**VISUAL ETHICS**

*Visual Ethics* addresses the need for critical thinking and ethical behavior among professionals responsible for visual messages in photography and photojournalism, film, and digital media. From the author of *Photojournalism: An Ethical Approach*, published more than 20 years ago, this book goes beyond photojournalism ethics. It discusses crucial contemporary concerns, including persuasion, stereotyping, global perspectives, graphic design decisions, multimedia production, social media, and more. Written for an ever-growing discipline, authors Paul Martin Lester, Stephanie A. Martin, and Martin Smith-Rodden give serious ethical consideration to the complex field of visual communication.


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Visual ethics is, of course, the reason why this book was written, but its hidden agenda is more complex. Although the ethical issues related to collecting, processing, and presenting visual messages in all manner of media and a seemingly unlimited number of purposes is important and, quite frankly, overdue, the actual purpose of this work is to teach critical thinking. Through practice using the 10-step Systematic Ethical Analysis (SEA) for how to best analyze ethical slights of the past and present, you should learn how to respond in positive ways to dilemmas presented to you in the future – both professional and personal. Your goal with the SEA is to move from a gut-feeling, highly individualized, short-term, and subjective reaction to a rational, collective, long-term, and less subjective outcome (I won’t write “objective” for obvious reasons after you read Chapter 3). That way, you should come to the conclusion that any dilemma does not have one correct and one wrong solution. The SEA is designed to get you neck-deep in the murky waters of a tricky situation and realize that there are several types of boats – from a homemade raft to a Viking River Cruise ship (notice: A blatant plug) – that will get you safely to shore. (How’s that for a salient metaphor?) In other words, there are many viable and positive alternatives to a dilemma that can be imagined after some careful consideration and a little creativity.

The chapters include discussions on important media issues from advertising to virtual reality. The main topics addressed in this book include credibility, objectivity, role-related responsibilities, values, loyalties, etiquette, empathy, and yes, ethics. Interviews with professionals conducted and written by Dr. Martin Smith-Rodden can be found in Appendix A. Those of you who are observant should, I trust, notice that it seems odd that a book that starts with “visual” does not have a single published illustration. Arguably, ethics is a subject that relies more on words than images. And yet, there are more than 300 illustrations described by words. At the end of each chapter are the sources that provide examples, additional context, and information. These images – still and moving – should be of interest to anyone committed to visual communication. This book also includes case studies where you can practice using the SEA (with the SEA form found in Appendix B, completed analyses and case studies using the SEA in Appendix C) and annotated sources that provide academic perspectives both written by Dr. Stephanie A. Martin.

Finally, it should be clear that the study of ethics is a highly personal exercise. Thinking about what others did wrong and determining alternatives that should be taken inevitably
leads to you questioning and considering your own past actions both positive and negative. To that end, you will no doubt notice that the style of writing is perhaps a bit more informal than other textbooks. There are personal pronouns, contractions, cuss words, and parenthetical phrases – all elements that I caution my students to avoid in their term papers. Simply put, if you find yourself in one of my classes, you will know that this book’s tone matches my conversational style. Reading this book, then, should feel like a conversation. I hope someday we get a chance to make that happen.

Online only, please.
It was the type of assignment that makes cynical reporters and photojournalists outwardly groan: Go to the airport and meet 80-year-old twin brothers – one local and the other flying in from Ireland. They hadn’t seen each other in more than 40 years.

There were many reasons for not wanting to go on the job. Most reasons come down to the greatest detriment a journalist can exhibit – previsualization. To cement the buzzkill while driving to the airport, Jack, the reporter and I discussed what we would experience at the reunion – a long wait at the gate (note: This anecdote happened before the airport restrictions mandated by 9/11 in 2001), an excited family, the ancient brothers seeing each other and giving a quick hug, and inarticulate or clichéd explanations of how it all felt to them. As a photojournalist with my role-related responsibility to make sure I visually recorded the reunion, I was sure that I wouldn’t be able to sum up the situation in a single frame because the lighting at the airport would be poor and there would be too many friends and family members crowded around the two men to get a clear and clean composition. Terrible quotes and awful photographs – a challenge for both of us. Jack and I couldn’t wait to get what we needed and get out so we could go to our favorite restaurant for dinner.

Sure enough, the reunion ended up just as we had imagined. But the unexpected occurrence at the airport haunts me to this day. Consequently, I always start a mass media ethics class I teach with the story and what I consider to be one of the most unethical actions I ever took.

At the airport, I stood in front of a roped area next to the local brother and his family. I wore my usual array of cameras for this situation – one around my neck with a 35mm lens and an electronic flash attached and another with an 85mm lens hanging off my right shoulder. My left shoulder carried my camera bag. I looked like a badass photojournalist ready for anything. But I wasn’t ready for what happened next.

After about 30 minutes, the plane taxied to the gate. Well-dressed first class passengers walked past my vantage point. I knew it would be several minutes before the brother would wobble out of the gangway so I was relaxed. But then I caught sight of someone famous. Inexplicitly walking toward me was the actress Faye Dunaway (“Faye Dunaway,” 2017).

