

## **15<sup>th</sup> Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism**

**Day 1, April 4, 2013: Morning Session – 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.**  
***Journalism Ethics and Values: Challenges in the Digital Age***

**Chair & Presenter: Tom Rosenstiel**, Executive Director at **American Press Institute**

### **Panelists:**

- **John Cook**, Editor-in-Chief at **First Look Media's** Digital Magazine **Intercept**, Former Editor-in-Chief at **Gawker**
- **Jane Singer**, Professor at **City University London / University at Iowa**
- **Sylvia Stead**, Public Editor at **The Globe and Mail, Canada**
- **Edward Wasserman**, Dean at **UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism**

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**John Cook:** So, I'm going to be brief. I don't really have much of a presentation. I think I'm here to argue against ethics in journalism. [*laughter*] I suspect that I was invited here because I gave an interview to Sylvia's newspaper a couple of months ago where the reporter asked me my thoughts on ethics in journalism. And my answer was that I think of journalism ethics in the same way I think of plumber ethics, which is that I think we are all as people bound by certain ethical precepts: don't lie to people, don't steal, don't break the law. But the sort of superstructure of professional ethics that have been applied on top of journalism as a profession, I think, have been used in a lot of ways to keep out people who aren't in the priesthood, to give a sense that there's something special and unique about what we do, and elevate our profession over the sort of whole ploy, and I don't think that's really a good thing. So, when I confront ethical questions in my career, I look at them as a person interacting with other people and try to do right by them...as opposed to as a member of a class.

So, you know, before I came here I was looking at the Society of Professional Journalists' ethical guidelines. And, you know, it's useful, but it says things like, "Don't plagiarize," which I don't really consider to be a professional obligation on journalists as much a sort of moral and ethical obligation on people. And another one that was in there is, "Don't use misleading headlines," which I think the ship has sailed on that one. [*some laughter*] And it sailed in the tabloid era. You know, that's sort of the point of tabloid journalism is to use sensational headlines to draw people into your stories.

In terms of the way technology has affected the way we approach ethical questions, I think one of the reasons that I like to think of my ethical obligations not in a professional context but just in a personal context is that, obviously, almost everyone in America—and I don't know what the sort of broadband penetration is globally—but a helluva lot of people around the

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world have access to exactly the same audience that I do potentially. So, you know, a lot of the ethical questions that I've confronted as a reporter and as an editor at Gawker are often about how I approach doing stories that there might be good reasons not to do, but are already on the internet.

When Richard Ingle was kidnapped in Syria—or they didn't know he was kidnapped, he disappeared in Syria—that story was in Turkish media, it was on twitter, it was everywhere. And one of the questions I had to confront was, well, you know, it's out there on the internet. I've just got one little website over here. Probably more people have read it on Twitter and in Turkish media than will ever read it on Gawker. But what's the ethical responsibility that I have to him and to his colleagues in terms of disclosing that information and pointing people to the fact of it in all these other outlets?

I think one of the things that technology has done is, we talk about the sort of promise of the citizen journalist, which I think a lot of people talked about that in terms of individual access to internet technology and being able to find large audiences even if all you have is a Twitter feed, that that would somehow involve an elevation of the citizen to the level of journalist. And I think what I prefer is devolution of the journalist to the level of citizen, so that what we're doing is communicating with one another conversationally. And the ethical considerations in that are about the same ethical considerations that you would have when you're talking to your friends. That there is not much of a difference anymore between, you know, communicating two people over Twitter and communicating to a large audience over a website...at least not much of a difference in ethical terms.

The other point I want to make—and I'll conclude with this—is that some fantastic journalism has been produced using extremely unethical and potentially criminal means. You know, the sort of avatar of the great story is Watergate. And in pursuing Watergate, Carl Bernstein called a friend of his at the phone company and pulled someone's phone records. Now, that act would arguably be criminal today. It certainly stretches the bounds of what most of the sort of priesthood would describe as ethical journalism, but it was an integral part of landing that story. They also—I don't remember if it was Woodward or Bernstein that did it—but they also pulled someone's credit card records, because someone had a friend at the bank.

So, when we talk about these ethical issues, we need to remember that.... You know, Sylvia mentioned sort of thinking situationally, that there are a lot of situations in which, you know, if we're going to speak in broad, strict terms about the proper behavior of someone we're going to call a journalist.... And I don't call myself a journalist, by the way, because I like to have a ready answer to a question that I frequently get, which is, how can you call yourself a journalist? [*laughter*] I call myself a reporter and an editor. But, you know, when we address these questions, we need to remember that, you know, those kinds of tactics have landed huge stories.

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And I really didn't.... You know, in the era of Watergate, those acts, which they revealed.... And, you know, if you read the book, *All the Presidents Men*, they're kind of ashamed of that. Like, they realize that these tactics stretched the bounds. And, you know, if that had been disclosed today, I think, in a similar story, it would potentially shut the story down. It would be used to discredit the reporters and discredit the reporting.

Same way in the Chiquita banana case in the Cincinnati Enquirer, which was as far as I know, an accurate story, but the reporters used -- they got access to the Chiquita banana's voicemail system. And instead of just the source giving them audio files, they actually used the password to access the system, which was a crime. And the result of that was that the story was discredited even though the facts of the story were, as far as I know, not in question. Some of the other people on the panel might know a little bit more about the case. And I think, you know, we need to think about the consequences of applying these kind of strict standards to individual stories.

Another one that comes up a lot is the Telegraph in England did a tremendous service to the people of that country by revealing the expenses - - that the members of parliament used taxpayer dollars to pay for the upkeep of their moats and other insane things: to pay for two houses, one of which they rented out and got income from. They were huge abuses. And they paid for that information. And in the context of American journalism, that's an ethical no-no. Well, you know, is it worth abiding by these rules if at the end of the day you're actually not getting out that vital information?

And I guess I'll end with, you know, one of the other things that comes up when we talk about the ethics of reporting. Frequently, we push off the ethical -- the dirty part of the ethical decisions onto our sources so that we can keep clean. An example would be a situation like the Chiquita banana situation. If that source had simply, you know, committed the ethical and potentially criminal violations by accessing the voicemail system and giving it to the reporter, the reporter would be able to keep his or her hands clean.

I had a similar situation where, when I was at Gawker, someone hacked into Mitt Romney's email. And they sent me an email that said, "I've hacked into Mitt Romney's email. I have his password." And that was it. And what I *wanted* to do and what I would have done if like a friend of mine had said this is, "Well, shit, what's in it?" But I couldn't because it would have been criminal. It was a criminal act to hack into his email and it would have implicated me in a conspiracy. So, I just had to say, "Wow!" [*laughter*] And, you know, what I really, really wanted him to do was for *him* to take the burden of the unethical behavior and then just give me the benefits of it. And in which case I would have printed plenty of it, because I'm sure a lot of it would have been newsworthy. But at the end of the day, he didn't give me anything and he eventually got -- I think he was arrested. I think he was Canadian actually. [*laughter*]

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So, I'll end with that story. One of the things to keep in mind is that part of what we do when we purport to behave ethically is, we're actually asking other people to behave unethically.

