between experts, effectively absolving journalists of their responsibility to question or challenge the official verdict directly. This was epitomised by the opening words of a report by Lucy Manning for ITV News (on 19 August 2010):

> Some, as the Hutton inquiry found, think David Kelly killed himself but some think the evidence just isn't there, others that there was some sort of cover-up.

The forum of expert debate enabled broadcasters to draw attention to their role as impartial arbiters. ITV's *News at Ten* (also on 19 August 2010) ran a special feature in which a representative both for and against re-opening the inquest were given a platform to air their views. The introduction seemed to emphasise the broadcaster's self-appointment as referee in this continuing conflict: 'On tonight's ITV *News at Ten* we hear from both sides in that debate.' Whilst this framing resulted in a balanced presentation of for and against voices, it was a marked departure from the outspoken criticism levelled at the *Hutton report* within the 'whitewash' context.

More crucially, perhaps, the expert debate was not quite as balanced in reality as suggested in news frames. In March 2004, *Channel Four News* pitched the views of medical experts against forensic experts but all of them considered re-opening the inquest to be both necessary and appropriate. On BBC's *Newsnight* on 13 August 2010, the views of medical experts were juxtaposed predominantly with those of other journalists but even here, protagonists on both sides of the debate were often unanimous in calling for an inquest.

One such supporter of an inquest was official pathologist Nicholas Hunt. He was by any measure the only medical expert in support of the official verdict who appeared in the media with any degree of prominence. This is not to say that there have not been other medical experts who have accepted the official explanation of death, either throughout the period since the

BBC management at fault	Gilligan allegation inaccurate	Cause of death suicide from incised wounds
4	2	17

Source: *National Film Archives and BBC Online*

Table 2: Number of times key Hutton findings reported without caveat or qualification, 28-30 January 2004

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Hutton report or at various points in time. But it does suggest that the debate was not as evenly balanced as it was framed in television news.

Furthermore, much of the controversy is, in fact, based on forensic and procedural anomalies over and above the uncertain medical evidence. The reduction of the controversy to an expert debate therefore constitutes a significant aspect of containment in itself. Indeed, the very term 'medical controversy' embraced by television news, conceals the broader concerns of campaigners over an official cover-up.[5]

In subtle and significant ways, even apparent journalist neutrality in the midst of this 'debate' was at times abandoned in favour of giving credence to the original verdict. The manner in which reports concluded was often particularly suggestive. In a way reminiscent of the immediate post-inquiry coverage, Liz McKean closed her *Newsnight* report on 13 August 2010 with a suggestion of what might have driven Dr Kelly to suicide:

> There can be no doubt about the calamitous effect on David Kelly himself – a man used to the shadows who found himself in the unblinking public gaze.

Whilst the initial coverage in August 2010 was framed as a debate between experts, subsequent coverage, notably in October, was overwhelmingly given over to the release of the post mortem report and its apparent 'debunking' effect. This followed a statement in August released by Dr Hunt, re-emphasising that the death was a 'text book' case of suicide (Swinford 2010). Both the statement and subsequent post mortem were released in response to a letter by campaigners published in *The Times* on 13 August 2010 which had sparked the initial renewed coverage (*Times* 2010). But far from debunking the medical controversy, both of these responses raised further as yet unanswered questions. Specifically,

1. How can Dr Hunt's reference to blood clots found in the sleeve of Kelly's jacket be reconciled with contradictory testimony by paramedics that Kelly was found with his jacket sleeve rolled up?
2. Why are there certain key medical and investigation reports, as well as witness statements, that remain classified for 30 or 70 years?

Whilst the bulk of coverage in August and October 2010 revolved around the official responses, none of it addressed the questions above, beyond inclusion of campaigner views in reports, often pre-empted by caveats such as this introduction by a *Channel Four News* anchor on 22 October 2010:

> The full post mortem was published in an attempt to end the speculation about how [Kelly] died. But the conspiracy theories persist.

As well as implicitly dismissing the views of alternative sources, broadcasters also exaggerated the explanatory power of the post mortem, and presented its release as the end of secrecy itself in relation to Kelly's death. Reports were typically introduced by anchors not with specific reference to the post mortem document, but simply to 'previously secret evidence' that had now been released. This declassification frame was epitomised by Simon Israel in a report for the *Channel Four News* on 22 October 2010 in which he declared: 'Today that secrecy was lifted.' Yet no mention was made of the approximately 900 police documents submitted to Hutton that remain outside of the public domain, along with the full toxicology and forensic biology reports.

The basis of containment

The analysis above suggests that the medical controversy's failure to gain news coverage, particularly in the crucial post-report phase, was not simply the result of story selection randomness. Nor can it be dismissed as a reflection of the controversy's relative news value (compared to the 'whitewash frame'). Rather, it was at least partly attributable to a systematic tendency of journalists to overlook evidence contrary to the official verdict. The question remains why and how this neglect occurred. It was certainly not attributable to access restrictions or resource considerations. Throughout the hearings, all news outlets within the sample had dedicated reporters in attendance, with unfettered access to the testimonies and evidence presented. What's more, the Hutton inquiry was in one way unprecedented in its openness – full transcripts of the hearings were published online as they progressed. Much of the contradictory evidence heard in relation to Kelly's death was, therefore, easily accessible to all journalists, regardless of whether or not they attended the hearing.

Nor can the neglect be attributed to a lack of voices questioning the official verdict. The inquest campaign is led by senior medical and legal experts, backed by a former front bench

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MP (who became a senior government minister in 2010) and represented by a leading human rights law firm.[6] Their distinction from 'wacky conspiracy theorists' was highlighted in a report on *Channel Four News* on 13 March 2004. But it did not prove sufficient to sustain coverage even when new information surfaced.

In one interview response, Norman Baker highlighted the sheer lack of investigative impulse shown by the vast majority of professional journalists:

> If the entirety of Fleet Street has to wait until I submit a Freedom of Information request to demonstrate that there were no fingerprints on the knife allegedly used by David Kelly to kill himself, that's a collective failure of Fleet Street not to find that out. Why is it left to one MP to find that out? That's just one example.

The question we are left with is why did journalists not consider the medical or cover-up controversy a story worth covering in depth? One explanation is adherence to a general consensus of what is acceptable copy for the daily news agenda, a so-called 'safe zone' of news. Criteria for inclusion within such a zone, if it exists, certainly do not preclude active and vociferous questioning of the government or indeed any notion of establishment elites. Journalistic outrage expressed through the whitewash framing of the *Hutton report* is one example. However, we can in this case at least point to a series of blind spots that gave rise to perceptions of the story as being too 'unrealistic' for the serious news agenda.

A crucial question concerns which *kind* of evidence was assumed to be lacking and why? For many respondents, belief that Dr Kelly committed suicide appeared to be based on a rejection of the directly opposing conclusion that he was murdered. Much of this reasoning was based on the lack of apparent motive for murder, as investigative journalist Paul Lashmar explained:

> I just don't see any evidence in the David Kelly thing that convinces me that someone decided to bump him off because it all came out anyway – well most of it. What did it achieve?

This appeal to the lack of evidence for murder is perhaps an understandable response by those whose 'gut instinct' was to favour the official verdict. But, in effect, this put journalists on no firmer ground than those who consent to murder theories. Both groups based their beliefs in one possible outcome at least partly on the lack of evidence supporting the other. This reflected a common misconception that the controversy surrounding Kelly's death revolved purely around a rejection of any *possibility* of suicide. There are certainly many who believe that Dr Kelly was murdered and even the most moderate of campaigners maintain that Kelly was highly unlikely to have died in the manner described by Hutton. But the legal campaign for an inquest rested on concern about the *process* which led to the conclusion of suicide. This somewhat moderate position certainly does not make great news copy as Dr Michael Powers QC, a leading voice for the campaign, intimated:

> From what I've seen the evidence of murder is really no better than the evidence of suicide. It may put me in a rather grey, less interesting and rather boring middle ground. But simply because you can't prove suicide doesn't mean to say that you can prove murder. They've both got to be proved positively and you may not be able to prove either positively.

Although a belief in cover-up does not require subscription to any theory of intention, it does invite consideration of alternative *possibilities*. In this case, the notion of cover-up pointed to the potential that Kelly might have been assassinated by an agent of the state, or that elements of the state may have been in some way complicit in his murder. Such a notion is clearly at odds with a common assumption that state-sponsored acts of criminality or acts of terror do not exist, at least not on home soil. On occasion, the implication of cover-up was exaggerated so as to invoke an obvious aura of absurdity. According to Paul Lashmar:

> I don't think there are MI5 or MI6 assassins wondering around Britain bumping off people who don't agree with the state, which is the sort of implication.

This seemed to reflect an instinctive presumptive reflex amongst journalists against the counterfactual implications of cover-up, which made the official verdict simply more plausible. Such a reflex was articulated broadly by Robin Ramsay, editor of the online magazine, *Lobster*, and author specialising in the security state:

> Inside all our heads and inside the heads of editors is a notion of how the world works

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> and if you pitch at them something which says your understanding of how the world works is false or inadequate they will reject it. In a way this is merely describing how a kind of intellectual hegemony works. It is the conventional view amongst political journalists in this society and political editors in TV stations and newspapers that the world is dominated by cock-ups and not by conspiracies. That's their fundamental view. Their second fundamental view is the rest of the world's secret states may murder and torture but ours doesn't. These are almost bed-rock beliefs.

Perhaps the most significant force of containment in this context is the campaign's susceptibility to the label of 'conspiracy theory'. This taboo, which operates within journalist and academic circles alike, has some sound basis. It discriminates against conjecture often associated with tabloid sensationalism or internet subcultures that respond to official secrecy with unfounded and empirically baseless reasoning. It has also provided the foundation for racist and extremist ideology upon which acts of terror, genocide and ethnic cleansing have been predicated.

This rightly cautionary approach, however, has led to an outright rejection of the idea that particular groups of powerful people might make 'a concerted effort to keep an illegal or unethical act or situation from being made public'.[7] The problem amounts to an 'intellectual resistance' with the result that 'an entire dimension of political history and contemporary politics has been consistently neglected' (Bale 1995). This research uncovered a similar resistance amongst some respondents who simply dismissed any notion of cover-up with characteristic derision, employing words like 'nonsense', 'insanity' or 'laughable'. Others expressed a reluctance to engage with evidence of cover-up because it appeared to be based on anomalies which can be manipulated to fit any theory.

