

Research Assessment #3

Date: 9/13/2020

Subject: Ethical Dilemmas in Journalism

MLA Citation:

Davenport, Lucinda D. "A Question of Journalism Ethics." *Syracuse Scholar*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1979, pp. 6–11.

Sager, Mike. "The Fabulist Who Changed Journalism." *Columbia Journalism Review*, 2016, www.cjr.org/the_feature/the_fabulist_who_changed_journalism.php.

Assessment:

For this research assessment, I continued to look into Lucinda Davenport's standpoint on ethics in journalism. While the previous part of the article mainly focused on the importance of remaining unbiased and objective when writing a piece, this portion focuses on the different ethical guidelines and different ways modern journalists are being confronted with ethical training and practices today.

In the article, Davenport defines ethics as "the study of standards of conduct and moral judgment or the system of morals of a particular person or group" (Davenport 6). The way that I view ethics in journalism is as a set of lines you should not cross in your writing to protect the person or group you are writing about as well as yourself. This includes situations such as changing information to fit your argument, leaking private information without permission, or lying in your writing. There have been many big debates on what constitutes a breach of ethics. An example referred to by Davenport was the Janet Cooke (Davenport 7). Davenport did not go into detail about that case so I decided to look into it on my own. Janet Cooke was a journalist who wrote a report on impoverished children in slums from third world countries and won a Pulitzer Prize, but after further investigation, it was found that the children in the report never existed (Sager). While I agree that what Cooke did was unethical and violated the trust of her readers and constituents she was attempting to shine a light on an actual issue and accomplished that but in a bad way.

Instances like this and many others have led to the overall levels of trust the public has in journalists to diminish drastically. This issue of distrust has only increased exponentially since the 2016 election and the rise of blatantly false information being passed as news. I believe that this distrust in media has contributed to the division in political and social groups in recent years because with so many unreliable sources people pick and choose what narratives support their beliefs, ideas, and agendas. Davenport later goes on to say how the sudden rise of false news has revealed the lack of accountability most journalists have. The lack of accountability and ethics breaches has become so common that most larger news organizations have specialized lawyers on retainer to help protect the writers and the companies (Davenport 7). I think the lack of accountability and the negligence of many of the current reporters is awful and betrays the trust of the public. Without the trust of the public, there is no use for journalists. There are some groups and organizations that attempt to teach good ethical practices and techniques as well as networks of journalists who assist each other with peer review, as well as having reliable sources and information. I think these are really good ways to help curb the misconduct in the journalism industry in the future but as of right now there are still many who do not follow ethical codes.

In conclusion, I gained a wider view of the controversies in the journalism industry as well as efforts to end those controversies. I also have a better idea of how important journalism is as a profession and that it is entirely based on trust between the reporter/ writer and the general public, and once that trust is damaged it can have lasting and dangerous effects on the sociopolitical structure of a place. This will cause me to pay much closer attention to my future research and writings and to try to foresee the effects of my actions not only as a result of my writings but as well as my regular everyday actions.