Before her airplane trip, she was in three critically acclaimed and internationally influential motion pictures. She starred in *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Chinatown* and was honored with Academy Award Best Actress nominations for both roles. For *Network* she won an Oscar for
her performance. She was a big, worldwide star (let's not think about her colossal gaffe during the 2017 Academy Award ceremony).

She was about 20 feet from me when our eyes briefly met and I could tell she noticed my cameras. I was a bit stunned at seeing such a famous person unexpectedly but I was snapped out of my awe by an agonizing scream she directed at me. She turned toward a wall, hid her face, and sobbed uncontrollably. It was awful. I wanted to go to her and let her know I wasn't there to photograph her, but I froze. Incredibly, the departing passengers didn't seem to notice this distraught woman on the side as they moved quickly past her. Several moments passed. Most of the passengers were off the plane. Dunaway remained against the wall with her hands on her cheeks. No one went to her to ask if she needed help including myself. She then suddenly became erect, wiped her face, and started to walk toward me. Without thinking I picked up the camera with the flash around my neck. As she walked past she covered her face with a hand. I took a picture (Lester, 2017).

This book details historic and current ethical dilemmas in various media and for numerous purposes and includes as its base a ten-point systematic ethical analysis (SEA) that should help guide whether actions should be considered ethical. The SEA is largely a product of what has been called the “ethics mantra” which states: Do your job and don't cause unjustified harm. The mantra should then be combined with an understanding of six moral philosophies – the categorical imperative, utilitarianism, the golden mean, the golden rule, the veil of ignorance, and hedonism. With both the mantra and the philosophies, I failed.

It wasn't my job to document Faye Dunaway's visit. In fact, it should have been no concern to anyone. Plus, by taking a harshly intrusive flash picture I caused emotional harm to the actress. Furthermore, the use of the six philosophies substantiates the conclusion that my behavior was reprehensible.

The categorical imperative stresses a rule that should not be violated. Professionally, anything newsworthy is part of my role-related responsibility as a photojournalist. A categorical imperative demands that it should be photographed. However, there was nothing newsworthy about Dunaway's arrival at the airport.

Utilitarianism emphasizes an educational reason for performing some task that may help others. Perhaps there is a slight justification when utilizing this philosophy because although Dunaway's privacy was violated and she was harmed, the fact that the picture and its story exists acts as an aid for an ethical discussion. Such a rationalization might be acceptable if I were thinking that way at the time. I wasn't.

The philosophy of compromise, one that is often a solution for many ethical dilemmas, is the golden mean. Instead of impulsively pressing the shutter button, I might have first explained to her the situation and asked her if I could take a photograph. She would have said no, of course, but I would feel better about myself.

The next two philosophies of the six used in this book encourage you to consider those in the picture and those who view the image.

The golden rule, the oldest of any of the philosophies mentioned and the veil of ignorance, the most recent one, both encourage you to put yourself in someone else's position or situation. Ask: Would you want to be photographed in such a manner given a similar situation and do you think someone needs to see it? No and no.

Finally, and saving the worst for last, is hedonism. Perhaps not surprisingly, this philosophy is another ancient way of describing a common human behavior. Anytime you perform an action based on purely personal motivations – to win favor from another, to win a contest, to earn some monetary advantage, and so on – you invoke a hedonistic attitude. I took Faye Dunaway's picture simply because I could. I misused my power as a journalist and a casual
observer in order to satisfy my own momentary and fleeting desire for attention. My ego got in the way of my better judgment.

My excuses? I was inexperienced, egotistical, and untrained. Although my major in college was photojournalism, I had been a newspaper photographer for less than two years. Although I had photographed indicted persons paraded in handcuffs known as “perp walks” for the benefit of the media by police personnel, I never encountered a famous person so distressed about me performing my professional duty. I was even a bit offended that she became so upset over me while I was doing my job. Because I was 20-something with a good paying job and a privileged position I thought I could do no wrong. My attitude at the time was that anyone on the other side of my lens was fair game for my photographic prowess. I was the hunter and everyone else the prey. Besides, there were awards to win and raises to be earned. I couldn’t stop to think about the repercussions of my actions.

But perhaps the most telling excuse was that during my time as a student, I never took an ethics course. I only had classes that taught me how to use the equipment and techniques necessary to become a professional photographer. As I recall, ethical considerations were never emphasized in any of the instruction. I also completed liberal studies classes necessary to graduate, but I didn’t take a single course on philosophy or ethics. In addition, after being hired, there were no opportunities for learning about ethics. The one exception were annual “Short Courses” sponsored by the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) that in one day presented visual reporters and their work in a format that inspired storytelling techniques and respect for those within the frames, but without any organized presentation or discussion on ethical issues and analysis (NPPA, 2017).

The good news – this memory of the brothers’ reunion and Ms. Dunaway’s surprising reaction started me on a path of learning and writing about ethical behavior with this textbook being the latest installment of my journey – an after-the-fact utilitarian justification. By the way, if you know Faye Dunaway or how to contact her, let me know. I would love to apologize.