For those that did endorse the notion of cover-up in this case, it tended to be framed as a manifestation of 'secrecy for secrecy's sake'; a culture of information control so pervasive as to be employed even when it was not necessary. According to ITN's chief correspondent Alex Thomson, the sheer obviousness of the state's behaviour made the idea that it was anything other than bureaucratic 'neurosis' somewhat incredulous:

> If there had been a cover-up it is hard to imagine a state behaving in a more obvious way of sending the signal that there had been a cover-up...Does the obsessive secrecy and general kind of official neurosis exhibited by the Ministry of Justice and many other officials in this case tell us anything about the potential for conspiracy? I think probably not. Does it tell us that we're a pretty sick state when it comes to secrecy for secrecy's sake? Absolutely… when I asked the Ministry of Justice to simply answer the question why it has taken nearly a year to get the papers put in the public domain, it took five press officers and nine weeks and I still didn't get an answer.

Part of the problem is perhaps a tendency to view the notion of conspiracy in totalising terms and overlook the degree to which information is controlled *within* the state. In its common association with the term conspiracy, a cover-up is often assumed to involve the knowledge and co-operation of a large number of state actors, sometimes extending to journalists themselves. Norman Baker's own estimation was that those with first-hand knowledge of all information pertaining to Kelly's death are probably 'very, very few in number'.

Whilst the perceptual blind spots identified above clearly played a central role in keeping the controversy out of the news spotlight, we cannot discount the possibility that they were aided by instrumental factors – namely official source strategies. Part of the problem is an apparent imbalance in relations between journalists and security state sources. It is manifest in an instinctive deference that one journalist (who wished to remain anonymous) alluded to in reflecting on his own experiences:

> You have to police yourself very carefully when you do come into contact with them. There is a bit of a thrill – we've all been brought up on James Bond. We were taken in to see 'C' at MI6 and you have lunch and you chat away and you're in the heart of this building that nobody goes into and it's absolutely thrilling and fascinating.

Overly friendly relations between journalists and security state sources manifest not only in an unchallenged platform for 'approved' stories, but also in a mechanism by which competing stories can be silenced or modified. According to Robin Ramsay:

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> When I was working at Channel Four news on the Colin Wallace story [involving allegations of state corruption by a former army information officer during the 1970s], there were several attempts by journalists on the ITN staff to dis-inform the investigation that we were doing because their friends, their allies in the secret state whispered in their ears and said: 'These chaps are off on the wrong lines why don't you steer them towards X.'

Some respondents, including Norman Baker, went as far as to suggest that some of these contacts were not just friendly but paid employees of the security services: 'If I had to guess I'd say there's probably someone in every paper and there's probably a retainer paid but that's my speculation.' What seems certain is that journalist-security state links are entrenched and historically evolved and raise profound questions for their role in holding institutions of authority to account (Keeble 2000). It was not after all the Prime Minister or, indeed, the government that were at the centre of the controversy, but the security state – by its very faceless nature a much more difficult entity to challenge and scrutinise.

Whether or not secret forces worked to keep the controversy off the news agenda is unclear. But in any case, it was unlikely to have been as significant as another key aspect of official leverage: bureaucratic delay. One of the most powerful tools at the disposal of official sources is the timing of announcements. In this case, a succession of bureaucratic delays in response to submissions by campaigners has had two significant consequences. First, it has limited the amount of evidence available in respect of Dr Kelly's death. As Dr Margaret Bloom, a specialist in coroner's law, observed:

> I think that we might have been in a very different position had an inquest been held timely back when further investigations could have been made with a much closer time juxtaposition.

Second, the lapse of time has fostered a degree of media exhaustion. In the words of acclaimed investigative reporter Phillip Knightley: 'The whole edge goes off it, the whole urgency disappears and vanishes into a bureaucratic entanglement that the story never gets out of.' Such sentiments endorse the view that the 'whitewash frame', in its saturation of media headlines, had simply exhausted coverage of the *Hutton report* per se. In this sense, the dynamics of the news cycle demanded not so much new evidence, as a new topic altogether. By the time the medical controversy began to resurface in television news during 2010, according to one senior BBC news editor, 'there was an attitude of "well, you know, we've done that and the story is over."'

Conclusion

Analysis of content showed a sustained lack of television news attention to the controversy surrounding Kelly's death, both in terms of story selection and framing. This consisted in an active endorsement of evidence in support of the official verdict (and to the neglect of the contrary); a relatively extreme adoption of impartiality codes that distorted and relegated the controversy to an 'expert debate'; persistent favouring of official responses over new evidence produced by campaigners; and the failure to draw attention to existing evidence that continues to be withheld, and to the various anomalies that point to an official cover-up. Thus, even when the controversy briefly surfaced in television news, journalists on the whole paid deference to official dicta. This was particularly noticeable in the introductions and conclusions to reports where framing was at its most explicit.

The associated advantages of 'primary definition' (Hall 1978) were manifest in an uncharacteristic benefit of doubt afforded to official sources both in accepting the verdict of suicide, and in rejecting a notion of cover-up. It reflected a common underlying faith not in politicians or the powerful as such, but in the institutions and procedures that legitimate their power, including the media itself. The obvious exception to this was the 'whitewash frame' which poured scorn on the *Hutton report* and heralded an unprecedented media critique of the inquiry process. But this critique was largely implicit, and unrelated to the more obvious failings of due process that were evident in the way Hutton reached his verdict of suicide. And in one important sense, the 'whitewash frame' served as a spectacle of accountability in positioning journalists as taking up the reins of accountability.

This type of spectacle is not captured by radical functionalist models of media performance. This is partly because the controversy featured unrivalled elements of elite dissent not accounted for in the 'propaganda model' (Herman and Chomsky 2002), according to which splits in elite

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ranks are only marginal and limited to questions over 'tactics' rather than 'goals'. Other accounts, known collectively as 'indexing' theory, allow for a broader range of elite responses but nevertheless hold that contestability in the media is 'tied' to elite interests (Livingston and Bennett 2003; Hallin 1986). In the case here, the extent of elite dissent suggests that indexing models would have predicted *greater* attention to the controversy than that which actually surfaced.

In the event, marginalisation might well have been aided by various official source strategies, including bureaucratic delay, disinformation and suppression. But above all, it was the product of cultural and intellectual blind spots which left the commonly held impression that the medical controversy was both 'unrealistic' in its implications, and lacked sufficient evidential basis. The result has been a collective 'don't go there' attitude which, although not rooted in or limited to journalism, presents question marks over journalism's capacity to stand as a last line of public interest defence. If there is a failure at the procedural level of justice we depend on journalists to uncover that failure, bring it to light, and either directly or indirectly provide the conditions for redress.

This is not to suggest that either procedural or journalistic failure is beyond repair or that the controversy has been irrevocably marginalised. The fact that the story continues to recur in the mainstream media, however fleeting and sporadic, is an indication of its endurance and the potential for retrospective accountability. In the summer of 2011 however, the Attorney General rejected a final legal submission by campaigners to re-open the inquest into Kelly's death. At the time of writing, it is unclear as to whether the decision will be challenged by judicial review.

Notes

[1] A cursory examination suggests a similar failure across the national press with the exception of the *Daily Mail* and the *Mail on Sunday* which has regularly supported the campaign for a new inquest and featured articles detailing alleged corruption in the investigation and inquiry.

[2] Dr David Kelly, AttorneyGeneral.gov.uk. Available online at http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.uk/Publications/Documents/Annex%20TVP%206.pdf, accessed on 31 August 2011

[3] Disclosure log item: Investigation into the death of Dr David Kelly, 13 May 2011, ThamesValley.police.uk. Available online at http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/aboutus/aboutus-depts/aboutus-depts-infman/aboutus-depts-foi/aboutus-depts-foi-disclosure-log/aboutus-depts-foi-disclosure-log-investigate/aboutus-depts-foi-disclosure-log-item.htm?id=175657, accessed 31 August 2011

[4] Disclosure log item: Investigation into the death of Dr David Kelly, 8 March 2011, ThamesValley.police.uk. Available online at http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/aboutus/aboutus-depts/aboutus-depts-infman/aboutus-depts-foi/aboutus-depts-foi-disclosure-log/aboutus-depts-foi-disclosure-log-investigate/aboutus-depts-foi-disclosure-log-item.htm?id=168251, accessed on 31 August 2011.

[5] With this caveat in mind, and for the sake of clarity and consistency, I continue to employ this term to denote the broader controversy over the official verdict

[6] See http://www.leighday.co.uk/news/news-archive-2010/leigh-day-co-partner-invited-to-join-foreign, accessed on 21 March 2011

[7] Definition of cover-up from Merriam-Webster.com. Available online at http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary-tb/cover-up, accessed on 15 March 2011

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Peter Simmons

Competent, dependable and respectful: Football refereeing as a model for communicating fairness

Attitude to the fairness of decisions is often influenced by attitude to the decision maker. Football referees communicate hundreds of decisions in each game and perceptions of fairness are difficult to achieve. This study examines the qualities of football referees that influence perception of fairness, and the way those qualities are communicated. It reports that players esteem competence, dependability and respectfulness as the model qualities of a 'fair' referee. Players use an array of communicative heuristics to discern the fairness of referees. The accordance of these findings with previous justice studies suggests the model can be used to train professionals in other contexts where decisions and judgements are communicated.

Key words: fairness; justice; communication; heuristics; football; refereeing

Introduction

Sportspeople emphasise the need for referees to make accurate decisions and to be consistent in their adjudications. It is no coincidence that 'accuracy' and 'consistency' are two of the 'rules' that Leventhal (1980) proffered for procedural fairness. But perceptions of accuracy and consistency are difficult to achieve for referees. Incidents requiring their adjudication are often ambiguous and occur more frequently than in other decision-making roles (Mellick et al 2005). Their job is often made harder by 'unrestrained negative feedback' from spectators, players and coaches (Wolfson and Neave 2007: 232). So how do players perceive fairness in referees and their decisions? Can referees manage their communication in ways that influence perception of consistency and accuracy?

When people feel they are not being treated fairly by an authority, there is a tendency for them to reject the authority and its decisions. Scholars have stressed wide-ranging benefits from understanding the way people form perceptions of fairness in a range of professional contexts including policing (Anderson and Giles 2005), sport refereeing (Simmons 2010), management (Patient and Skarlicki 2010) and teaching (Gordon and Fay 2010). In each of these professions some decision-makers experience greater cooperation because of personal qualities and communication skills that enhance perception of fairness (Patient and Skarlicki op cit; Simmons op cit). This paper is concerned with understanding decision-maker qualities which contribute to perception of fairness and with the displays that communicate those qualities to people affected by their decisions. Theory and findings from previous organisational justice studies are used to guide understanding of the communication that occurs between football (soccer) referees and players. The focus of organisational justice literature has been on what people perceive to be fair, rather than asserting what is or is not fair.