[Applause.]

**Jane Singer:** Great. Thanks, Tom. Thanks very much to Rosental. Everyone has said this, but I want to just add thanks to Rosental and Amy and everyone who's put this conference together. It's fantastic, and I'm really delighted to be here. So, we're all doing something a little bit different and then we'll come together and talk about whatever you'd like to talk about, some of Tom's points that he made at the start.

But I want to talk a little bit about an aspect of ethics, journalism ethics, related to change, which is what I'm most interested in.

**Rosental Calmon Alves:** A little closer [to the mike].

**Jane Singer:** A little closer. Oh, there we go. Oh, that's better, but scary. Which is the way that ethics are appropriated, sometimes appropriately, I think, and sometimes not, as a defensive mechanism of resistance to change. So, kind of controversial as well. Not so controversial probably as what John had to say, but let's see what you think about this.

So, I want to suggest, and I do hope we'll get to talk about this, that journalists in particular tend to use—sorry about that—tend to use ethics as kind of a boundary marker. So, we use that as a way to distinguish the familiar—the thing that we know and the ethics of doing it that we understand—from the unknown and the things that are accompanied by some amount of fear, because we don't know very much about them. And when we do that, I think we tend to couch that in ethical terms. So when we define who we are and what we do—and actually John's a good setup for this, because he kind of talked about this—we tend to say, "Well, we do these things because we're journalists and because we have this sort of sense of what journalism ethics is," which is fine. But the problem, I think, is that we tend to -- when we do that, we tend to look at every single new thing that comes along as this terrible, terrible challenge to our ethical standards, [so] that we start with resistance. That's kind of the point of what I want to talk about today.

And I think that comes in two flavors. I think it comes in terms of the people who are in fact doing that new thing are not journalists. So, that's one flavor. Therefore, because they are not upholding the standards that we uphold, that's one flavor. And the other thing is that we are going to have to do that new thing. You know, we can see it coming. We're going to have to do that new thing. And when we do, it will compromise our ethical standards. So, I think that journalists tend to react that way.

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And I want to go through some examples, which are totally cherry picked, but examples of things that journalists say. And then I want to toss out there the sense that I'm a strong believer in the need and the centrality of ethical standards in whatever kind of environment we're in, but that that automatic reaction is kind of an overreaction. And it's starting to get on my nerves, and in addition to starting to get on my nerves, I think that a better approach would be to say, "Here's this new thing that's coming along," to think from the start about how we can take our ethical sensibilities and adapt to it. So, that's what I want to [do is] kind of throw some quotes out there at you and talk about [them] a little bit, starting from a more proactive stance instead of a reactive stance in saying, "This doesn't fit, so it's not going to work for us."

So, I'm going to take this chronologically with some of the quotes over the years that some of the people in the room have gathered from journalists, things that journalists have said and they quoted. Yes, I am cherry picking here. There certainly are many, many journalists, all of you, and many other journalists besides who have been vocal from the very start with new things that come along, and their excitement about it, or their commitment to doing it well and doing it in ethical ways. Nonetheless, I would suggest that some of the quotes on the screen are not -- I mean, yes, they are cherry picked from some of the research, but they are not unique in the way that journalists have reacted to some new things.

You can go back before the internet, but we'll start with the internet in the interest of time here. So, I've got some quotes here on the slide on the screen. I don't know if you can see them all that well. But basically what journalists said when the internet came along is, "Well, it's obviously a very quick medium. It emphasizes speed. That's going to be a problem, because how are we going to get it right if we're really focused on getting it out there quickly?" We used to have this ability to think about -- to verify the information. Sorry. To think about whether it's right or not. Now that's going to go away. There's a lot of false information out there, so that raises some accountability issues. How are we going to be accountable for all this information? How are we going to possibly deal with the volume of it? There's issues about the kind of overall public service norm. That this is a detriment to an informed public; for instance, because you can be very focused on what you're interested [in] and ignore everything else. Concerns that we still hear today. And then the last one, another concern we still hear today. It's been exacerbated, of course, by web analytics and traffic data. That we're going to be so hungry for an audience. Now we know who that audience is [and] we're going to be servants to them.

So, these were concerns that came up. Most of these quotes are from the 1990s. So, these were concerns that came up right at the start with online journalism.

Next, we had a trend toward multimedia and convergence. I kind of lumped those together, so the idea, which of course has continued on, that... These

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quotes that I'm giving you are particularly coming out of sort of the dot-com bubble era. So, there was a response in news organizations to have journalists do more things, as you'll recall, those of you who lived through it. So, there was a trend toward everyone producing content across platforms, so print journalists shooting video and so on. It seems so obvious now, but that was a big deal ten years ago. So, these are some the reactions to that. "I went to j-school to be a journalist, not to be a multimedia person, not to be a TV person, not to multitask." I can still hear it. This is a quote from one my studies. I can still hear this guy. He was just seething. He was seething. "I've never liked TV journalism. I always that it was abhorrent. It's a sub-species." He went on. This quote went on for a while. "There's time constraints. I have to rush to the newsroom. I can't stay and do the real reporting, because I've got to rush back, and I've got to edit my video, and I've got to do all this other stuff." It seems so innocent and simple now. [chuckles] But this was a concern when it first came along ten years ago—the time constraint. The concern about it being more entertainment oriented, and so that's going to be a problem.

Then we have bloggers. I'm not going to go on forever with this, but to give you.... You know, it's the reaction every time is the point that I'm trying to make here. So, then we have bloggers. So, again, early 2000s. We're now into early-to-mid 2000s. It was the rise of the blogs as a more dominant media form. So now, we have this clear attempt to draw lines in the sand, right? Lines in the cyber sand. "I'm a real journalist because I follow certain ethical guidelines. And those bloggers, those horrible people in their pajamas—" that's the stereotype—"they don't do those things." So, it's vanity journalism. "Oh, look at me. I can post. Isn't this great." Well, that doesn't make you a journalist, sorry. "Bloggers publish because they hear 'something' from 'someone' who's 'reliable'. That's not good enough." "Blogging is just hype dished out by the unemployable to the aimless." I mean, there were lots of quotes. It was great. I mean, they're very articulate quotes, but that was in large part the response until journalists themselves started really getting seriously into blogging and then things changed, which is also my point, which I'll get to at the end. That last one, by the way, is a quote from a writer from Advertising Age who was declaring essentially—it was from a longer piece—that there was no commercial feature in new media forms such as blogs, and sadly, some publishers seemed to believe that. So, that kind of led them astray a bit.