Visual Ethics is Your Personal Journey

Ethics has personal and professional components. Visual communicators must juggle positive personal values with unique role-related responsibilities. As a journalist or documentary image-maker, you are a surrogate for the public. You are often the only witness to an event, the only recorder for history, the calm and cool explainer to others, as well as the educator and explainer. As a designer, editor, filmmaker, or advertising and public relations professional, you are also a persuader, a propagandist, and an entertainer. How can you possibly be expected to be objective and subjective, impassive and emotional, uninvolved and engaged given the physical constraints, technological changes, and sociological pressures the mass communications profession offers?

Ethics.

The key to produce work that aids the common good and satisfies your need for storytelling is a continual, inquisitive, and consistent path toward ethical behavior. Consequently, an exploration of ethical behavior is a personal, emotional, and intellectual journey. It is the outcome of an open, questioning mind that desires progressive development. The quest toward ethical behavior also requires an understanding of your own values and loyalties that can cause conflicts between how you actually behave and how you should behave. And when you make an error in judgment, it takes a humble heart to learn from the experience and do better.

This book is dedicated to the notion that being an ethical visual communicator not only makes you a better person but also creates opportunities and storylines that you might have
overlooked in the past. As such, your personal growth, your career, and your profession can only be enhanced by focusing inward and outward.

*Visual Ethics* is inspired by an important work, *Photojournalism: An Ethical Approach* (Lester, 1991) that was published more than 25 years ago. In that work, philosophies, techniques, and issues important to the photojournalism profession were featured in chapters that emphasized three major concerns: Victims of violence, rights to privacy, and subject and image manipulations. Needless to mention, much has changed in the field of visual communication since *An Ethical Approach*. Hence, the main motivation for this book. *Visual Ethics* acknowledges a need for critical thinking and ethical behavior among those responsible for visual messages in all areas of mass communications while acknowledging the personal decisions and experiences that make us empathetic personas and dedicated professionals.

The main difference between *An Ethical Approach* and this book is that it goes beyond photojournalism ethics to include the professions and techniques of documentary and advocacy reportage, citizen journalism and activism, advertising and public relations, typography, graphic design, informational graphics, cartoons, motion pictures, television, computers, the web, augmented reality, games, immersive storytelling, social media, story selection, and editing. It should be obvious that in today’s complex media environment propelled by technological advances made possible by the web and the development of apps, visual communication is a field that requires serious contemplation and a guide that showcases the best practices possible.

This book offers many examples produced by working professionals that may or may not be directly related to your present interests. No matter. You will learn from all of the varied perspectives. This work also includes intellectual discussions that illuminate technical considerations and philosophical justifications, opportunities to discover your own values and conflicts, and perhaps even a few inconsistent and confusing viewpoints. The goal of *Visual Ethics* is to challenge your own opinions about what is and is not ethical behavior within a wide variety of visual communication presentations. Consequently, the journey you’ve started by reading this preface may be a tough slog. It is never easy to look deeply into yourself and bring to light the motivations for your actions. In addition to that daunting task there is another idea you must accept – your ethical exploration should never end. Being ethical in your personal and professional lives means constantly evaluating yourself for as long as you live. Luckily, it’s not as difficult as you might think. That’s because the most important trait that you should already possess is having a concept of empathy. As you continue with your life and career and all the decisions and actions yet to come, if you simply and honestly consider what someone else thinks and feels as a result of your actions, in other words, if you are an empathetic person, you will more likely be an ethical visual communicator.

References


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Any transgressions along my journey are my own damned fault.

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On a personal note, special thanks to Ivan Butterfield (and Marge!) who taught me everything I know about photography, to my parents who taught me to ask hard questions and look for good in the world, to Stefanie Barraco Zmich who is never far from my mind when I’m thinking about ethics and the First Amendment (she knows why), to my wonderful Paco, who makes being the partner of an academic seem like an easy gig (which it is not!), and to Niles and Tate who are the world – the whole, wide world – to me.

Martin celebrates his better half Pamela and his direct descendants Wilson and Katherine with his contributions to this book.
Whenever I’m asked what I teach and I mention mass media ethics, the reaction is almost always a cynical smirk with a comment such as, “Well, that must keep you busy.” The implication being, of course, that the media is so unethical that I can’t possibly discuss all of the publicized and controversial dilemmas that mass media professionals are accused of in sixteen weeks. The general characterization is unfair and rises to the level of a stereotype when critics, mostly political candidates and their supporters, label journalists as the “lamestream media” and a presidential candidate calls a reporter a “sleaze” and complains about libelous and dishonest stories. Nevertheless, it is difficult at times to defend some questionable and cringe-worthy actions reported in the media.