Fairness heuristic theory is used to explain the way referees' communicative displays mitigate uncertainty in player perceptions of the fairness of the referee and their decisions (Lind and Van den Bos 2002). This theory says that people affected by decisions use authority figure displays of fairness (heuristics) as mental short cuts to determine whether a decision-making authority is fair and legitimate, and consequently whether to comply with their decisions (Conlon, Meyer and Nowakowski 2005).

A review of the largely quantitative field of organisational justice reported that understanding of justice would improve with more qualitative studies (Fortin 2008). In this study focus groups with teams of footballers revealed that players perceive fairness in referees as a composite of the qualities of competence, dependability and respectfulness. The qualitative method elucidates the way players associate a range of discernible communicative displays with the presence or absence of these qualities. The associations players make generally accord with fairness theories, and findings from previous fairness studies in other contexts. The model is likely to have utility in other professional contexts involving the communication of decisions and judgements.

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Football referee communication

Referees believe that communication is central to effective refereeing. In Australia's largest online football referee chat room one referee challenged others to referee a game with whistle, signals and cards alone – without talking – and see how long it took for the game to 'explode'. The thrust of the ensuing discussion was that talking to players is so important that it would be highly irresponsible to accept the challenge. On another thread, referees volunteer advice on tactics for effectively presenting yellow cards (sanction displays) to players (Ausref 2007).

There is little research on which to base training in referee communication and interpersonal skills (Mascarenhas, Collins and Mortimer 2005; Simmons op cit; Mellick et al op cit), but referees' belief that their communication has an important influence on player behaviour is consistent with the small amount of research available on the topic. One study reported that rugby league referees were motivated to manage 'their appearance on and off the field .. to project the image of a competent, confident and decisive official' (Thatcher 2005: 33). Another found that elite level football referees use an extensive repertoire of verbal and non-verbal techniques to 'sell decisions' and 'minimise disruption to the game' (Simmons 2006: 4). Mellick et al highlighted three characteristics in the skilful communication of decisions; 'to engage the offender's attention and instigate a decision interaction episode; to project confidence in the decision made; and finally to promote perception of the decision as fair and just' (op cit: 42). To date there has been just one empirical study that explicitly examined the perception of fairness in referee decisions. That study (Simmons 2010) is discussed in the next section.

Perception and communication of fairness

Most justice researchers agree that perception of fairness is influenced by a combination of three justice dimensions: distributive fairness (perceived equity in allocation of resources and outcomes), procedural fairness (the processes used to make decisions) and interactional fairness (politeness and respectfulness of treatment by authorities making decisions). Some aspects of procedure and interaction are of particular interest to communicators because they influence perception of fairness independently of the decision or outcome itself (Simmons 2010). Leventhal (op cit) said that people form 'cognitive maps' that help them evaluate the fairness of procedures preceding decisions (35) and proffered six rules for the fairness of procedures: consistency, bias, accuracy, correctability, group representation and ethical standards. This paper focuses on the first three:

- consistency – procedures need to be implemented consistently, over time and with different people;
- bias – decision makers should be without self-interest, and unaffected by factors or considerations that lead to favouritism;
- accuracy – procedures need to be based on valid and relevant information, decision-makers need to be informed and to minimise error (adapted from Jordan, Gillentine, and Hunt 2004; Colquitt, Greenberg, and Zapata-Phelan 2005; Leventhal op cit).

The role of judges or sports referees is to interpret and follow fair procedures (Leventhal op cit). Players have very high expectations of fairness in referees (Pawlenka 2005), they want rules and penalties applied consistently without bias, and accuracy is very important. When referees make mistakes, players can perceive injustice and partiality (Faccenda et al 2009). But everyone sees each decision from a different vantage point in football, and consistency, impartiality and accuracy are open to interpretation. So how do players perceive fairness? In some sections of his seminal 1980 work Leventhal indicated the importance of having the right person implement procedures, but his work generally focused on describing and explaining rules for fairness. More recent developments in fairness theory suggest that having the right person implement procedures is indeed very important to mitigate uncertainty about fairness. Attitudes to decisions are largely influenced by attitudes to the fairness of the decision-maker.

In an experimental scenario study both the tone and content of referee communication influenced player perceptions of fairness, independently of the actual decision (Simmons op cit). When a referee calmly communicated a negative decision (against the player's team) player ratings of the fairness of the referee were significantly increased, compared to when the referee communicated the same decision angrily. When a referee provided a short explanation for a negative decision, ratings of the fairness of the referee and the correctness of the decision were both significantly increased, compared to not giving an explanation. One way of explaining these findings is the 'substitutability'

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effect, the use of communication heuristics to mitigate uncertainty about decision-makers and their decisions.

> The findings support Lind and Van den Bos' (2002) heuristic notion of 'substitutability' and thus have important implications for referees and others responsible for communicating decisions. Footballers appear to use certainty about procedure and interactional style (communicative behaviours) to mitigate uncertainty about fairness and correctness in decisions (Simmons 2010: 90).

The main implication here is that perception of the fairness of decisions is influenced by behaviours and processes the decision communicator can control.

There is increasing evidence that decision-makers can be trained to communicate sensitively and influence perception of fairness. Managers who received an 'empathic induction' – that focused their feelings on the recipients of bad news – displayed improved fairness in their communication (Patient and Skarlicki 2010: 572). The researchers suggest organisations can choose communicators who are able to empathise when bad news needs to be delivered, and they can encourage managers who need to deliver bad news to try to identify with recipients (ibid). Simmons (2010) said referees would benefit from understanding the way players form perceptions of fairness and Skarlicki and Latham (2005: 506) say training that aims to increase perceptions of fairness in organisations should be designed to increase leaders' 'understanding of how perceptions are formed'.

Research questions

The study borrows Saul's (2001) notion of the 'speculative atom' comprising qualities and Tyler and Blader's (2003) assertion that perceptions of fairness are central to people's evaluation of situations. This study assumes that the qualities players prefer in referees approximate 'fair'. The assumption is supported by scholarly (Pawlenka 2005; Mellick et al 2005; Simmons 2010) and popular assertions concerning the centrality of fairness to good refereeing. 'Fair' is the 'speculative atom' in which 'each quality is a both a proton and a neutron' (Saul 2001: 13).

The study sought to identify the 'qualities' of a fair referee, and communicative displays of these qualities. 'Communicative displays' are verbal and non-verbal behaviours, policy, and process displays that are interpreted by at least one other person (Pace and Faules 1994). The research questions were:

RQ1. What qualities do players prefer in a referee?

RQ2. What communicative displays influence players' perception of these qualities in a referee?

Method and analysis

A qualitative interview method was selected to listen to players' perspectives on their interactions with referees, and develop understanding through analysis of their motives, thoughts and feelings (Lindlof and Taylor 2002). The initial analysis used some grounded style techniques (Daymon and Holloway 2011). Open coding yielded units of data with meaning (Lindlof and Taylor op cit), which were then organised into sub-categories and categories (Strauss and Corbin 1998) and themes.

The first stage yielded a table of referee 'qualities, dimensionalised and presented in separate cells (Table 1). But in the minds of the players interviewed, and on the football field in interactions with referees, the qualities and the displays that players attend to are neither tabulated nor separated. They are dynamic and interactive.

The second stage of analysis borrows from the thematic narrative analysis technique used by Williams (1984, in Riessman 2008) with interviews about illness. Unlike the grounded-style coding that fractured the data into categories in the first stage (Riessman op cit), the second stage reports and interprets whole sections of the 'stories' (Altrichter and Holly 2005: 29) provided by the players (Riessman op cit).

The second stage of the analysis intertwines players' stories from the interviews and justice theory to explain the way properties and dimensions that emerged from the first stage of the analysis are displayed by referees. Much is known about the way decision-makers influence perceptions of fairness in other contexts, especially in organisations. The narrative situates the discussion of each of the emergent desired referee qualities – competence, dependability and respectfulness – within contemporary understandings of the way people perceive fairness. Our understanding of the associations that players make between communicative dis-

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plays and referees' qualities are enriched and validated by 'reading' fairness into the narrative.

Focus groups and sample

Focus groups were preferred for this study because of the 'group effect', the potential for members to be stimulated and challenged by each others' accounts and experiences, and to obtain insights that might otherwise not be accessible (Lindlof and Taylor op cit). Sample selection was based in part on availability of teams. Three team interviews were held with a total of 40 males who play at high levels of the sport. One was a fully professional team in the National A-League. The others (one metropolitan and one regional) were 17 and 18-year-olds from the Super Youth league and Development Leagues in New South Wales, Australia.

Interviews lasted about an hour and avoided imposing preconceived ideas as far as possible (Lindlof and Taylor op cit). Players were encouraged to raise what was important to them in words of their choosing. The words 'communication' and 'fair' were avoided until they were raised by players. Early stages of the interviews used general, open-ended questions about soccer and refereeing ('Tell me about a time when you thought "yes, that was good refereeing"'). Standardised open-ended questions that related to preconceived themes ('Do you think there are better and worse ways to give a card?') (Amis 2005) were introduced only if preconceived themes had not earlier been raised spontaneously by players. Focus group recordings were transcribed within two days of interviews.

Findings

RQ1. What qualities do players prefer in a referee?

There are many qualities that players expect of referee. Three main qualities emerged from the data – competent, dependable and respectful. A referee is expected to be 'competent' in terms of physicality, mentality, and confidence. 'Dependable' referees react well to the many pressures they face in a game, and provide a safe and predictable environment for play. Players believe football is mostly for players, and that referees should respect players by being accountable, discreet and politely responsive. 'Respectful' refers to the referee's attitudes to players, and preferred interaction styles.

Table 1 shows the preferred qualities and their properties and dimensions separated in cells. The positive dimensions are the players' ideal, and enhance perception of fairness. The negative dimensions detract from perception of fairness.

