

Enlightenment Pragmatism and Truth

(or, The Truth is Out There)

Society of Professional Journalists:

Seek the truth and report it

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Age of Enlightenment

18th century

Philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke

Knowledge could only be gained by experience and reflection on experience.

Knowledge wasn't handed down from a higher authority

People control the government

People can remove a ruler who fails to secure the public good.

The ruler's authority is conditional rather than absolute.

People have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness

The market place of ideas:

Differing ideas compete for our support

The market place is the media

Reporters must remain fair and objective in order for all ideas to compete fairly

Pragmatism

19th & 20th centuries

Truth is relative to the time, place, and purpose of investigation

God only exists only if His (Her?) existence is useful to you

John Dewey: education reformer

the news media and “truth”

people in the media decide what is news and how to craft the story:

- what and how much information to provide
- what information to leave out

The media's gatekeepers

about 88% are white; 63% are male
almost all are college educated

Minorities writing for newspapers in 2007:

Nationwide: 13.6%

Pacific coast area: 19.3%

Southern Atlantic coast area: 15.4%

New England: 6.7%

Minorities comprise 33% of the U.S. population

Source: American Press Institute <http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=6508>

Defining news

Traditional characteristics of news

- | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|
| timeliness | conflict and/or violence |
| proximity | magnitude |
| consequences | prominence |
| uniqueness | science and progress |

News is usually tied to an event

News usually tells a story to make a point

Characteristics of news:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| accuracy | confirmation |
| tenacity | dignity |
| reciprocity | sufficiency |
| equity | community |
| diversity | |

Society of Profession Journalists Code of Ethics (abridged)

Seek Truth and Report It

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.

- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
- Examine your own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.
- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.

- Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting.

Minimize Harm

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort

- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

Act Independently

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment.

Be Accountable

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which you hold others.