To name a few recent media examples from advertising, entertainment, journalism, and public relations sources: Pop star Meghan Trainor removed a music video in which the producers digitally slimmed her waist without, as she claims, her approval (Turner, 2016). KTLA Los Angeles meteorologist Liberté Chan was offered a sweater during a live report to cover her bare shoulders (Politi, 2016). A Planned Parenthood employee discussed fetal remains in a hidden and edited video (“Investigative footage,” 2017). The actor Sean Penn interviewed the (then) fugitive Joaquin “Shorty” Guzman for Rolling Stone magazine (Penn, 2016). Alison Parker and Adam Ward were killed during a live television broadcast (McLaughlin and Shocichet, 2015). Beyoncé’s album “Lemonade” featured her husband Jay-Z’s marital infidelities (Pareles, 2016). TMZ paid for recordings that featured former owner of the Los Angeles Clippers Donald Sterling stating racist opinions to his friend, V. Stiviano (“Clippers owner,” n.d.). A Twitter user posted personal information about several prominent Chinese citizens (Forsythe, 2016). A Sky News reporter looked through damaged luggage from Malaysian Airlines flight 17 shot down over the Ukraine to learn a victim’s name before family members could be notified (Brown, 2014). NBC anchor Brian Williams was removed from his prestigious position after he admitted he exaggerated his war coverage experiences (Byers, 2015). The website Gawker aired film of the former wrestler Hulk Hogan having sex; he was later awarded $115 million for the privacy breach through a lawsuit financed by the billionaire Peter Thiel (“Hulk Hogan,” n.d.). “Saturday Night Live” produced a parody of a Toyota Camry commercial of a father leaving his daughter at an airport to join ISIS and not the Army as in the car advertisement (“Father daughter ad,” 2015). Apple CEO Tim Cook refused to help the FBI by cracking open an
iPhone used by a mass killer (“Apple CEO,” 2016). As Sonny and Cher once sang, “The beat goes on.”

However, not all questionable actions rise to the level of unethical behavior. How do you know what is and is not ethical? As you will learn in this chapter, you should only come to a conclusion about an action after a careful and systematic consideration of the issues involved. In other words, you should not use an initial gut reaction to determine your response. Before you learn the systematic ethical analysis (SEA) procedure used in this book, you must first understand the definition of ethics.

What is Ethics?

Ethics is the study of how people actually behave and how they should behave toward other persons, sentient beings (animals that can feel pain or discomfort), and systems (academic, business, economic, environmental, governmental, and so on). Simply noting the questionable behavior as in the examples above is a not too illuminating form of ethics named descriptive. It is all well and good to call out behaviors that you suspect to be unethical, but such labeling doesn’t advance the field and definitely doesn’t lead to better behavior. It is another form of ethics – normative – that helps us all progress. After a deliberate process such as the SEA, normative ethics concludes how individuals should have performed. With normative ethics credible alternatives are offered to guide others in what should have been done so they might do the right thing.

Many seem to confuse the concept of morals and ethics. Although interconnected, their differences are important and should be understood. Knowing what is right, good, and acceptable and what is wrong, bad, and unacceptable is being moral. Morality, then, is concerned with judgment while ethics is concerned with behavior. The concepts are interconnected because the actions we take should be based on what we think is correct. We are taught the difference between right and wrong and how we should act given a unique set of circumstances throughout our lives by friends, caregivers, role-models, educational opportunities, as well as the millions of tiny and significant everyday and life-changing and affirming experiences that fill our minds with memories, questions, and solutions. Another crucial educator in our quest toward moral development and ethical behavior is the media, which is why the study and practice of mass communications is so vital.

The approximately 2,500-year history of philosophical thinking concerned with ethical behavior can be summed in one sentence introduced in the preface, the ethics mantra:

Do your job and don’t cause unjustified harm.

As long as you attempt or accomplish the unique role-related responsibilities that define your position, whether personal or professional, and any injury you may cause to another while performing those duties can be justified, you are most likely acting ethically.

We all demonstrate diverse and often complex jobs or roles throughout our personal and professional lives. We may be children, friends, students, caregivers, parents, consumers, teachers, office workers, creators, managers, and so on. Each role signifies a complex interrelated structure composed of responsibilities that define that position. A friend, for example, initiates contact, cares for another, offers advice, is reliable and consistent. An instructor writes a syllabus, meets with a class, gives lectures, and assesses assignments. However, a friend might also give critical advice or reveal a secret that may be tough to hear while an instructor might give tough exams, assign 20-page term papers, write critical remarks about a student’s work, and
give a less than favorable grade. Friends and instructors sometimes cause harm. However, there is no ethical slight if that harm can be justified. A friend cares and speaks the truth. A teacher is concerned that you understand the material conveyed during lectures and grades work with competence and objectivity. Any harm, hurt feelings or a “C” in the class, is therefore justified.

Five Areas of Ethical Concern

As mentioned in the preface (what, you didn’t read it?), the inspiration for this book in your hands is one published in 1990, Photojournalism: An Ethical Approach. In the earlier work, three major concerns for visual communicators were stressed – victims of violence, rights to privacy, and subject and image manipulations. This book adds two more concerns to the list – persuasion and stereotypes.

Victims of Violence. After a gruesome image of dead or grieving victims of a tragic event is presented to the public in either the print or screen media, many viewers are often repulsed and offended by the picture. Nevertheless, violence and tragedy are staples of American journalism. “If it bleeds, it leads” is a popular, unspoken sentiment in many newsrooms. The reason for this obvious incongruity is that a majority of viewers are attracted and intrigued by such stories. Photojournalists who win Pulitzer Prizes and other international competitions are almost always witnessing excruciatingly painful human tragedies that nevertheless get published or broadcast. It is as if viewers want to see violent pictures, but through gaps in the fingers in front of their face. Not surprisingly, most letters to editors, news directors, and website managers from concerned members of the public have to do with violent images than any other visual communication concern.