Table 1. The fair referee – The qualities players prefer in a referee

Quality	Property	Dimensions Positive	Negative
1. Competent	Physicality	Athletic	Unfit
		Aware	Oblivious
	Mentality	Experienced	Inexperienced
		Intelligent	Unintelligent
		Decisive	Indecisive
	Confidence	Assured	Insecure
		Assertive	Diffident
2. Dependable	Consistency	Reliable	Unpredictable
		Professional	Uncaring
	Resilience	Resolute	Yielding
		Courageous	Fearful
3. Respectful	Accountability	Answerable	Unanswerable
		Discreet	Attention-seeking
		Firm	Punitive
	Personality	Engaged	Disinterested
		Affable	Aggressive

The next section explains the communication of competence, dependability and respectfulness, and describes the way some referee displays influence more than one quality.

RQ2. What communicative displays influence players' perception of these qualities in a referee?

Players have strong views about the need be competent (to enact good decisions), dependable (consistent in rule administration and not easily influenced), and respectful towards players. These qualities are consistent with procedural and interactional fairness, but they are abstract, and perception of these qualities is influenced by more concrete communicative

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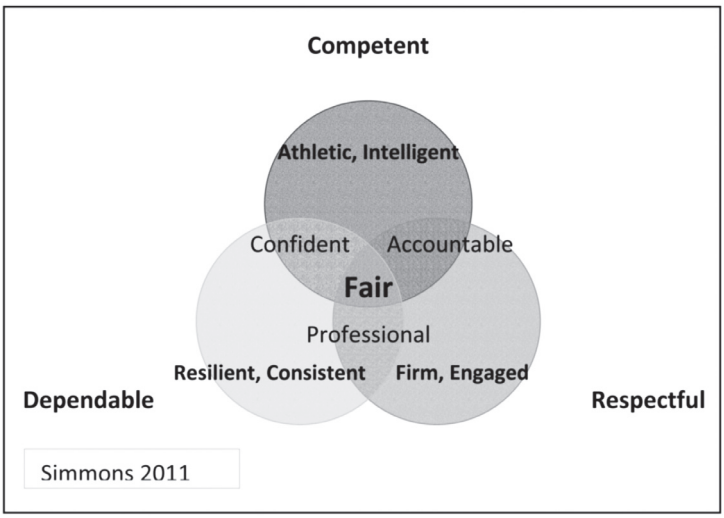
Diagram 1.
Integrated model of players' preferred qualities in a referee



displays players associate with the qualities. Diagram 1 shows a model that integrates the qualities of a fair referee.

Communicating competence

Leventhal's accuracy rule says that fair process requires decisions to be based on 'as much good information and informed opinion as possible', and that there should be safeguards 'that deter people from violating fair procedure' (op cit: 41). Players repeatedly expressed preferences that can be interpreted as a desire for referees to be competent to gather accurate information for decisions. Intervewees said referees need to be fit to keep up with play, in order to be close to incidents when they occur on the field. They stressed the importance of athletic appearance and mobility on the field, and notice displays suggesting the referee might be unable to keep up with play, such as overweight, frail stature, or the wrong age (too young or too old). Hearing aids and glasses display compromised awareness that diminish ability to obtain accurate information.

Players believe intelligence is required to make good judgements quickly, justify decisions, and avoid being fooled by cheats. Referees display intelligence mostly through the quality of their voice and articulation, and the speed of their answers and decisions.

> I think like some of the guys were saying [about better referees].. You ask questions and they've quickly got answers. You know what I mean. They're quick, they've got quick minds.

Players in each group said they admire referees who penalise cheating. Detection and discipline of 'diving' (pretending to have been fouled) displays acuity required to avoid being deceived:

> ...it all comes with the experience of the ref…the more experienced the ref, the more times they've seen diving and the easier it is for them to pick it...
>
> They just turn and drop to their knees and the refs give it to them
>
> If they were ex-players it would be a lot different… they'd sit there and the ref would say 'get up…play'.

The perception of experience is highly esteemed. Players perceive that playing experience gives referees empathy and understanding that results in sympathetic judgements. Refereeing experience leads to better decisions. But players do not normally know a referee's experience, and they infer experience from various displays such as a calmer style, explaining decisions (with the caveat that the explanations make sense), and resilience to pressure. Players said experienced referees use interpersonal strategies that minimise disruptions to the game, such as admonishing players when the ball goes out of play.

> [Good referees] let the game continue and talk to players as the game's going on. You know, they're talking all the time. But I think for a ref that comes with experience... because you will never see a young guy doing that .. With the more experienced guys and the older guys .. the game will continue on and they're talking to people.

Displays of inexperience include youthful appearance, getting in the way of the game (referee does not anticipate play), panic, anger and 'trying to stamp their authority' on the game by issuing lots of sanctions.

Players said they want referees to assert themselves confidently to deal effectively with foul and dangerous play. Displays of confidence include a calm manner, the ability to talk and explain in a 'normal' voice to players, and a sense of proportion in decisions and hand signals, even under pressure. Players said a preference for warning players before penalising displays confidence, but penalising to 'stamp

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authority' displays a lack of confidence or maturity. Shouting, waving arms, and brandishing cards angrily show low confidence. Other indicators of low confidence are panic, taking player criticism personally, avoiding difficult decisions and ignoring disrespect from players.

Communicating dependability

Perceptions of fairness are diminished when there are deviations from expected procedure (Van den Bos, Vermunt and Wilke 1996). Leventhal (op cit) said that fair procedures are consistent and avoid favouritism. Footballers expect consistency in referee decisions for both teams, from game to game, and from referee to referee. Deviation from expectations, for any reason, can cause players to doubt the dependability of the referee. This section explains communicative displays that influence the perception that the referee is the sort of person players can depend on to be consistent, impartial, committed to the rules, and resilient to pressure on their decisions.

Players are very sensitive to any deviation from equal treatment. For example, referees who use first names for one team and not the other, or otherwise appear more familiar (especially 'home referees'), can create uncertainty about their dependability. Players said referees sometimes 'pick on certain players'. The deviation from equal treatment might be justified in the referee's mind (perhaps preventing illegal or dangerous play), but players can view this deviation as less than complete commitment to treating players equally.

One concrete display of inconsistency raises questions about consistency more generally. When referees make repeated warnings to players, but don't carry them out, players perceive an inconsistency between words and actions. Referees should be perceived to be wholly committed to the rules. Sometimes referees award a penalty for one team, and are subsequently perceived to make a decision that 'squares the ledger'. Such perceptions cause players to doubt the referee's complete commitment to judging each decision according to the rules. Players esteem a 'professional' approach to refereeing that includes a commitment to propriety, attention to detail, and discreet efficiency. Neat attire and grooming display pride in refereeing, while old boots and poor grooming show lack of care. One player asked:

> If he doesn't care what he looks like, why would he care about getting decisions right?

Clear voice and articulation were also associated with the referee's professionalism.

> …when he speaks to your team before the game.. if he's slow and doesn't know what he's saying .. so he's going to be a pretty casual ref .. but if the guy's like real professional spoken and shit [laughter] .. you just know that he's going to be professional.

Players want referees to make their own decisions, stand firm and be resilient when subjected to influence from players or other pressures. Explaining decisions suggests the decision is the referee's own, not one prompted by the players or the crowd.

> If he's got an answer for it you know it's all about him .. You know it's what he wants.

Interviewees said 'changing the decision' or 'taking the whistle out of his mouth before he blows' can suggest the referee is yielding to pressures from players and spectators.

Players admire referees with the courage to make decisions they know will meet an angry response from players and spectators. Younger players suggested that referees need courage to confront abusive coaches, parents and spectators, and that calm manner in the face of anger displays courage.

> Like when a ref goes over to the coaches on the sideline and says to get out or he's not going to take any more from him .. It ruins the game if the parents and coaches start yelling and stuff…It starts to become about them…The boys can't enjoy the game.

Players said that unwillingness to confront difficult situations and ignoring abuse from players displays lack of courage.

Communicating respectfulness

Interactional justice refers to the effects of interpersonal treatment on perceptions of fairness (Colquitt, Greenberg, and Zapata-Phelan op cit). Bies and Moag (1986) posited truthfulness, justification, respect and propriety as dimensions of fairness in interpersonal treatment. Since the 1980s there have been numerous studies showing that interpersonal treatment mediates behavioural and attitudinal reactions to negative decisions and outcomes (Bies 2005; Colquitt, Greenberg, and Zapata-Phelan op cit). Perceptions of fairness are positively influenced by respectful interpersonal treatment (Buttner 2004; Tepper et al 1998) including positive

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demeanour and explanations (Cole 2004) and attentive and relaxed style (Sitter 2003). Bobocel and Zdanjuk (2005) report that there are 'strong normative expectations' for organisational leaders to 'explain controversial actions' (470).

Respectfulness refers to referees' attitudes to players and preferred interaction styles. Interviewees stressed that games are played for players (and spectators in the case of professionals), and that referees should respect players by being accountable, discreet and polite.

> There should be respect both ways...Don't demand respect…A lot of refs give an early yellow card or even red card for something stupid or soft…And that's often them showing that they've got more power over you…I reckon they should be just a normal person…talk to you normally... explain things to you...have respect for you so that you show it back to them.

Players dislike referees unnecessarily drawing attention to themselves through excessive stoppages or even brightly coloured uniforms.

> You've got so much going on, so much information coming in from everywhere, on the field, off the field or from the coaches .. the last thing you want to worry about is the ref.

Displays of respect for players include a free flowing game, clear and specific justifications for decisions, answers to player questions and apologies for bad mistakes. Players frequently reported getting angry or frustrated when referees ignore or dismiss them, and that younger referees were often less likely to answer than older referees.

> The younger a ref is .. they tend to have more attitude than a more senior ref .. You might go 'Oh what's that ref?' and a young ref's says 'Shut up and get on with the game'…But if you've got a senior ref he'll explain things to you more.

Players said good referees exercise discretion that respects players. They resist heavy sanctions, and find alternatives to stopping play, such as warning players during ordinary stoppages. Waving and calling out 'play on' shows that the referee has seen the incident (acuity), but prefers the game to flow (respect for the game and players).

Players consistently expressed a preference for referees to be firm, not punitive. Players said that gestures should be proportional to the seriousness of the foul. Punitive approaches display lack of accountability to players, frustrate individuals and teams, and are likely to inflame. Punitive referee displays include anger, frequent stopping and sanctions, heavy penalties for actions that do no harm (such as players swearing at themselves), and sharp and confrontational gestures such as waving arms and 'shoving cards at players' faces'.

> If someone did that to you in the street it's going to end up in a fight…it's going to make you angry.