User-generated content. I'm going to fly through because I don't want to take up all the time on the quotes. You get the idea. So, late 2000s. Now, we're wrestling with mostly comments at this stage and then more consternation about that. "It's not factual. It's not trustworthy. How can we check it out? They're not professionals. They're not journalists." You can see the theme here.

Then the last one of these that I have, because you do *clearly* see the theme and get the idea, is social media. So, bringing us kind of more or less up to

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today; although, this morning we've already gone on well past that and raised other issues as well. And again, there have been many positive reactions, but there also have been quite a few negative ones. And I'm picking some of those out. So, ethical terms again. So, Twitter users, Facebook user, whatever, "They do these things, but we the real journalists—kind of what John was alluding to—we don't do them." So, you know, there's all these quacks. There's all this junk out there. "We disseminate news that's reliable. Reliance on Twitter and Facebook is throwing the door open to *everyone!* And that's a terrible thing."

So, you get the idea. This has been a common theme for 20 years now as each new technology has come along. And it was a theme, actually, to some extent before with other new technologies, but starting just with the internet here. And so I want to suggest—I've got two more slides—that we kind of draw a deep breath here, which again, you as an audience, you're way past there, but a lot of your colleagues are not necessarily past there. I do think there's a value. Clearly, there's a value. We're kind of all here talking about it. In revisiting our foundational norms and thinking deeply about them, and thinking about our values, and thinking about why we hold them, there is a reason. They do [have] sort of a fundamental purpose. Credibility is what we have. If we lose that, then we really don't have any value. So, it's not that I'm arguing against having ethics by any means or having these values or even articulating these values. As new things come along, I think there's a value in that.

And yet when we look back now, I mean, some of those quotes just seem silly. Because when you look back now from a not very distant perspective—a couple of years in some cases—you can argue, I think, I would argue that every single one of those changes has ultimately given us better journalism, better examples of what I think we probably would all agree is some pretty fine journalism. Fine journalism that's reached more people. It's been more accessible. It's been more effective. It's been more—whatever you define. It's been more engaging. Whatever you define as being good journalism, these tools have enabled us to do not just good journalism, but in fact better journalism, I would argue, than we might have been able to do without them.

Tom, among other people, but certainly Tom has been saying early and often that the crisis we're going through, have been going through and seem to be coming out of, to some extent now, it's a financial crisis. It's not a journalistic crisis. It's a financial crisis. And so, I think what we've tended to do in responding to these technologies is that we've kind of been mistaking the effect for the cause. The cause of these ethical breeches—and you can point to many ethical breeches and concerns—the cause, I would argue, is not the internet or multimedia or bloggers or social media, it's a lack of resources for dealing with them. It's an economic cause. And so, I think we're making kind of a logical mistake there. And I think we're going to keep making it until we get to not just digital first, but flexibility first. And until we

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can do that, we're going to keep losing a lot of time on angst that could be more productively used.

My last slide. Just take one example of social media, which, you know, again, I'm kind of preaching to the choir in this room, but not necessarily in this industry. "I've seen the future and it's mutual." -Alan Rusbridger at the Guardian, a very forward-thinking journalist, and we need a lot more editors like him. But look at all the benefit. Look at all the ways that we have.... Actually, as we've gotten into using social media and have figured out how to use them well, we've actually strengthened our ethics. You look at some of the verification policies [of] organizations like the Associated Press. They've got like a nine-step thing on top of their normal thing that they do in verifying information, to verify information for social media. They're making more certain, in fact, that what they've got is credible before they put it out there.

Obviously the diversity of views. We all talk about that and know about that and it's real. There are more view. There's more information getting out there because of this technology. The speed, the tips, the insights. We're getting great stuff.

And then the last two, which I think are really important, is that there is in fact more accountability, and there's more transparency, [which is] something that, again, Tom, Jay, I know is here, and a whole lot of other people have talked about the importance of being accountable, the importance of being transparent, the importance of telling people what you do. Sylvia's point, absolutely, earlier on. Well, we're actually more so than we were before, not less so.

So, I'll stop there. That's my last slide. Thanks for your patience. And I hope we can talk about all these things. Thank you.

**Sylvia Stead:** So, the topic of this question, as Tom gave us, was the evolution of ethics. And I want to go back into the distant mists of time to say, this was journalism then. This was the voice of God talking to you. And you can imagine that TV voice and those radio voices. They were very authoritative. People trusted everything they said. But it was also very paternalistic. It was very closed. It was a complete one-way conversation at the listener, the reader, the viewer. People had no idea really what were the standards behind things. And if something went wrong with what Mr. Cronkite said, maybe the audience would know, but there was not this discussion about media rights and ethics that goes on today. So, that was then.

So now, you've seen a much better demonstration that I can give now from the earlier session about drones and bots and Google Glass and all the things that are going on, which you cannot imagine a more different culture in

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terms of what's happening with journalism than what's happening today and what's going to be happening in the next few years.

So now, things are open. Things are very transparent with the readers. They know what you're doing. They know what they want. The reporting comes as much from the citizen journalists as they do from the other journalists. And we storify and we make stories out of them. Just one example. Last week in Toronto, there was a shooting in a courthouse. A man tried to get in, was shot by the police and killed, and the police officer was fairly seriously wounded by a weapon that he had. And what happened there was we were not allowed in. Journalists are not allowed in. It's on lockdown. So, we and everyone else in the city reported using live video from someone who was there. Tweets, phone conversations. So that, what that does is it requires a different way of looking at ethics and standards. It's certainly more democratic, which is great. It's more fun. It's more relaxed. It's less corporate. Less talking at people and more talking with the reader and trying to understand what they want. And you really need to now make it a two-way street and nurture the engagement with those readers.

OK. So, technology, again, has been explained far better than I could. But one of the things you need to think about, in my world at least, is, as a journalist, you still need to verify. You still need to make sure that this is right. Because if it's wrong and you're curating, it's your reputation. It's your reputation personally if things go wrong. It's your organization's reputation if things go wrong. So again, you need to be right before you're first. You need to be open about your standards.

The self-cleaning oven theory is a good one, which is you put things out there and your readers will help you correct. And I get that all the time. I get a lot of readers writing in and saying, "This is wrong, and that is wrong." And we have a very smart audience, but that's not the full story. It's very important if you recognize a mistake to fix it right away, because you can't count on readers going back and reading subsequent things online to make sure it's right. So, that's not an excuse to be cavalier about the facts. You have to do the best you can with the facts. Now that said, we all make mistakes. There are errors made every day. And you have to be open about it and very upfront about what went wrong and what you're going to do about it.