But not all violent images come from tragic news stories. In 2017 comedian Kathy Griffin, known for her caustic comments to reporter Anderson Cooper on New Year’s Eve television specials, was photographed by Tyler Shields, a former professional inline skater, looking at the camera, unsmiling, and holding a gruesome bloody head of a realistic likeness of President Trump (“Kathy Griffin,” 2017). In a tweet Cooper wrote, “For the record, I am appalled by the photo shoot Kathy Griffin took part in. It is clearly disgusting and completely inappropriate.” Griffin in a video tweet said, “I beg for your forgiveness. I went too far. I made a mistake and I was wrong.” Griffin was fired from her 10-year gig at CNN and lost product endorsement deals and bookings. Shields told a TMZ reporter, “You make art, you gotta stand by it. I can’t censor myself.” File this tale in the “What Did You Expect?” folder.

Rights to Privacy. Ordinary citizens or celebrities who are suddenly thrust in front of the unblinking lens of a camera because of a connection to some sensational news story almost always voice privacy concerns. Seldom do you hear viewers complain about violating someone else’s right to privacy. Courts in America have consistently maintained that privacy rights differ between private and public persons. Private citizens have much more strictly enforced rights to their own privacy than celebrities who often ask for media attention. Not surprisingly, celebrities bitterly complain when they are the subject of relentless media attention because of some controversial allegation. For private or public citizens, perhaps the most stressful news story is the funeral of a loved one. Sometimes a person’s privacy is more important than getting a story. Besides ethical considerations related to privacy, legal issues or torts should be a part of the calculus of whether an image should be taken, obtained, or made public (“The privacy torts,” 2002). The legal scholar William Prosser wrote in 1960 of four torts that define the legal concept of privacy: Intrusion upon seclusion or solitude, public disclosure of embarrassing private facts, publicity which places a person in a false light in the
As a rule to guide you, ethics should always trump legal considerations. Rather than die from the flames and smoke filling the floors of the World Trade Center on 9/11, about 200 of the trapped victims decided to end their lives by jumping out of windows ("9/11 jumpers," 2017). "Jumpers" was the name given to them by the New York City medical examiner who ruled that they did not commit suicide, but were victims of a homicide. Although many visual reporters fulfilled their role-related responsibility (a categorical imperative philosophy) and photographed the jumpers, most news entities did not show the images to the public. Nevertheless, many can be found on YouTube with warnings (a golden mean perspective) about "graphic content," "viewer discretion is advised," and "not for children." 9/11: The Falling Man is a documentary film based on Associated Press photographer Richard Drew’s photograph of a man falling from the north tower (9/11: The Falling Man, 2006). It is a thorough and ethical investigation into the probable identity of the victim.

Subject, Image, and Context Manipulations. Deception has been a part of photography since it was first invented. Stage-managing, the arrangement of objects and persons within a frame as if they were props for a theatrical presentation, is probably ethically acceptable with photographic portraits, advertising set-ups, media and photo op events, and fictionalized motion picture and television productions. However, when stage-managing is used in news photography or documentary films, the practice is often criticized. One of the most recent blatantly unethical examples of stage-managing came after the Brussels terrorist attacks in 2016 when footage from a Fox News report clearly revealed photojournalist Khaled Al Sabbah directing a young girl near a memorial to the victims (Jamieson, 2016). Fortunately, it is rare for a visual reporter to manipulate a story so blatantly, but photographers often stage-manage a scene unwillingly. Alex Cooke writing for Fstoppers reports that anthropologist and photojournalist Ruben Salvadori produced a short film that revealed how "the presence of a myriad of photographers with large cameras tends to encourage an exaggeration of normal behavior that lends the drama they seek" (Cooke, 2016). Even during violent clashes with military personnel, as those covered by Salvadori in East Jerusalem, there are lulls in the action that aren’t necessarily photogenic or news-worthy. However, with 20 photojournalists pointing their cameras at protesters, many times a tacit agreement of action will be induced. Visual reporters working on news events should never alter the actions of those around them either through direct or implied consent. That injunction is a categorical imperative and a role-related responsibility.

Image manipulations through digital technology are relatively easy to accomplish, hard to detect, and perhaps more alarming, often alter the original image so that checking the authenticity of the picture is impossible. Some critics have predicted that in a few years, images – whether still or moving – will not be allowed in trials as physical evidence because of the threat to their veracity created by digital alterations. Cameras and the images they produce are naively thought by many to never lie. But because humans operate the machine, technical, composition, and content manipulations are unavoidable. Computer technology did not start the decline in the credibility of pictures, but it has hastened it.