Many players felt that use of aggression to assert control over the game is counter-productive.

> When they throw cards around it gives them nowhere to go…like that dickhead on the weekend. He tried to impose himself on you. 'I'm in control here'…For the first couple of minutes when I came on as a sub he just abused me. 'If I see you doing that again you'll be off.' Blah Blah .. 'It will be a penalty next time I see you touch him'… You know, [he's] thinking that that is going to change my game but it only makes me frustrated.

Players prefer referees to be approachable, to talk normally without shouting and threats, and to respond to reasonable questions. Calm, smiling referees display confidence and approachability that can influence the atmosphere of the game.

> If the ref's calm the players are going to be calm too. Cause if the ref's like screaming at you, you're not going to talk back to them in a nice way…Players scream back at him and then that causes yellow cards…It changes the game.

Displays of aggression and unwillingness to engage include ignoring, turning back on players, dismissing concerns, anger, verbal abuse, sharp gestures and threatening players.

Limitations

The sample here was all male. Females have been found to perceive and communicate fairness differently to males (Cole 2004). The adult males in this sample were all full professionals. Consequently the perspective of the 'Sunday League' lower grade, where referees often

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operate in less protected environments, was not included. This research achieved saturation in the third group, but future studies should target amateur male and female adults.

Many players behave deceptively and disingenuously on the field and may have been acting out in the focus group interviews. It is possible that some interviewees, surrounded by their peers, were less than frank about some of their beliefs and motivations. That said, each of the interviews proceeded with what seemed an appropriate blend of open discussion and good faith.

Discussion

The many qualities required for effective refereeing are best acquired through training and experience (Simmons 2006). However the tripartite model of competence, dependability and respectfulness, developed here using fairness theory and evidence of players' preferences, provides an easily-remembered framework to guide a strategic approach to communicating fairness. This model, and findings concerning the way referees communicate these qualities, provide new insights that can be used to train referees to become more self-aware, and more strategic in their communication. Referees can reflect on the way they are perceived, and deliberately focus on presenting themselves (e.g. in speech, manner, rule implementation, attire, grooming) as competent, dependable (e.g. displaying calm, attention to process and even-handedness) and respectful (e.g. firm yet responsive). Studies in fairness heuristics suggest that self-presentation is especially important in early encounters when impressions are formed (Lind, Kray and Thompson 2001).

The congruence of the model with previous fairness studies in a range of contexts suggests the model has utility in many professions and situations where decisions are communicated. Players believe referees have powerful influence over safety, fairness and other outcomes for individual players and teams. They want referees to be people who exercise their power capably and responsibly and they attend to both intended and unintended communicative displays in assessing the referee's competence, respectfulness and dependability. In accordance with Leventhal's (1980) accuracy rule in procedural fairness, players desire athletic and intellectual competence in a referee because they want decisions based on accurate information.

Players' preference for dependability can readily be viewed as support for Leventhal's (1980) rules for consistency and bias-suppression. Procedures should be predictable, consistent and administered with equal opportunities for the parties affected. The importance of respectful treatment has frequently been claimed in interactional fairness (Patient and Skarlicki op cit; Buttner op cit; Tepper et al op cit; Bies and Moag op cit). Players expect referees to be sufficiently firm and confident to assert themselves, but dislike arrogance and aggression. Justification is well known to enhance perceptions of fairness in many situations (Bobocel and Zdanjuk op cit) and players expect answers to 'reasonable' questions. Clear and calm explanations display respect for players.

The focus on decision-maker qualities and influential displays using a qualitative approach improves understanding of the way people perceive fairness, and supports Fortin's (op cit) call for more qualitative research in the organisational justice field. Analysis of player discussions and responses to open-ended questions improves our sense of what is important to those receiving decisions, and reveals nuanced associations that standard questioning techniques might fail to uncover. Players said they consciously make links between concrete displays such as calm, and more abstract qualities such as consistency.

Associations of this kind were frequent in the interviews and give support to the idea that people use heuristics to mitigate uncertainty about authority figures (Lind and Van den Bos op cit). Skarlicki and Latham (op cit) suggested that leaders need to be trained in the way perceptions of fairness are formed. Referee development programmes could be enhanced by training modules that help referees to explore the way procedural and interactional fairness heuristics influence player perceptions of referee fairness and decision correctness. In particular, trainees would benefit from understanding the principle of substitutability (Lind and Van den Bos 2002), the idea that players use displays about which they can be certain, such as attire, to form judgements about more abstract qualities such as competence and dependability.

Previous research has found that the tone and content of communication influence perception of the fairness of the referee and the correctness of the decision (Simmons op cit). This research reports competence, dependability and respectfulness as qualities that help to communicate fairness to footballers, and suggests that these qualities are likely to communicate fairness in other contexts where decisions

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are communicated. Although players occasionally linked specific referee displays to their own reactions, the data gathering and analysis methods used here do not enable assessment of the effects on players, or the relative importance, of the different qualities. Many referees appear to manage football matches effectively without visible displays of accountability or engagement with players. Future research should examine the influence of specific communicative displays on cooperation and compliance with decisions, and explore the relative influence of the qualities in football and other decision communication contexts such as teaching, surgery and management. Competence, dependability and respectfulness may be desirable in most professionals, but it seems likely that it will be relatively more important for teachers to communicate respectfulness, and for surgeons to communicate competence.

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Ethics 2.0: Social media implications for professional communicators

This paper examines ethical implications in the use of social media by professional communicators. Using its research into the experiences of New Zealand practitioners, it identifies major ethical challenges for the profession. It also illustrates how social media intensify ethical issues that public relations has struggled with in the off-line world. At the same time, it shows how social media open opportunities for increasing practitioner influence on organisational ethics in ways long desired by traditional practitioners and recently advocated by public relations academics. It concludes that, despite enabling a lack of transparency and easier deception, social media can help public relations both improve ethical communication with stakeholders, and gain a greater ethical leadership role.

Key words: public relations ethics, social media, ethical conscience, professional communicators in New Zealand

Background

Social media are revolutionising the way organisations communicate with their stakeholders. Activists, customers, employees, and other interested individuals have been able to gain access to organisations and to get their voices amplified in new, and less costly, ways. At the same time, managements, and those communicating on behalf of managements, have been able to reach out to many new publics and at least engage them in organisational discourses, if not dialogue.

Over the last decade, articles, books, and conference papers have tried to assess the implications of the technological revolution for public relations (e.g., Croft 2007; Duhé 2007; Gillin 2007; Hallahan 2005; Hiebert 2005, Hyojung and Reber 2008; Scott 2007; Taylor and Kent 2010; Wright and Hinson 2008; Xifra and Huertas 2008). Some attempted to identify how the new tools could change how practitioners would carry out their jobs; and others focused on the pace of adoption of the new technologies. Some recommended strategies for using the new tools, while others analysed the dialogical nature of websites, blogs, and social media. However, amidst all the literature, discussions of possible abuses of the technology to manipulate, mislead, and incite public opinion remained rare.

Kirk Hallahan's pioneering chapter related to social media as 'the new frontiers of ethics and responsible advocacy' (2006: 108). More recent books on online communication provide more concrete ethical guidance. Brown's (2009) *Public relations and the social web*, for example, includes a short chapter on the new ethics, and mentions new codes offered by organisations such as the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) in the UK. The main ethical concern of those codes is around transparency and the disclosure of identity online: 'The CIPR Code identifies a number of issues such as "astroturfing"…which is the practice of falsely creating the impression of grassroots support…. The concept of full disclosure is important here because if you clearly identify who you are you can't "astroturf"' (ibid: 73).

Philips and Young go so far as to identify ethics in internet public relations as 'critical to survival' (2009: 91) for organisations and warn that 'untruths, half truths, hype and extravagant claims become reputation time bombs' (ibid: 91) in the new communication environment. In addition, Philips and Young note that: 'Crucially, social media brings greater possibility for interaction with a wider audience, with different expectations, norms and vulnerabilities. The implications of these changes need to be considered in terms of managing both internal and external relationships' (ibid: 222).

Employee relations offer another important challenge for professional communicators. Philips and Young (ibid) suggest that organisational communicators develop a 'clearly stated policy' to guide employees about their rights to use social media in the workplace, the impact of personal publications on organisational reputation, employees' ethical usage of social media, and other issues (ibid: 227-228). Organisations have to develop new policies to try to control

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publicity, avoid public embarrassment, protect client privacy, and ensure the filing of records and transparent systems.

Related issues have also surfaced in communication industry publications (O'Brien 2009) and the general media. Examples include reports about organisations hiring public relations agencies to distribute messages online signed by fake 'innocent' bloggers (flogs) or Tweeters (Gogoi 2006; Weaver 2006), social media campaigns bypassing the off-line media editorial process by bribing young and inexperienced online publishers (Barry 2009; Brunell 2010), and abuse of social media anonymity to disguise identities, and to avoid disclosure of remunerations received in return for publicity, or relationships of publishers to interest groups or front groups (Coates 2007).

This paper investigates old-new ethical issues through the experiences of public relations practitioners. Drawing from evidence from practitioners employed at the new frontier of social media and faced with ethical dilemmas on a daily basis, it identifies the current major ethical topics on the profession's agenda and considers their implications for practitioners.

Legitimating dialogue, ethical conscience, and mutuality

Legitimating dialogue

This is not entirely unfamiliar territory: 'Public relations as a practice and as a field struggles with issues of social legitimacy, and connections to propaganda' (L'Etang 2009: 14). To be able to operate, organisations need to be accepted and approved by their stakeholders and society as legitimate and responsible entities. Practitioners use communication to achieve organisational legitimacy and the unethical behaviour of management or of public relations as a management function could result in legitimacy gap (Quesinberry 2005: 486) that could put the organisation's survival at risk.

However, we agree with others that the responsibility of public relations practitioners should go beyond survival issues. Bowen (2005: 294), for example, observes that, through such activities 'as public affairs and lobbying, issue management, political communication, corporate communication, military communication, investor relations, and activist communication,' public relations helps shape society and that this 'power to influence society means that public relations holds enormous responsibility to be ethical' (ibid: 294).

Before social media enabled organisations to conduct such direct and engaging conversations with stakeholders, Pearson (1989: 128) usefully linked ethical public relations with the notion of a dialogue:

> Corporate public relations departments… are charged with the responsibility of managing the moral dimension of corporate conduct. This is because dialogue is a precondition for any legitimate corporate conduct that affects a public of that organisation…This is the core ethical responsibility of public relations from which all other obligations follow.