So, you all remember this. And you know how quickly your reputation can be destroyed by something... No, she's not a journalist, but [she is] unbelievably stupid. [*laughter*] And we've seen others. Lots of other Twitter examples. Here's one I wanted to go into a little bit. So, the Globe and Mail is a traditional newspaper. It's been around for—I don't know—140 years. Canada's national newspaper. [It] does business [and] does politics very well. And we had a story online that basically said, "Local man in coma." "In a butter coma," was the headline on it. Now, just all of you here are very smart journalists. Just think for a minute. You read something that says,

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"Butter coma, 413 butter biscuits," and if that isn't enough of a clue that this is a hoax, it says, which you probably can't read there, "Arkansas's second most unreliable news source," right on the website. [laughter] So, that's a very bad mistake to make. And it was done on something called The Hot Button Blog. Readers are all over us. We also had various companies, who write about media ethics and hoaxes, say, "Globe and Mail suckered by this." So, what do you do about it? So for me—there we go—lesson number one is, be transparent about it. Oh, yeah, I know it's not. Thank you. Be transparent about your mistake. Tell the readers right away, "We were hoaxed too." Say that. Leave it up. Don't take the site down. Don't take the story down. There were two or three other mainstream media caught in the same hoax. Most of them just took it out and had an error link. We keep it up. We say right in the top, "We were hoaxed on this." I wrote a blog explaining what went wrong and what was learned from it. So, you can't fool the readers, and you can't hide your mistakes.

So, one of the top questions that Tom had was, culture is merging. And there's no question that that is happening [and] that all of the legacy media, the organizations that have been around for a while, are learning or adapting or writing a lot more about -- as they drive the clicks on it.

And, you know, two of the biggest stories for us in terms of online are our two Canadian bad boys. And we know who they are -- Justin Bieber and Rob Ford. Now these things are out there. These are kind of pat coverage, a lot of them. Not something exclusive. So, you've got two things going on there. There's been a lot of exclusive coverage about the Ford family; some done by The Globe, some The Toronto Star, and some done by Gawker under John Cook. But you have to think more about those core stories and your brand, that everything is situational. That if you make a mistake about a Justin Bieber story, people don't really care so much. Our audience wouldn't really care so much. But if you had a major error or an ethical slip on something about Canadian politics or business, the readers would be very upset, because they have a trust with you on these stories. They know what you stand for, and you really have to honor that trust.

So, Canadian standards are a bit different than the U.S. Part of it is probably our spread-out country. Unlike Britain, it grew up. It was based on home deliveries as opposed to newsstand sales. So, it is more about that relationship with the reader, rather than the big, flashy headline. Libel laws—we have no out about public figures. In fact, our libel laws are stricter about what we say about public figures. That makes a difference. Canada also has a very international way of looking at the world, because we're a small country and because we are a nation of immigrants. So, we tend to write about the world. And, of course, as with everywhere, you get more and more opinion stories and advocacy.

So, just to wrap up, I think the basic standards don't change, which is fairness, balance, and transparency. So, being up front with the readers

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[and] including them. Also, not giving up on the basic core of journalism, which is to challenge authority, to do reality checks, to write critically and tell people about what's going on, because that is our number one mission. And a couple of things that I see kind of looming in the future, in terms of ethical issues [that] are especially happening in the Europe and the UK, is a growing movement about the right to privacy, the right to disappear from stories. We have a policy of *don't unpublish*, but that kind of thing is probably going to be under some pressure in the future.

So, that's it. Thank you.

[Applause.]

**Edward Wasserman:** Well, good morning. It is a great pleasure and an honor to be here. This is an outstanding panel. It's a little daunting as an academic to be talking to a room full of civilians. I have this new obligation to be brief, but to be clear, and nobody has any need to laugh at my jokes. I'm also doing this without any stage craft. I may surprise you later when the flying monkeys come in, but for the most part, it's just going to be words and thoughts. My comments right now are going to be largely confined in the U.S. tradition. I've lived long enough abroad to know that traditions of journalism practice, institutional environments, and notions of obligation and duty among journalists differ very much, as do the rules of discourse. And I'm sorry for that, but it's taken me a long time to speak with any sort of sure-footedness about the U.S., and I wouldn't presume to do so about other cultures. I hope, at least, that what I have to say will be sort of valid outside of the state of Texas.

So first, let me suggest by starting -- let me start by suggesting, I should say, that we have never had a body of ethical doctrine for journalism that was unitary, stable, and authoritative. And this idea that we're now seeing threats to a widely accepted and commonly understood body of duties and obligations is really false—historically false. We have had... We are the heirs to parallel traditions of journalism. Think magazines, tabloids, broadsheets, documentary film, partisan newspapers, sectarian newspapers, alternative press, trade press. All of them were practiced within different entities. They were often competitive. They often had incompatible practices with one another, conflicting normative traditions of engagement, truth telling, [and] advocacy. And it would be wrong for us to think that some were rogues, some were outliers, some were indifferent to ethical concerns, and others were the bearers of the truth. That's not the way it ever was, and so setting the stage for this situation we are in now, it's important to realize that a multiplicity and a fractured journalism environment is not a new thing. It is and always been the norm.

And you saw that in the way persuasive content was viewed—the permissibility. Some of the mainstream so-called press consigned persuasive content to opinion pages, others saw it as an appropriate theme to introduce

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and reportage. So, documentary film allowed overt collaboration with sources, which many journalists would consider to be anathema. So, all of these reflected different notions of engagement, different aesthetics, different aspirations when it came to effectiveness, quality, optimality, and they defined professional rights and wrongs differently and recognized different norms. And as then, as now, there was serious wrangling over expressive limits, sensationalism versus sobriety. There was wrangling over evidentiary standards. When do you have a story nailed down enough that it's publishable? You had dedication to different notions of public service. You had questions of what fair-mindedness required, what a willingness to submit to the discipline of empirical fact obligated the journalist to do. And this is the terrain of values on which the current conversation about ethics takes place now in the digital age.

So, what shapes and reshapes ethics? Tom has, I think, correctly introduced technology as a major driver in the ethical conversation. And I'm going to talk about technology briefly. And I also want to talk about four other areas, again, briefly, which each of these areas has had and continues to have major impact on shaping and reshaping our notions of what reporters ought to do.

First, there's *audience enfranchisement*. Secondly, *industrial rivalry*. Third, what I'll call *revenue anarchy*. And finally, *institutional frailty*.

Now, the technology, we're going to talk about that a lot. I think I would just caution you, and I'm sure I don't need to tell my panelists, we ought to be careful not to blame the tools overly. Tools enable, they don't require. If conscious choices needed to be made to ramp up the velocity of the news cycle, digital technology made that possible. It didn't obligate legacy news media to wave or relax the standards of when something was adequate to publish. They did that because their marketing strategy obligated them. It drove them, they thought, to be able to have credibility and legitimacy online. They wanted to stake their flag. They wanted to be the first, if not necessarily the best. And the distinction as a result between conversation and publication is collapsing, and I think there's serious harms that are involved in that. We'll come back to that later. But technology does transform the ethical terrain. It creates new incentives. It creates new opportunities.