Persuasion. The Dean of a school of communication once told me that “All communication is persuasion.” Whether that statement is literally true is up to you to decide, but in many situations – convincing a friend to see a certain movie or eat at a particular restaurant to attempting to convince your professor to give you a higher grade on your essay or your boss to give you a raise – we all use persuasion in our daily lives. Media personnel use factual information, seemingly credible sources, and emotional appeals to educate a reader or viewer about a particular situation, to change a person’s mind on a topic of concern, and to promote
a desired behavior or action. As we become dependent on visual messages to communicate complex ideas, information relies on the emotional appeal inherent in visual presentations. And because the fields of advertising, public relations, and journalism can often be used by savvy practitioners, the blurring between corporate, governmental, and editorial interests for persuasive purposes is one of the most pressing concerns of media critics today.

Writing for The New Yorker magazine, Alexandra Schwartz reviewed an exhibit, “Crime Stories: Photography and Foul Play” that was shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2016 with the headline, “The Long Collusion of Photography and Crime” (Schwartz, 2016). Pictures dating from the 1800s revealed police officials showing off their caught criminals, wanted posters, executions, crimes in progress, sympathetic portraits of killers, and victims of murder. Schwartz noted that the exhibit raised ethical issues related to the “American attraction to criminal glamour, and our queasy, not always critical fascination with looking at violence – are the right ones to ask during the current vogue for ‘true crime,’ that funny phrase we use for stories told in public about terrible things others suffer privately.” The show makes clear that photographers are often, perhaps unknowingly, used by others to forward a persuasive agenda imposed by authority figures, social critics, and commercial entities.

Visual journalists often want their viewers to care for the sources of their stories. Motion picture and television producers want you to enjoy a picture or program so you will tell your friends to see the presentation. In addition, politicians employ a public relations staff to put a positive “spin” on a situation and to set up media events and photo ops that show their candidate or government official in the best light possible.

With so much expertise in the White House, it is surprising when a seemingly controlled event is marred by insensitivity or incompetence. Philip Bump of The Washington Post reported on a photo op that went awry for the Trump Administration when senior advisor Kellyanne Conway was pictured with her feet on a couch in the Oval Office looking through her smartphone while a group of educators from traditionally African American universities and colleges posed with the president (Bump, 2017). Conway was accused of being a distraction when the focus of the event should have been on the leaders’ visit. As Bump concluded,

Events like this are the lowest-hanging fruit for a politician. Come in, listen for a bit, take a photo, move on. It’s rarely the case that such events create new policy, but it’s probably even rarer that they end up creating a media firestorm. It’s like the Trump team stepped up to the plate in a game of tee-ball, and somehow ended up spraining an ankle while hitting into a double play.

Persuasion often is a double-edged sword.

Stereotyping. African Americans are criminals. European Americans are racists. Mexicans are rapists and drug dealers. Native Americans are alcoholics. Gays are effeminate. Lesbians wear short hair. Transgender persons are pedophiles. Those who use wheelchairs are helpless. Older adults need constant care. Homeless people are drug addicts. Sensational politicians, inexperienced individuals in interviews and on social media, and images presented in the media perpetuate these prevalent stereotypes. For example, it is easier and quicker for a visual communicator to take a picture of an angry African American during a riot than to take the time to explore in words and pictures the underlying social problems that are responsible for the civil disturbance. Stereotypical portrayals of ethnic, gender, physical characteristics, sexual orientation, and job-related cultural groups are a result of communications professionals being
lazy, ignorant, or racist. As with the printing term from which the word comes, to stereotype is a shorthand way to describe a person with collective, rather than unique characteristics. Visual stereotypes are easily found in all manner of media, but not easily defended.

Gap is a clothing company headquartered in San Francisco that has been in business for more than 45 years and with more than 3,500 stores worldwide. And yet, in 2016 a seemingly innocent advertisement that showed two young models wearing snappy Gap clothing revealed the gap between gender portrayals. As described by Madeline Farber of Fortune, the ad sparked a firestorm of outrage on social media sites (Farber, 2016). The diptych featured a full-length image of a smiling boy pulling apart a collared shirt and jacket to show off a blue tee-shirt with the famous tongue-sticking-out head shot of Albert Einstein and the copy, “THE LITTLE SCHOLAR Your future starts here. Shirts + graphic tees = genius idea.” Originally, the scientist’s name on the shirt was misspelled as “Einstien,” but was corrected after the typo was made known. The girl’s portrait showed her as passive, arms at her side, and looking up. She wore silver animal ears on her head and a sweater that featured the letter G in pink. The picture was cropped at her waist. Her ad’s copy read, “THE SOCIAL BUTTERFLY. Chambray skirts + logo sweaters are the talk of the playground.” Comments from Twitter users included: “My daughter & son both love to have genius ideas – please don’t limit them.” A Gap spokesperson wrote, “we did not intend to offend anyone.” For many of the unethical deeds performed by persons described in this book, innocence is often used as a defense when the hedonism philosophy is employed.

Regardless of the technology employed and the underlying purpose of the media message, the five concerns of violence, privacy, manipulations, persuasion, and stereotypes should be considered as you read through the subsequent chapters and carefully study the examples and case studies provided.