To set out conditions for dialogue Pearson (ibid: 125) cites Habermas (1970, 1984). Burleson and Kline (1979) further interpret Habermas to offer prescriptions that remain relevant to the ethical challenges presented by contemporary dialogue tools:

1. participants must have an equal chance to initiate and maintain discourse;
2. participants must have an equal chance to make challenges, explanations, or interpretations;
3. interaction among participants must be free of manipulations, domination, or control;
4. participants must be equal in respect to power (Burleson and Kline 1979: 423).

In line with Kline's first two prescriptions social media offer an opportunity for a dialogical pattern of communication between organisations and their stakeholders. However, reports on the manipulative and controlling usage of social media by organisational communicators indicate that we cannot assume that social media are automatically dialogical in nature.

Ethical conscience

Bowen (op cit: 296) expects public relations practitioners to act as the 'ethical conscience of their organisations' and to morally influence management and employees. Practitioners should not just represent management, but also wider stakeholders and be 'seen as naturally filling this organisational role because of their expertise in relationships building, conflict management, reputation management, and communication with publics' (ibid: 296-297). Serving as 'the ethical conscience' in this way would involve practitioners in training management and internal publics in ethics, and consulting about ethical aspects of management decisions.

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In reality, however, public relations practitioners have little, if any, training in ethics, and their job descriptions rarely mention the role in maintaining ethics. In general, management does not seem to expect this service from public relations. Moreover, the profession has a negative reputation for unethically manipulative behaviour and titles such as 'spin doctors' and 'manipulators' are common in public discourse. Many incidents of irresponsible and deceptive practice support this negative image. Brown (2009) opens his chapter on 'the new ethics' by saying:

> The public relations Industry has never been particularly celebrated for its ethics. In fact, we PR people are right up there with politicians and journalists in terms of how our honesty is perceived. To some extent, we only have ourselves to blame and in part it is because we allow the line between public relations, advertisers and publicists to become blurred (ibid: 67).

Critics of public relations perceive practitioners as part of a management team representing powerful organisations with access to significant resources. This advantage enables powerful organisations to control the public discourse via their public relations employees, and to corrupt the 'marketplace of ideas' in self-interested efforts to reach their objectives.

Coombs and Holladay (2007: 29) critically analyse the inherent tension for practitioners:

> PR professionals are obligated to represent the interests of their clients. The concern for balancing the needs of society and the needs of clients produces a tension that may be difficult to manage. PR professionals may find it challenging to function as the 'conscience of the organisation' when the organisation is their employer.

The position of ethical conscience of the organisation faces other large challenges. For example, practitioners are not often included on the board and have limited influence on management decisions and so: 'they may not be able to truly let their conscience be their guide' (ibid: 44). Nevertheless, Coombs and Holladay (op cit: 32) do not see the situation as hopeless and advocate moral PR conduct inspired by an 'ethics of care'.

Mutuality

In the public relations literature on ethics, scholars tend to use two main philosophical approaches: teleology, with a focus on the outcomes of the action; and deontology, which is based on duty, a system of obligations, and rights (see Bowen 2004, 2005, 2010; Hallahan 2006). Coombs and Holladay (2007) suggest a third approach called the ethics of care, which focuses on 'interdependence, mutuality, and reciprocity' (ibid: 32). The ethics of care recognises the importance of the web of relationships and thus 'fits well with our view of public relations as managing mutually influential relationships within a web of stakeholder and organisational relationships' (ibid: 32). As part of those ethics, Coombs and Holladay (op cit) advocate 'listening' as morally essential: 'Public relations practitioners must listen and utilize two-way communication to be ethical. Two-way communication sets the stage for mutual influence' (ibid: 48). This mutuality lies at the core of the greatest opportunities for public relations but listening is still not evident in practitioner discourses, let alone as having an ethical dimension.

Clearly public relations scholars have high expectations for ethical practice. The following research reports on how New Zealand professional communicators live up to scholar expectations and their experiences and ethical challenges in the new communication environment.

Social media and ethics in New Zealand

New Zealand is a useful location for such research because of the country's high ethical standing. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), which is published annually by Transparency International (the global coalition against corruption), compares over 180 countries. The score of each country indicates the perceived level of its public-sector corruption. The 2009 index ranks New Zealand at the top of the index list as the least corrupted nation in the world (CPI 2009). Moreover, the number of practitioners who are members in the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) is also relatively high and this signals at least an espoused commitment to that organisation's code of ethics. This relative 'clean' environment provides a useful field for researching ethical issues since local practitioners would be expected to care about, and be sensitive to, ethical issues, and to identify deviations and corruption of ethical norms. It offers a useful benchmark for future comparative studies on ethics and public relations.

Ranked 22 out of 30 OECD countries, New Zealand is also defined as a developed country.

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Although the adoption of the internet in general has spread relatively rapidly, the growth and use of broadband has been slow by international standards. Access to high-speed broadband lagged behind in the last two decades because of geographical conditions and market structure (Oram 2010) but by June 2009 the total number of broadband subscribers exceeded 1 million, or almost a quarter of the population. (Statistic New Zealand 2009). A national survey conducted by Attitude New Zealand reported in May 2010 that 78.8 per cent of New Zealanders aged 15 to 65-plus used Facebook. Twitter and YouTube were used by much smaller proportions of less than 2 per cent (Attitude New Zealand 2010). New Zealanders' use of social media also featured in an international study called the World Internet Project. According to this report, 13 per cent of New Zealanders maintain their own website and 10 per cent publish a blog (Smith et al. 2008: 313).

The New Zealand public relations industry is estimated to include several thousand practitioners, of whom 1,380 were members of the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand in 2010. The pace of adopting social media as a communication tool has picked up only recently, in the last three years, but is growing. In 2009, Pursuit PR agency, as part of its international partner's Text 100 Global Survey, conducted a survey of New Zealand bloggers. Stephen Knightly (2009), the Director of Pursuit, reported in June 2009: 'only 67 per cent of bloggers (and we surveyed reasonably high-profile bloggers) have had contacts from PR representatives in the last six months. Only 30 per cent say they have contact at least weekly'.

A new professional group, which provides social media consultancy services to organisations, has recently appeared on the communication industry map. They are small, often individual-run operations that prepare tailor-made social media programmes for clients.

Research approach

To identify ethical issues, new and old, experienced by practitioners in the current environment, the authors conducted three interviews with practitioners who used social media professionally. Based on insights into potential ethical issues from those interviews, the authors organised two focus groups with communicators who had experience in using social media on behalf of organisations. Focus groups were chosen as a good way to listen to, and learn from, relevant people. Ethical behaviour is a sensitive topic and hard to measure in any method. Nevertheless, the openness and the willingness to be self-critical in comments cited below offer evidence that the focus groups did encourage participants to share experiences.

Participants were selected by a purposive sampling method, mainly from a 2009 list of 37 members of the PRINZ in Auckland who expressed interest in social media when asked about it by PRINZ. The snowballing technique of sampling was used when members on the list referred the researchers to other practitioners who were using social media. The general population of users of social media among New Zealand public relations practitioners was limited during the research period (February-March 2010) and so the 21 participants in two focus groups provided a reasonable representation of relevant professionals at the time.

The first focus group was conducted with 13 participants in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city and business centre. The second focus group, which was conducted in Hamilton, the fourth largest city and a centre for rural farm services, contained eight practitioners. Both meetings were scheduled for one hour but lasted two hours because participants were keen to share their experiences. The University of Waikato's ethics codes were used to protect participant rights and, as part of that, the purpose of the focus group was explained in writing, in the oral introduction, and processes were put in place to protect participant anonymity.

Participant profiles

In the Auckland group, six of the participants were independent consultants (or worked for a private public relations agency), three worked for government, and one worked for a professional association. Two worked as independent social media consultants. Those who specialised in social media reported spending 75 to 100 per cent of their time on social media communication. Most of the other participants estimated 5 to 35 per cent of their working time was spent communicating via social media.

Amongst the eight participants in the Hamilton group, four practitioners were independent consultants or employed by a PR agency and spent from 15 to 50 per cent of their time on social media communication. One participant worked for a higher education institution, another one worked for an NGO, and two others for a company.

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The focus group discussions
The discussions were facilitated and recorded by the authors. The same protocol was used in both groups and included nine major questions. Participants made many comments and shared experiences that did not always respond to the questions or directly relate to ethics. They sometimes spoke not as professional communicators but as individual participants in the social media conversations. Nevertheless, those comments were sometimes relevant to the purpose of this research.

The recorded discussions were transcribed and participant responses were analysed mainly by identifying significant ethical issues, dilemmas, and experiences in the social media environment.

Findings
The findings tended to cluster around the following issues:

Loss of control
A strong sense of loss of control over the organisation's message underpinned the discussions. Organisations had previously tried to speak with one voice and control the timing for the dissemination and the content of their message. The public relations practitioner was the vehicle for coordinating and strategising the organisational voice. In the new communication environment every employee is a potential publisher, and organisations are scrutinised by customers and stakeholders more closely and more quickly with fewer filters than before. Accordingly, there was less control. This was illustrated in practice by participant W's example: 'At a prize giving [event] two minutes after the prize giving it is all over the internet . . . so the organisation didn't really have the chance to take it through our normal channels.'

Practitioners also expressed concern over loss of control around employee relations. They expressed confusion about employee rights in relation to using social media and publishing information that might impact on the organisation. One communication co-ordinator for a non-profit organisation reported this concern around volunteer relations:

> W: Big portion of our staff are volunteers and members, they are not paid employees…Two things that have come up in recent times: the first one is around privacy and what they can and can't say around [clients, who have privacy rights]. How do you regulate that as an organisation? And the second thing is messages that go through social media versus us putting out communication about things.

Participant A described related difficulties in convincing management to use social media tools within the organisation: 'They [the board] are really worried that it is going to be a place to complain…we are starting to develop a policy around what we actually let staff post.'

The sense of loss of control was also obvious in discussing customer relations, especially in serving customers' complaints. Social media enable an easy and rapid spread of negative reviews and complaints so that practitioners have no time to check negative reviews before they are published and read by millions. Participant descriptions of their experiences exposed conflicting feelings. They welcomed social media dialogues as an opportunity to build relationships, but at the same time they lamented the loss of control over the message and the timing of its release.