Tools do confer obligations. You can't have *should* if you don't have *can*. When telephones were placed on reporters' desks, the failure to get comment from somebody named in a story became malpractice. Because it didn't require a three-hour carriage ride to a distant suburb that would have caused them to miss their deadline as part of a new cycle—itsself an artifact of technology.

Now, you have reporters get inflows of emails. And what we should see and probably are seeing emerge is a duty to read them, a duty to listen, which is

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not something that reporters were ever admonished to do, at least in my many years in newsrooms.

And maybe this vast expansion of communicative and expressive capability creates a whole set of obligations when it comes to aesthetics and quality and impact. Maybe we're getting to the point where an ethical reporter has to be able to avail himself or herself of a full range of technological proficiencies to be able to bring a story to the reader or to the viewer in the most high impact, most effective way. So in other words, the technology creates the tool. It creates areas of *don't*. It also may create areas of *must*. So, we'll come back to technology.

A second point I wanted to raise has to do with enfranchisement of the audience. I'm calling this *selected enfranchisement*, because clearly there's a wider population of communicants who are involved in setting standards and asserting values now than had been the case 20 years ago. I don't think.... I know every time there's technological change, particularly, in the communications industry, there's a lot of millennialist rhetoric. There's a lot of atmosphere of celebration. There's a lot of talk about the expansion of communications democracy. We don't know whether we have a democratic regime arising or whether we're talking more of a populist one. And we don't know whether the influence of these other folks is limited to rare and colorful cases in which narrow enthusiasms are involved. Journalism ethics have always lurched from what Jeremy Iggers, ethicist, in Minnesota, calls *officially recognized cases* from one to the next. And usually the reason these cases get their notoriety has to do with the fact that people in influence within the industry want to make a point. Hence, Jayson Blair became an exemplar of the rogue reporter.

But recently I've seen the Grantland case. Some of you may be familiar with [it], where a transgender person was outed in the course of reporting and killed herself. There was enormous.... I was impressed by the passion and the sincerity of the outcry that surrounded that, which was very much an online phenomenon.

All right. So, third point, *industrial rivalry*. I just want to introduce a notion. The language of ethics has long been used as a weapon in the battle for audience and advertising revenues between rivals in the news business, and so it is now. The tabloid press in its day was deplored for its sensationalism. Upstart TV network proclaims itself fair and balanced unlike its competitors. Ethical language used to buttress market ambitions. And now, the criticism that legacy media are resting their authority on some discredited notion of objectivity, right? When practitioners need to disclose their preferences and predispositions is a powerful criticism. And on the other side, legacy press castigates the online rivals for cavalierly disregarding standards of verification in their haste to publish first. Well, my point here is that industrial rivalry avails itself of the language of ethics in order to pursue strategies.

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My fourth point, *revenue anarchy*. This is a big area. Just briefly, business turbulence has forced media organizations and individual journalists to make choices that traditionally would be considered prone to corruption. The decline of the ad revenue model. The search for philanthropic sources of support for media organizations has opened up the door to areas of influence over news agendas that the advertising support model rarely had to contend with quite so flagrantly.

Native advertising and other mutant forms are rising. Paid placement is seeming a much more attractive option. And now we see the language of transparency abused, in my view, to mask that and to basically say that it's okay—paid placement—as long as it's disclosed, because everybody else who's communicating has ulterior motives too.

All right. My final point, *institutional frailty*. I worry about the absence -- for the most part, and one of our panelists today is a happy exception to that, but the absence of new institutions operating in the new sphere that embrace their role as civic actors and have an interest in promoting the notion of journalists as professionals who recognize public obligation. I remember listening to Carl Bernstein saying Watergate was about a newspaper, not about a reporter. And I think that, historically, professional ethics has been articulated alongside a claim for professional privilege, and it required institutions to go to the mat and to be the carriers of that doctrine. And I worry now—just my final point—[that] the business trajectory of new age media organizations is short-term and transactional, and they're looking not to make a difference but to make a killing.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

### **Q&A Session**

**Tom Rosenstiel:** So, let me just start with a question. Ed, you talked about how technology enables, but it doesn't require. What are the sort of golden rules that we want -- that we would not technology to force us to abandon? Are there? And John, you talked about them as sort of human golden rule kind of rules. What are the two or three big things that we want to make sure we're not pushed into doing?

**Edward Wasserman:** Well, I'm bridling a little bit at the question, because I'd rather not dwell on the possibilities of technology inducing us to do evil. I think technology challenges us to redefine and reaffirm sort of the core practice of journalism. And how does journalism differ from other modes, if it evolved, to talk about what's happening around us? Or does it differ? Does journalism exist as a separate kind of discourse? A separate social practice? And I think it does. I think at the extremes, we know journalism is different

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from propaganda, because propaganda makes a corrupt use of fact. We know it's different from gossip, because gossip makes an inadequate effort to determine what fact is. And we know that journalism has a core public service motivation. At least, I think we know that. So, the question is, how do you...? And I think Jane's critique was really very interesting. And I think that I strongly agree with the notion of ethics being kind of trotted out, being hauled out as a set or prohibitions. And I think John's point also.... He was reacting to the notion that ethical conduct consisted of a sort of random application of mindless rules or sort of a brainless sort of deference to law, when in fact, ethics is in the business of telling law what it ought to be.

So, I'm dancing around your question a little bit, because I would rather not be sort of Dr. No and look at the ways that ethics should be resisting change, when in fact, one of the points I was trying to make is that ethical practice in journalism requires us to embrace these new tools, because there are far more effective and far more compelling ways to share the truths about significant realities around us that is the core of the journalism practice.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** Better answer than question; although, Dr. No's gotten cool again apparently.

**Edward Wasserman:** Always was cool.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** John, you, at Gawker, you were in the business of traveling in gossip and rumor, right?

**John Cook:** [Nods yes.]

**Tom Rosenstiel:** So, how does that square with this notion that we should take some responsibility for what it is that we pass along, about whether it's true or not?

**John Cook:** Well, I mean, we tried to.... I guess the goal at Gawker was honesty as perhaps distinct from accuracy. So, and mostly that was a function of the fact that a lot of this stuff that we were doing.... If we had an exclusive thing, if we had something that came into us, we would do -- you know, we reported it out. We wouldn't just like throw tips up on the internet. Sometimes we might as a blind item. But, you know, we would, because it's more valuable to us if we can nail it down. And it's a better story. And the goal is good stories. But when we were addressing things that were out there that are on the internet that people are already talking about, part of our job is to, you know, address what's already sort of been disclosed. And again, like I was saying, a lot of sort of those process and ethical questions would come up, like, "Do we address this or not?" And at the end of the day, the key value for us was to do it honestly. I don't know if it's true or not, but enough people are talking about it that you've probably already heard about it. "Here are the efforts that we've undertaken to find out if it is true or not."