**The Systematic Ethical Analysis (SEA)**

The study of ethics has been improved and made easier to understand by orderly systems of analysis of particularly challenging case studies. Such procedures elevate the field of ethics past the banal descriptive level and toward the more illuminating and thoughtful normative goal. Remember, the end result of any SEA is to arrive at credible alternatives (the use of the plural is intentional – there is often more than one acceptable solution) given a set of facts that describe a particular ethical dilemma. The end result should be several reasonable solutions to a perplexing challenge.

The Ethics Unwrapped website sponsored by the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin presents a two-step Systematic Moral Analysis (SMA) that has a goal to find alternatives that don’t cause harm to other people (Elliott, 2017). This SMA is inspired by the work of the philosopher Bernard Gert who describes ten moral rules in *Common Morality: Deciding What to Do* that concentrate on actions that, when followed, minimize harm to yourself and others (Gert, 2004). His list of ten moral rules include seven negative requirements – do not kill, do not cause pain, do not disable, do not deprive someone of freedom, do not deprive someone of pleasure, do not deceive, and do not cheat – and three positive suggestions – keep your promises, obey the law, and do your duty. The two steps in the SMA, conceptualization and justification, are designed to help you understand who might be harmed and how that harm can be minimalized. For conceptualization, ask yourself who might be harmed and how is that harm administered by an action. For justification, does breaking a moral rule prevent a greater harm from occurring or does the harm you cause legitimately address a more significant harm that was
already caused? If an action causes the least harm to others, can withstand public scrutiny, and would be ethically permissible for anyone in a similar situation, it can be considered ethical.

The Swedish-born American philosopher Sissela Bok, one of the only persons whose parents are both Nobel Prize recipients, formulated a three-step SEA. Bok has written several books concerned with ethical behavior including Mayhem: Violence as Public Entertainment (1998) and Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life (1999). Her deceptively simple solution to solving ethical dilemmas involves asking yourself how the facts of a case study make you feel, obtain assistance from experts in the field, and make your alternatives known to the public in order to refine your solution (Cohen, n.d.). Her SEA is an interesting combination of the personal and the community as she advocates an inner, self-awareness approach combined with an outward, public sharing of information.

Harvard professor of social ethics and theologian, Ralph B. Potter, Jr. developed a little more complex SEA that involved four steps popularly known as the “Potter’s Box” (Christians et al., 2001). His procedure asks you to know all of the facts involved with a case study without any judgments or conclusions, identify the possible values of those involved based on an actor’s personal and professional role-related responsibilities, consider philosophies such as Aristotle’s golden mean, Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative, and John Stuart Mills’ and Harriet Taylor’s utilitarianism (don’t panic – those philosophies and three others will be explained below). These philosophies can be employed to justify or criticize decisions made. Finally, Potter asks that you name the loyalties or allegiances that the actors of the dilemma may consider to be important. Unlike Bok’s SEA, or the one used in this book, Potter’s steps can be made in any order and repeated as the analysis becomes more thoughtful and sophisticated. In that way his “Box” becomes the “Potter’s Circle.” Potter’s work is an important addition to the canon of ethical analysis with its emphasis on facts, values, philosophies, and loyalties, but the end result, although perhaps a satisfying intellectual experience, seldom leads to a definitive solution.

Many view the two-step SMA as described in the Ethics Unwrapped website, Bok’s three-step approach, and Potter’s Box/Circle, as insufficient for a thorough ethical analysis for use by professionals. Consequently, the ten-step SEA was developed to address the shortfalls in other analytical schemes and provides a clearer understanding of how to formulate credible alternatives to the actions presented by the facts of a case study.

The Ten-Step SEA

1. What are the three most significant facts of the case?

   After a careful evaluation of all the known facts presented within a particular scenario, single out the top three facts that are the most important.

2. What are three facts you would like to know about the case?

   You should have questions about the case study that are not answered by the facts presented. You may need to interview individuals, consult written records, explore the web, and so on to obtain a clearer idea of the facts and motivations of the actors involved with the case.

3. What is the ethical dilemma related to the case?
Most dilemmas come down to a conflict of interests between the various parties involved, but there may also be economic, privacy, and personal issues that motivate the dilemma.

4. Who are the moral agents and what are each person’s specific role-related responsibilities (RRRs)?

A moral agent is any person or entity that can be held responsible for an action. Although it is rare to name a company as a moral agent, it does happen. During the Enron Corporation scandal of 2001, the auditing firm of Arthur Andersen, one of the largest in the world, was indicted by Federal prosecutors and found guilty. Children, prisoners, or anyone mentally incapacitated are often not considered moral agents because they often are not considered responsible for their actions. Defense lawyers often use a moral agent argument for clients involved in drinking-and-driving accidents. It rarely works. A clue in identifying RRRs is to note that they are always verbs.

5. Who are the stakeholders and what are each person’s specific role-related responsibilities (RRRs)?

A stakeholder is anyone affected by a decision from a moral agent. It is important to note that a moral agent and a stakeholder cannot be the same person or entity.

6. What are the possible positive and negative values of all the moral agents and stakeholders named in Steps 4 and 5 and the two most opposite values from all the lists?