Pearson's (1989) dialogue theory identified the dialogue between organisations and stakeholders as an essential dimension of professional public relations ethics. This study of practitioner engagement with social media actually reveals a tension between their need to develop a dialogue with organisational stakeholders and expectations that they manage the dialogue on behalf of the organisation. The effort to control actually pulls public relations towards less ethical practices than the pull towards dialogue. In effect, in increasing the pressure for a more dialogical approach, and less controlling approach, social media hold the promise of being a positive influence on the profession's ethics.

Transparency
In both focus groups the major issue mentioned in relation to social media ethics was transparency. Social media allow anonymity and a changing of identities that opens it to abuse, manipulation, and confusion. Communication campaigns designed for social media may take advantage of these conditions of easy concealment or masking to create false impressions.

Transparency is a major prerequisite for trust in the message and includes three issues: identity, remuneration, and relationships. In the offline environment, professional communicators' codes of ethics insist that practitioners make full disclosure of who they are representing, who is paying for their communication services, and the nature of their relationships with the

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sponsor. As a result: a news release has to carry the logo of the organisation; sponsorship has to be disclosed; and journalists are required to mention that their travel expenses were paid by a company, or that they were embedded with troops by army spokespeople.

To conduct ethical public relations practitioners make a commitment to avoid the use of front groups, but ghost-writing, for example, is a legitimate off-line public relations function used by speech writers. Now, however, social media campaigns are using amateur online publishers, such as bloggers, to deliver pro-organisational messages. Those web publishers, unlike journalists in traditional media, are not committed to ethical codes and tend not to disclose information about sources of payment for what they published.

Participants resented the fact that executives expect communication consultants to engage in online conversations on their behalf:

> K: it is not my opinion – it is your [the CEO's] opinion that people want to hear. They want to talk to you; they don't want to talk to me pretending to be you.

> J: I have actually refused work based on the fact that I was required to ghost type and I just was not prepared to do that.

One participant, whose work involves promotion of television programmes, described the organisational pressures:

> O: I tweet and blog as a dog [a star of a children TV show]...we sell a lot of marketing around character blogs...They [programme sponsors] ask us to do certain things and they pay a lot of money for it. So how do you tell these little kids or whoever is reading the blog that their favourite puppy likes this kind of food when actually you know that it is eating something else?...Somebody is telling you you've got to do it. So you make the dog sit there and eat the dog biscuits and then you say: I have been eating such and such, and then it becomes true. I don't personally want to sit there and say 'I'm enjoying this' if it is not actually eating it, or it has never eaten it.

On the other hand, practitioners have to contend with fake identities used by communicators from competing companies to slander their organisations. Another participant experienced the false identity issue as a victim:

> P: I've ended up in situations where the person on the other side is claiming to be a customer and in fact turns out it is actually someone working for another company [competition]. And that gets very sticky then…especially when they don't make it clear and it gets in the media as customer says 'company sucks' but, in fact, it is a competitor not a customer. I find it quite difficult to deal with...I can see how you could quite easily come along and decide, right, well I'm going to set up several fake identities and I'll now support my cause.

Tensions between the private and the professional

Another strong theme was the tension between the private and the organisational sphere. Practitioners said they were not sure what they should say on private online publications in case they jeopardised their commitments to the organisations they served and the brands they promoted.

Ethical training and ethical conscience of the organisation

Participants were surprised by a question relating to the scholar's expectations that they would take responsibility to ethical training and serve as the 'ethical conscience' of the organisation (Bowen 2005). They were simply unaware of this expectation. They saw themselves as already having to deal with many challenges and so would not consider adding such a serious task to their list of responsibilities.

One participant, a communication manager, reported that her organisation had a policy which was quite permissive:

> P: We have got 1600 staff in the building. Every one of them wants to be an advocate. Why am I going to stop them? Why don't I give them the skills and the training and the tools to actually go out there and sell the brand and be on message?

P's argument responds to Bowen's (2005) expectations that public relations practitioners should take responsibility and function as the ethical conscience of the organisation. If social media move practitioners towards the training of employees, then there is the opportunity to set up a programme that will include ethics.

Codes of Ethics

Questions about the need for new professional codes of ethics stirred emotional responses from the social media consultants. They strong-

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ly resented the idea of a code of ethics because that implied an external authority regulating their individual online freedoms. To them a code meant accepting external impositions.

C and J went so far as to resent the idea of a professional association:

> C: I don't want to be a member of anything. I don't want to be part of anything. The joy of social media to me is that it is individuals, it is grass-root democracy, the communities are organic and they form naturally, but I don't want anyone to own it or structure it or tell me what is right or wrong.
>
> P: you are the anti-social social media communicator? [laughter]
>
> J: ... I would rather jump off a building than be [a member of an association], especially have these people as my spokespeople or claim that they were. It would be like, no. Just flat no.

These social media consultants were ready to consider a code of ethics only when presented with the example of the Word of Mouth Marketing Association code. This is an open online document to which members are encouraged to contribute all the time. To this idea the social media strategist responded:

> C: If it is a Wikipedia style thing then yes, I would like it. But as soon as there is a chairperson or a vote or a speech then I don't want to go.

Most of the participants were members of PRINZ and thus committed to its code of ethics from the pre-social media era, but they had not entered into discussion with the social media consultants.

Libertarian discourses about online radical democracy represent new challenges for public relations as a profession seeking legitimisation. New social media consultants become part of the public relations function but are unaware of ethical responsibilities when they act on behalf of an organisation. This trend will become an obstacle to public relations aspirations to function as the 'ethical conscience of the organisation' (Bowen 2005).

Social media and change opportunities

One participant in each group spoke about social media as an opportunity to change management's attitude to ethics and to elevate the professional communicator's status within the organisation. For example, the Director of Communication of the University of Waikato and former President of PRINZ, Lisa Finucane, said:

> we have to be more ethical in how we behave because it is too easy to be caught out...
>
> [We say to our employers] you can't do it [expect public relations practitioners to cover up for management failures] any more... That is what we have been saying we stand for over many years. You can't be any less than honest because as you know it is much easier to be found out... I think it [social media] is great for us...we can take a much stronger lead role.

In the other group, Catherine Arrow, Chartered Public Relations professional and specialist in digital communication, said: 'From a practitioner perspective, we have always been charged with advocacy, honesty, transparency and acting in the public interest – all included in the professional public relations associations' codes of ethics'. She went on to argue that:

> Social media channels allow us to listen and engage more closely than ever before. In today's operational environment we inevitably become the internal advocate within the organisation, prompting change on behalf of the stakeholder, as well as being the external advocate for the organisation. Inevitably, this will mean practitioners will face ethical challenges as they present the stakeholder view to the organisation – a clash of 'public interests' if you will.

Not all participants saw the opportunity the same way. One participant, who did not wish to be identified, said he was serving political campaigns in which he had one commitment – to the client's success: 'We get things done so when it comes to social media when it is running a campaign with an agenda or a certain cause, then we will do what it takes to get a message out there'.

Discussion

Social media intensify ethical challenges familiar to those that professional communicators encounter in the off-line world. Ethical issues around organisational transparency were, and are now even more, a major concern. The loss of control over organisational messages, the time of distribution, and employee communication seem to be part of new communication world.

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On balance, changing the practice to adapt to the new realities is likely to favour raising the profession's ethical standards.

As they make progress in adopting the new communication tools, New Zealand public relations practitioners currently seem to be confused, with regard to their organisation, about the rights and wrongs in online communication. The confusion is also manifested in their difficulty in drawing a line between private and organisational discourses.

However, some New Zealand practitioners also identified the new communication environment as a long-awaited opportunity for the profession. For them, this arises because the new communication environment increases organisational dependency on trustworthy communication with stakeholders. They felt empowered to provide advice about the ethical conduct of the organisation. In effect, they suggest that, once the management realised that the new reality would not allow cover ups, practitioners would be expected to deal with the ethical challenges for the sake of the organisation's survival. They would thus be supported to practise ethical public relations from the outset.

In terms of contemporary academic thinking, there is a significant deficiency in the focus groups – no one mentioned the use of social media for 'listening'. 'Listening' is about letting stakeholders' voices and concerns be heard before decisions are made and it is further enabled by social media. It is a major component of a dialogue and of Coombs and Holladay's (2010) ideas about an 'ethics of care' for guiding public relations practitioners (p. 32). The fact that participants did not welcome social media as a tool for listening to stakeholders' concerns indicates that dialogue issues are lower on the agenda than control issues.

There are positive examples of public relations using social media to help act as the social conscience of the organisation. The 'Ethical Idol' project, conducted for Cisco by a creative team from mPower Communications at the Network Inc. (Atlanta), aimed to raise ethics awareness among Cisco's 50,000 computer-using employees. In order to engage and excite employees about a new code of ethics, mPower Communications developed an 'Ethics Idol' training project. It is an interactive cartoon-based parody of American Idol, the popular television reality show. In it, animated employees sang about their ethical dilemmas and more than 10,000 employees participated as the new ethical code was well received (Singer 2008).

Incorporating social media tools into public relations professional services simultaneously opens opportunities for ethical conduct and presents risks for unethical practices. According to participants in these New Zealand focus groups, social media both increase the options for open dialogues between organisations and their stakeholders, and decrease public relations control over the message. However, they did not report the use of social media for increased 'listening' of organisations to their stakeholders. On the evidence of this research, the practitioners have not recognised 'listening' as a major asset of social media for improving ethical conduct and organisational legitimacy in public relations.

Conclusion

Even on the evidence of a relatively transparent society such as New Zealand, social media expand and intensify old ethical dilemmas. Participants, especially the veterans, could point to similar situations in off-line communication. But, according to this study, problems that were rare in traditional media are now a daily experience.

Social media provide organisations with dialogical tools that can enhance effective listening. We see the role of public relations practitioners as facilitating and opening the organisations to the new relationships. According to New Zealand practitioners interviewed in this research project, the ideal set by Coombs and Holladay (2007: 48) – that practitioners 'must listen and utilise two-way communication to be ethical' – would involve many challenges: to take responsibility and use social media to listen to stakeholders as part of a dialogue; to train employees and management; and to represent stakeholders' interests within the organisation. Social media could empower public relations practitioners to become ethical leaders of their organisations. By using the new communication environment to guide the organisations into increased transparency and social responsibility, and to listen to stakeholders concerns, public relations practitioners could elevate the status of the industry and enrich the role they play within organisations and in society.