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But that was a function of the fact that it's such a leaky environment. There's so much data out there careening around the internet. And when one of your jobs is to present what the news is on the internet, you have to find ways to do that. And I don't see anything particularly, you know, troublesome about - or troubling about, you know, reporting things that people are talking about and reporting them in an honest way, saying what we know [and] what we don't know, "These are the efforts that we've taken to access it, and this is what's out there." And it's always a case by case basis. You know, it's situational. But does this story merit something? Does it not merit something? You know, that's how we would approach it.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** So, but then, it's not a self-cleaning oven. You're actually going in and saying, "Well, we want to scrub on this one. We need to do some..."

**John Cook:** Right, I mean, depending on the story. And again, if it was an exclusive thing, like, we wouldn't want to be the only people reporting something if we didn't have it, you know, nailed down to our satisfaction. But, you know, it is, you know, if there's a story.... I'm trying to think of a good example. Nothing is really coming to mind. But, you know, if there's a story that people are out there talking about, and it's already sort of being distributed in various forms, you know, we want to, you know, bring it to people's attention as something that is a conversation out there, after we've at least done some diligence to figure out what we know about it.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** So, let me pose a question that sort of picks up on that for you as the public editor of a paper or a publishing organization. We're at an event. Let's say one like this that is being live tweeted and webcast, and you're covering it. What if Jane, who's a well-known *exaggerationist*, makes a wild allegation about somebody—and this is a case that actually I was privy to—and says, "There's actually a coach who's molesting children at this university, and the school is covering it up, and the coach is an active coach right now." And a reporter came up to me afterwards and said, "What am I supposed to do with that? Do I report that? Not report that?" What's the responsibility? How do you live up to a notion of being accurate or having fidelity to remain truthful and presenting yourself as a good person, even, in John's lexicon?

**Sylvia Stead:** Well, I think in this case, you're really talking about a legal issue more than a moral issue, because you're talking about someone's reputation. Now, because it was said in a public place, do you have...? I don't know. I would be coming back and asking you a lot of questions as the editor. And here I'm being the assigning editor and say, "Well, did Jane name the person? Is it known who this person is? Because we can't name a person without contacting the police, the school, whoever it is. Was it a general allegation that there is someone at the school?" So, you treat it differently. You always.... I mean, you put your journalist hat on, your critical thinking hat, and you say a lot of things. So, how important is this story? Is this

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just—no offense to Jane—just Jane throwing out gossip that really doesn't impact something? So, you respond differently to, is this an allegation about the president of the university or someone in authority? So, you have to ask all these questions. You have to think about it. And at the end of the day, you have to be able to tell the world what you did and why. Which is why it's so important to think about how you're chasing a story and what you've done. You have to be able to explain what you did.

**John Cook:** And if I could make a quick point about trafficking and gossip and unverified rumor, one thing that I always try to remind people [of is], there was an orthodox Jewish gentleman who was gunned down in Brooklyn a couple of months ago, and it was a big story in New York. And if you go back and look at the New York Times' coverage of it, the Times story about this murder presenting rumors as rumor about why it happened. It was literally like, "There are many rumors about why he may have been -- in the Orthodox community, about what it was. It may have been this business deal." I mean, they just presented completely unverified rumor as rumor in a news story, you know, which I'm in favor of, but, you know, it's important to remember the sort of avatars of ethical and responsible journalism are doing that, too, when you talk about the swamp of online journalism.

And another case in the New York Times is in their coverage of the Malaysian disappeared plane. Their stories were they just quoted anonymous airplane bloggers and comments on anonymous airplane blogs. Just like quoting in the New York Times, in a news piece, theories about what may have happened from someone they have no idea who it is. It could be a nine-year-old kid. And they just put that in the paper. Again, like, you know, there are good reasons for that, but it's important to remember that these kinds of decisions are being made at those establishment institutions as well as at, you know, little websites.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** I've got to include Jane, but we've got to let Ed --

**Edward Wasserman:** No, Tom, I'll wait.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** OK. So, Jane, in the research you've done, it seems to me that the consistent sort of pattern is that people glommed onto routines and had a fidelity to these practices, which could come and go, when the larger principle was sort of the thing that is more enduring. John just talked about sort of the avatars of responsibility. I probably fall into that.

**John Cook:** I used to call you when I was a reporter to ask you if certain things were responsible or not.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** Right. So, is responsibility, I mean, is that gone, or do you have responsibilities and you live up to them in different ways? What does that word [mean] as you've thought about it and listened to all these people talk over the years?

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**Jane Singer:** Oh, no, absolutely, I don't think responsibility is gone. I think just.... Can we come back to the other discussion? There's a difference between honesty and accuracy. I mean, I think we're tending to conflate those terms and they are not the same thing. You can honest report what somebody said, but is it more broadly accurate? It may or may not be the case. That's kind of what we're getting at. But yeah, journalists do.... All of us, all professors, we learn how to do something and we're comfortable in that routine, and when something else comes along and it's going to challenge that routine, we don't want to admit that we just really don't want to get out of our safety zone, so we find another reason why this thing may need to be resisted. And I think we tend to fall back on ethics in doing that. But no, I very much think responsibility is vital. Sylvia's made this point really well [that] you have to be responsible for what you do. That is part of why people are going to come to you and not just -- why they're going to keep coming to you. It's kind of part of what your value continues to be is that responsibility.

Kind of an interesting thing that we're seeing on the internet and social media and these different formats as they emerge is that actually that responsibility is becoming more nuanced, where we're finding new ways or more explicit ways to be responsible. I think we're talking about accountability and transparency. That's really what we're talking about. You know, being responsible when all there was was the newspaper, [it] was maybe a little bit more within our own control to be responsible or not, and no one might necessarily be the wiser. We started out with Walter Cronkite and kind of that era. And now we have an environment where being responsible has to be very explicitly articulated. I think we are seeing journalists do that, and I think that's a positive thing.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** OK. So, let me just back up. Jim Bankoff in his presentation this morning talked about, we've entered a phase where a sophisticated, quality brand is actually interested in what the audience understands. Not just the content you put out, but how citizens in the end, what their comprehension is. Is that what you're responsible to? That people.... It's not just.... If you pass along things that you don't know are true or not, how do you maintain a responsibility to people understanding it well or having an accurate understanding? Or is that even possible?

**Edward Wasserman:** Well, the tools we have now enable the media to get a much better bead on what people are perceiving and what they're hearing and what they're understanding than ever before. This is not something that the media have ever been indifferent to -- the notion that they went blithely along without any concern about their audiences is a complete fiction. I was a journalist starting in the early 1970s, and news organizations were desperately eager to get as close as possible to their readers and know what they were doing and anticipate their wants. So, this gives them tools to do that better.

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I want to come around to a larger kind of question having to do with the assault on -- the questioning of ethics and the importance of ethics to the media and to journalism. And let me just suggest that the future of journalism, the future of the press... And I like that Jay Rosen continues to use that archaic term, because it sums up the kind of institutional role that the media were expected to have in this society. Their future depends very much on the embrace of a body of ethical norms. The respect they have from the audience, the respect they get from the courts, [and] the deference they get from government all depends on the perception. If there's a seriousness of purpose about journalism that is part of a civic mission to unearth significant realities and bring them to bear to enable a self-governing polity to vote in meaningful ways and take part in civic life, this is really serious high-level stuff. And time and again, you see the courts deferring to the press because they trust the press to try to do it right, to take pains to do it right, to have an absolutely important civic mission.

Now, the embodiment of that mission has to do with this conversation about ethics, about right and wrong. It's not just the blind application of foolish rules. It's not just deference to the law. And one of the problems of the current age is the institutions of the press are so weak, they are unable to stand up and defy the law in instances when they should be defying the law. So, I think we do ourselves a disservice and in some ways we imperil the press by being a little dismissive of the notion of ethics as an important area of intellectual elaboration, of moral logic, and of thinking about what professional purpose ought to be.

And while we embrace these tools, and Jane's catalog of resistance to technological change was very interesting, but let's remember, by and large, the technologists have taken over. By and large, they have won that argument. The people you're looking at now and the quotes that we are seeing seem like the utterances of dinosaurs on their way out looking at the comet coming down.

So, it's not as if the technologists are beating a hasty retreat. They won! Now, the question is, what have they won? And what are they doing with it? And we're arguing in a sort of bashful way that one of the things they should do is reanimate and reaffirm the kinds of ethics that have given the media an important role in the governing of the society.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** So, I want to go to the audience.

**John Cook:** Could I just respond to that real quick?

**Tom Rosenstiel:** Yeah.

**John Cook:** I take the point about the civic role that reporting on matters of public concern plays. I think when we talk about the deference that has been

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shown by the courts and the government to the press, I see it actually enacted the other way: the deference that the press has shown, and in many ways, the institutional press has shown to the government. And so, you know, one of the things about polite, establishment, responsible journalism is that when someone goes to Jim Risen of the New York Times and says, "George Bush is violating the constitution with an illegal surveillance program," the New York Times politely and responsibly sat on that story for a year. The ethical consideration that I would consider there, if I were in that place, would be the ethical consideration of the source who risked career and life -- well, not life, but career and criminal penalties to get that story to light. And so I would caution against trying to reanimate a sense of the primacy of a responsible establishment that's in good favor with the federal government and institutions of law, and I'd rather have a press that's aggressively combatting the mistakes those governments make.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** I do want to get to the audience, because they've been sitting and listening.

**Edward Wasserman:** If I could....

**Tom Rosenstiel:** Well, let me just say one thing about this. First of all, Jim's an old, old friend of mine, and he is not deferential to anyone. And part of what happens in a dynamic press is that you have these reporters who find things out, and then they operate within institutions that will or will not accommodate them. But it's not institutions that in the end are policing society on behalf of fellow citizens, it's actually these crazed missionary type people, whatever you call them, who want to create accountability. And Jim's just a perfect example of that. He would be doing this if no one employed him. And he'd be wandering around, coming to people and saying, "I've just discovered some amazing thing that you've got to figure out."

**John Cook:** Oh, I'm not blaming it on him. No, no, no. I'm just saying that....

**John Cook:** Yeah, yeah. My understanding is that he forced the issue with the book and that's why it went in the paper.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** Right. But the man is still there many years later at the New York Times.

**Edward Wasserman:** I need to respond. I'm not suggesting that institutions don't often behave in cowardly ways [like] in connection with Chiquita. And I think the Times has behaved in an unacceptable way toward Risen, but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm not defending cowardly and deferential institutions. I'm saying that without some underlying seriousness of purpose, you've got a problem. You've got a problem with the standing of the press and the ability of the media to do its job.

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**Tom Rosenstiel:** OK. I want to go to the audience. We're going to go over here. It's a little hard to see who's got a question. I will just say this, that even in an open economic system like we have here, an institution is a brand, and a person is a brand, and your response -- how responsible you are and the way you behave is part of whether people, I think, gravitate to you. That, I don't think has gone away, and that's part of the dynamics of all of this.

**Anna:** My name is Anna, and I work with a magazine reporting on South Asia. And in our region, I think we are now going through some of the changes which all of you have probably already been through, so this has been really interesting. I want to go to something which Jane, the exaggerator, was talking about, about confusing cause and effect, and the fact that it's lack of resources and not the technology that is driving a lot of the problems that are seen. But do you think the digital technology and its economics is by itself skewing the economics of responsible journalism? Because, of course, if you had 20 more people in the newsroom to verify facts on time, or if your reporter was able to spend more time on a story while other reporters came back and updated every hour or so, it would be different, but that's obviously not so. So, I was wondering whether you or somebody else could respond to that.

**Jane Singer:** Yeah. No, it's a good point. I actually was in some ways quoting Tom and some of the State of the Media reports, which for a while have been highlighting the economic drivers of some of the problems. But technology exacerbates the economic problems for media organizations in a whole lot of ways, as we know. So, yes, it is certainly a factor. I think, though, that what we're doing, though, is we're starting out by looking at the problems that are going to be caused by the technology and whether that's through individuals using the technology or whether that's what the technology is going to do to us in the newsroom. And then when we actually get into using it, we find ways, as we've seen with social media, to actually articulate our ethics, and in some ways, even strengthen our ethical practices in ways that it takes us a while to get to. That we would maybe be farther along if we got to those ways a little quicker, as opposed to our starting point being seeing the challenges that are going to be posed. I don't know if that quite answers your question, but certainly technology does raise a whole host of different kinds of issues that do have to be dealt with.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** Anybody feel a compelling need to jump to add in or can we get to the next question? Dr. Rosen?

**Dr. Rosen:** Thanks. Well, congratulations on the best ethics panel I've ever actually listened to. [applause] It really was.