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REVIEWS

Fast media, media fast: How to clear your mind and invigorate your life in an age of media overload

Thomas W. Cooper

Boulder, CO: Gaeta Press

ISBN 978 1 4520 8500 5 (pbk); 978 1 4520 8401 2 (cloth); 978 1 4567 3325 4 (ebook)

This book contends that information overload has become a social crisis for industrial societies. Cooper describes this wraparound media world relentlessly and persuasively. New technologies, programs, and software come at us faster than we can digest them well. The amount of stored knowledge has doubled within the past two decades, but is expected to double again within the next single decade. Futurist Richard Worzel estimates that by the year 2015 there will be one thousand bits of data for every fact in existence (p. 170).

The Introduction cites the Kaiser Foundation Research (2010) that 8 to 18-year-olds use entertainment media an average of 7.5 hours a day, with a majority of teens reporting they consume two or more media concurrently. Cooper is concerned that the immense media overload and speeding-up threaten our quality of life. As he summarises it, we live in a world of shortcuts, burnout, 'hurry sickness' shrinking attention spans, confusion, and the emasculation of ethics during decision-making. The central thesis of Cooper's book is that the media – not drugs or alcohol – will be the leading addiction of this millennium.

Cooper recommends media fasting as an effective way to deal with a runaway information society. Just as Henry David Thoreau isolated himself for two years at Walden Pond to gain fresh perspectives on nineteenth-century American society, now it is the electronic environment one must vacate to understand e-culture and ourselves. One option is a full media blackout – removing all media from one's life for a month or more. What Cooper calls a 'practical fast' is another possibility – deleting those media that are not crucial to one's career. Media diets are promoted too. Like a 'low cholesterol' or 'no sugar' diet from food, media dieting means eliminating an addiction such as to MTV, pornography, or tabloid news. The book's purpose is to help us find 'a new Walden Pond' outside the media maelstrom.

Throughout this handbook of advice, guidelines, and arguments for media fasting, Cooper weaves his own narrative. Twenty years ago he lived for a month in a media blackout. He stopped watching television and movies, listening to radio, using computers, and reading books and magazines. In the two decades following, he has tried different types of fasting and dieting, and lived in 'low media' communities such as the Rapa Nui on Easter Island who have only one television station, among the Old Order Amish who ban all electronic media, and in the oral culture of the indigenous Shuswap of British Columbia. As a senior Professor of Visual and Media Arts at Emerson College, Boston, Cooper has guided or assisted thousands of students, groups, and colleagues with their own media fasting. Reflections on his and their pre-fast, fast, and post-fast experiences make this fascinating book credible.

Withdrawing from media-saturated society

Withdrawal from a noisy, media-saturated society is difficult. Cooper's first sensations during his fasts are of media after-images and sound-echoes. As with Cooper, fragments from programmes, the face of Oprah Winfrey, TV ads, top-forty music popped up like toast in the faster's memory. Cooper wondered during his fasts how much 'media residue' we carry with us perpetually. His mind seemed programmed with commercials, news and songs, and he came to doubt whether independent thinking was still possible. As the book documents, the ubiquity of mass media is never driven home so much as when one abstains from it.

Eventually an inner voice begins to speak up, where previously only media voices spoke as memories. The brain increasingly feels re-oxygenated. Even the emotions start to purify. Emotion can be expressed more purely, genuinely and appropriately, and with less invisible prompting from stored media memories. Cooper's experience and the testimony of others is that when senses are no longer saturated, they become enhanced and re-sensitised. Although a few people have found that fasting is not for them, Cooper affirms that literally thousands of people have returned to their lives after fasting as more conscious, creative, and purposeful people.

The book emphasises that the fast itself is not as important as the thinking it inspires. What is important is the restoration of our own creativity. At its best, fasting liberates us to think independently in a world in which 'thinking' is largely the recycled sound-bites, opinions and jingles of others. Cooper is concerned that media-drenched societies have moved beyond Erikson's

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'identity crisis' to an 'identity absence'. At the heart of his adventures with fasting are fascinating questions about intelligence and identity: 'Is original thinking possible?' 'What do I truly know when I can hear myself think?' 'Underneath all the ads, programming and noise swimming in my subconscious mind, who am I, where am I going, and with what purpose?' 'Who is at home beneath my programming?' Cooper queries his readers whether they have ever had a truly original idea – one that cannot be traced to some form of media – TV, textbooks, the internet, journals, newspapers.

Rediscovering the creative process

Media constantly promote the duplication of thought, and withdrawal from them is one way to rediscover the creative process. With a shift in consciousness during the fast, when returning to the real world media, fasters do not find them irrelevant or trivial. Their change in perspective did not make them condescending to the media. The post-fast typically means that excellent programmes or articles are identified readily, and the mediocre are more easily brushed aside.

While Cooper eschews formal theory, he *de facto* develops a philosophy of communication centered on creativity. With one of the keenest minds in communications today, he develops a three-level model that integrates meta-theory, application, and action. Cooper's erudition is trilingual, being equally at home in all three dimensions. His metatheory focuses on the philosophy of the human, and accounts for a wide range of the intellectual giants across history and geography, such as Pascal, Sartre, Bergson, Kant, Marx, Confucius, Augustine, Huxley and Wittgenstein. Application for Cooper is not deductive logic. He is not trapped in Plato's argument that if B depends on A for its existence, then application is inferior. Theories of the human and their application to media comprehension, for him, are dialectical, feeding into one another. And Cooper doesn't merely insist on action in the last chapter as typically done, but the practice of fasting transforms the whole. Not since Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* has an author's attention to *praxis* been as productive.

Opening up identity and consciousness

In social scientific terms, *Fast media, media fast* is a distinct alternative to mainstream effects research. While taking note of scientific empiricism and referring to effects research on violence, Cooper does not explicitly position his own narrative and the research on fasting against the standard paradigm. But the difference between Cooper's work on media impact and the received view is dramatic. While one measures attitudes and behavior, Cooper opens up identity, consciousness, and life's meaning with a sophistication unmatched by statistical analysis. He avoids unproductive debates over causality, and introduces a fresh set of questions about human agency.

For media ethics, this book is instructive. The most influential work is no longer focused on professional ethics but on the general morality. The new media are interactive, the boundaries between professionals and media producers have blurred, and communication theory emphasizes the active audience. Thus the challenge for convergent media is not role-specific ethical codes, but the morality of the public sphere. *Fast media, media fast* demonstrates how a people's ethics ought to be done. Taking responsibility for one's media world does not undermine the accountability of media practitioners, but human flourishing becomes the norm for both citizens and media practitioners.

This is a landmark book. Cooper notes that there are more than a thousand times more titles and programmes on media use than on low or non-use. Cooper does not simply point to this undeveloped area, but he establishes it brilliantly for research, teaching, and scholarly analysis. *Fast media, media fast* has the same stature and originality as Neil Postman's *Amusing ourselves to death*, Joshua Meyrowitz's *No sense of place*, and Raymond Williams' *Television: Technology and cultural form*. But it is positioned even more strategically within global media technologies than they are, and it is better written. This vivid, nuanced and complex book is an intellectual feast on media fasting.

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So you want to be a political journalist?
Edited by Sheila Gunn
Published by Biteback Publishing
ISBN 978 1 84954 085 8

One of the joys of being in higher education is having access to all the books being published by people with the finest minds in the world. As someone who is getting to grips with the 'academic world' full time I have to admit that I am finding it challenging. You see, I have been a newsman for thirty years. The first lesson I was taught about writing was to K.I.S.S.: Keep It Short and Simple. Any story can be summarised in three sentences and the cleverest people can explain their ideas to a child. And this is the debate I am having with fellow academics. For me some books are simply too dense. I guess that says a lot more about me than the author.

So what has this got to do with Sheila Gunn's *So you want to be a political journalist?* Well this book is definitely *not* an academic tome. Rather, it is a collection of reflective essays, with some great learning points buried throughout the various sentences, from well-known political hacks. Gunn is herself a practitioner of journalism and the dark arts of spin; she was once John Major's spin doctor. But Gunn hits the nail firmly on the head when on page one she tells of the need for aspiring journalists to go into a new village, town or city and come back with 'a number of good ideas for stories'. This is so obvious to *practising* journalists but having taught in HE for more than a decade it is a lesson, I still have to drum into my students year in year out.

What Gunn does with her book is to take a student (and those already in the business, if they so wish) by the hand and navigate them through the various aspects of the democratic political processes. The brilliant *Guardian* commentator Michael White reminisces about his time as a lobby correspondent for the paper. He provides a readable history lesson for the uninterested and uninitiated about how politics and political reporting have changed over the decades. The sedentary lifestyle of reading committee reports, wining and dining political contacts replaced by the frenetic pace of a 24/7 continuous news cycle.

Inside this book are the thoughts of intellectual journalist giants. No, this is not an oxymoron; just spend time reading Peter Riddell's potted biography and marvel at his achievements. When he tells you how to work with politicians, make notes, inwardly digest and practise the craft. My friend Carolyn Quinn – we were both BBC trainees together – explains how she broke into the business. Adam Holloway, the MP for Gravesham in Kent and former investigative journalist, tells us about his typical week in the Commons. But was he right to stop writing a weekly column and issuing press releases to his local paper because he was miffed by the way another MP and he were treated by the press? Andrew Hawkins' explanation of reporting opinion polls puts in simple language what few but the best really do. No jargon, no mystery and certainly no trying to write for the academic.

I do have two criticisms of the book. I wanted to hear more from the elite of political reporting. It was as if they kept some of their secrets to themselves or perhaps this is a cunning ploy by Gunn to write a second book? The other fault is that it is aimed at a niche market. This book will not be recommended by those on politics courses or, dare I say, useful to them because it is not analytical enough. And conversely some journalism courses will also wonder about the merits of putting it on their reading lists because they will think it too detailed. But I would argue that this is a must for any wannabe reporter just starting out. Put simply: it is a collection of useful recollections from those who have been there, done it and bought the tee-shirt.

Barnie Choudhury is a former BBC news and social affairs correspondent and a principal lecturer in journalism at the University of Lincoln

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CORRECTION

In the article The ethics of spoilers by David Shaw (*Ethical Space*, Vol. 8, Nos 1 and 2 pp 41-43) a spoiler warning was accidentally deleted at the editorial stage. Anyone unfamiliar with Phillip Pullman's *His dark materials* should avoid reading the section entitled Fake spoilers on page 41. In addition, the last sentence of the article should read: 'Careless talk spoils art, and should be avoided – unless spreading spoilers is actually your idea of fun.'

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