**Jane Singer:** Well, thank you.

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**Dr. Rosen:** I think it's due to the way that you approached it. So, this isn't really a question. It's more of an observation that, I think, connects what we heard. I loved Jane's way of phrasing the problem. It seems to me what you were saying, Jane, is, people use ethical discussions and questions to flee their anxieties. And that's the way I've always looked at journalism ethics. I rarely participate in discussions of ethics, because I find them so boring and errant. And part of the reason is that we never get to what journalism ethics actually is. And I think this panel, you did that. It is actually a way for journalists to flee their anxieties. The other thing I think it is, is it's a way to control the conversation about journalism. This is what John was getting at. As you know, journalism among learned professions has a unique problem in controlling who gets to be a journalist. In the law, you can have a law license. You can have a medical license. Civil engineers don't sit around thinking about, "How are we going to prevent all these people from running claiming to be civil engineers?" But in journalism, it's impossible to actually divide non-journalists from journalists. It's impossible to say, "You don't have the right to publish that." Journalists themselves believe that there shouldn't really be regulations on who should be a journalist. They believe that. But on the other side, they believe these phony people aren't real journalists. And so, since that contradiction has to be kind of like under the surface, it comes out through these phony ethics discussions that bore everybody to tears. So, it's not a question. That's just my observation. Thanks.

**Jane Singer:** Well, I would say, I think journalists agree, at least in the United States, that there shouldn't be laws about who should be a journalist, but I think that's how they use ethics. I don't think it's only about anxiety. I do think that there's a very deep-seated belief among most practitioners that ethics do matter, but I do think that they couch their anxiety in sort of an ethical coding, if that makes sense.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** Go ahead.

**Edward Wasserman:** I like what Jay had to say, but I'd have to push back against the idea that ethics is somehow pathology [*some laughter*] in response to an illness, and somehow it's the handmaiden of control. Maybe regulation, self-regulation by a group of people that wants to be engaged in a common purpose. There's nothing wrong with self-regulation. There are going to be some behaviors that lie outside of what the relevant group considers acceptable and socially useful. I think that conversation is a good one to have.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** Yeah. And I would just add that—violating my role as the moderator—that ethics in any profession is not just exclusionary. It's also aspirational. It's a way of communicating to your public that you have obligations that are larger than making money. And in a commercial context, yeah, sure, it's a way for doctors to make sure that quacks aren't out there too. And in a moment of disruption, that may kick in. But the idea that somehow you aspire to do things well, I don't think, is entirely about

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commercial exclusion. My own view. [*looking for next person with a question*] Yeah, where are we?

**Man:** Over there.

**Paula Poindexter:** So, I'm Paula Poindexter. I'm on the faculty here at University of Texas - School of Journalism. I'm also the president of AEJMC. And so, I want to push back a little bit, too. And in fact, Jane is on the Board of Directors for AEJMC, which is the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication -- very, very long name for those of you who don't know who we are. But, you know, the idea that ethics does not mean anything, we really need to correct that. I mean, we have a lot of journalism students who are in the audience, and yes, ethics matter. And if we didn't do a good job, and I suspect that we don't do as good a job as we should be doing, you know, teaching our students ethics, then what would you end up getting by the time they got into the profession? And so, ethics matter. I think that we need to emphasize it more and more and more, not only for our students, but also in the profession. Because if we don't have ethics, we certainly don't have a requirement that you have to have a journalism degree. We don't have a requirement that you have licensing or any of those things that go along with professions and so forth. So, we need to have something, and so at least let's have some ethics going on here.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** So maybe it's not a way of determining who's a journalist and who's not, but it may be a way of determining who's a good one and who's not.

**John Cook:** I certainly agree that ethics matter. What I want to push back against is the notion that there should be a professional super-structure on top of this job -- that of rigid rules that you have to live by if you're in the club. I think any good reporter and editor can navigate the ethical questions that come up and confront them in a professional environment by simply -- don't lie, honor your commitments -- and this is exactly what Ed was talking about, like in terms of making sure that what we're doing has social utility and is responsible. I mean, it's this sort of self-policing and sort of a guild-like structure, and that guild has in the past been used in sort of a sclerotic way exclude people from conversations and delegitimize voices that didn't come from.... And I'm not saying that Ed wants that. I'm just saying that attitude has been adopted by people in order to exclude certain voices. And I think it's important to try to think about this job—and consider it a job and not a profession—in a way that allows a multiplicity of voices [and] that allows people to bring information and data and views to the table even if they are not a part of a club of like-minded people who all agree on a shared set of values.

**Sylvia Stead:** So, just very briefly, I agree that ethics matter. Ethics are important. It's important for your readers, the relationship with your readers, to know what your standards are. And on the front page of our homepage is

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our public code of conduct. Now, just to give you one example, one of the things says, "You should represent yourself as a journalist and tell people who you're working for at the start of the interview." Now, that has an exception to it. So, that is the general guideline. The exception is, if you're going undercover, you're doing something that's of such importance that your senior managers have signed off on this, they accept it, and they are willing then to say, "In this story the reporter went undercover because of this greater good." That gets to the point of, we're not here just to write gossip and do other things. We are here. There's a real point of greater good here that we are making society more knowledgeable, more aware of what's going on, and that's our ultimate job.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** I feel an ethical obligation to get one more question in.

**Sara Peralta:** Hi. My name is Sara Peralta, and I'm a recent graduate from Texas State University. Currently, I do work in PR. And so, I kind of have a thought. You know, obviously, journalism does not happen in a vacuum and especially with the evolution of digital journalism with things like native advertising. So, what are some considerations of ethics when you're talking with -- in regards to public relations? Does public relations have an obligation regarding ethics in journalism? And in advertising?

**Tom Rosenstiel:** Great question.

[The panelists hesitate in responding.]

**John Cook:** I don't want to say anything that's insulting.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** Are you going to make the moderator answer this? Come on.

**Jane Singer:** Well, I would come back to transparency. I mean, I think actually an ethical problem that journalists have had for a long time is that they have not been transparent about when they're using material that's originated from public relations or, you know, other places that have not just involved their own report. So, I would say transparency is going to be the key issue there as well, as in many other places. And I just want to clarify, I am not saying that ethics is not important to any students or anyone else. Not at all what I was saying. What I was saying is that we tend to use it -- we tend to misuse our articulation of it, not that it's not important. Of course it is.

**Edward Wasserman:** Just one comment I would make about PR ethics and what makes PR ethics so much more perplexing than journalism ethics, in my view, is that you have client obligations. You have clear client obligations. And looking out for the well-being of your client then comes into collision frequently with your obligation as a public communicator to tell the truth. And that's the terrain in which PR ethical dilemmas are situated. It largely

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consists of that. It's very hard. So, I'll just leave you with that. It's a different realm from ours, but nonetheless a perplexing one.

**Tom Rosenstiel:** And I'm going to use this as a way to close and segue back to Rosental, which is that I think that we could think of journalism now as a form of public communication, as a form of public storytelling. And journalists are distinguished perhaps because their obligation is to an accurate understanding to the citizen. Their chief obligation is to the citizen and that the citizen understands things correctly or as accurately [as possible]. In public relations, you also have -- you are also in public communication, public storytelling. Your allegiances are a little different. But the more that journalists can talk about what is ethical storytelling, the more that elevates all public communication, I think, and that may be ethics not as an exclusionary concept, but as an elevating concept, where we all win then in a kind of network system.