Values are general concepts (truthfulness, fairness, diversity, and so on) that correspond with the RRRs or attitudes of those involved.

7. What are the loyalties of the moral agents and stakeholders named in Steps 4 and 5 and the two most opposite loyalties from all the lists?

Loyalties are alliances based on promises to yourself or to others that come from reasonable expectations from their RRRs. Someone involved with a case might have loyalties to him or herself, to family members, to sources or clients, to an organization, or to a profession.

8. For each of the six moral philosophies used in this book describe either a justification or a criticism that can be applied to a moral agent or a stakeholder named in Steps 4 and 5 in the case study. In chronological order, the six philosophies are:

Golden rule. The golden rule, or the ethic of reciprocity, teaches persons to “love your neighbor as yourself.” This theory has been attributed to ancient Greek philosophers such as Pittacus of Mytilene (died 568 BCE), considered one of the “Seven Sages of Greece,” who wrote, “Do not to your neighbor what you would take ill from him;” Thales of Miletus (died 546 BCE), another Sage of Greece who said, “Avoid doing what you would blame others for doing;” and Epictetus (died 135 CE), a Stoic philosopher who wrote, “What thou avoidest suffering thyself seek not to impose on others.” In fact, every major religion has some variable of the golden rule as a part of their scriptures and/or teachings. This philosophy holds that an individual should be as humane as possible and try not to harm others by insensitive actions (Puka, n.d.).
Hedonism. From the Greek word for pleasure, hedonism is closely related to the philosophies of nihilism and narcissism. A student of Socrates, Aristippus (who died in Athens in 356 BCE) founded this ethical philosophy on the basis of pleasure. Aristippus believed that people should “act to maximize pleasure now and not worry about the future.” However, Aristippus referred to pleasures of the mind – intellectual pleasures – not physical sensations. He believed that people should fill their time with intellectual pursuits and use restraint and good judgment in their personal relationships. His phrase sums up the hedonistic philosophy: “I possess; I am not possessed.” Unfortunately, modern usage of the philosophy ignores his original intent. The Renaissance playwright and poet Ben Jonson, a contemporary of William Shakespeare, once wrote one of the best summaries of the hedonistic philosophy, “Drink today, and drown all sorrow; You shall perhaps not do it tomorrow; Best, while you have it, use your breath; There is no drinking after death.” Phrases such as “live for today” and “don’t worry, be happy” currently express the hedonistic philosophy. If an opinion or action is based purely on a personal motivation – money, fame, relationships, and the like – the modern interpretation of hedonistic philosophy is at work. Not surprisingly, most unethical decisions are based on hedonistic inclinations while most actors who use the philosophy are loath to admit it (Weijers, n.d.).

Golden mean. Aristotle was born near the city Thessaloniki in 384 BCE. As his parents were wealthy, he studied at the Athens-based Academy led by the renowned Greek philosopher Plato, who was a student of Socrates – the SPA succession of Greek philosophical education – Socrates to Plato to Aristotle. After learning and teaching at the Academy for 20 years, Aristotle traveled throughout the region studying the biology and botany of his country. He was eventually hired as a tutor for Alexander the Great and two other kings of Greece, Ptolemy and Cassander. When he was about 50 years old he returned to Athens and began his own educational institution, the Lyceum, where he wrote an astounding number of books on diverse subjects that made breakthroughs in science, communications, politics, rhetoric, and ethics. He was the earliest known writer to describe the phenomenon of light noticed by a camera obscura that eventually led to a further understanding of how the eyes and the photographic medium work. Although the golden mean was originally a neo-Confucian concept first espoused by Zisi, the only grandson of the Chinese philosopher Confucius, Aristotle elaborated on it for Western readers in his book *Nicomachean Ethics*, named after his father. The golden mean philosophy refers to finding a middle ground or a compromise between two extreme points of view or actions. The middle way doesn’t involve a precisely mathematical average but is an action that approximately fits that situation at that time. Generally speaking, most ethical dilemmas are solved with the golden mean approach (“Golden mean,” 2007).

Categorical imperative. Immanuel Kant was born in Königsberg, the capital of Prussia (now Kaliningrad, Russia) in 1724. The fourth of 11 children, at an early age he showed intellectual promise and escaped his crowded household to attend a special school. At the age of 16 he graduated from the University of Königsberg, where he stayed and taught until his death. Kant never married and never traveled farther than 100 miles from his home during his lifetime. Thirteen years before his death in 1804, he published *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is considered one of the most important works in philosophical history. In it Kant established the concept of the categorical imperative. *Categorical* means unconditional, and *imperative* means that the concept should be employed without any question, extenuating circumstances, or exceptions. Right is right and must be done even under the most extreme conditions. Consistency is the key to the categorical imperative philosophy. Once a rule is established for a proposed action or idea, behavior and opinions must be consistently and always applied in
accordance with it. But for Kant, the right action must have a positive effect and not promote unjustified harm or evil. Nevertheless, the categorical imperative is a difficult mandate to apply (McCormick, n.d.).

Utilitarianism. The legal scholar and philosopher Jeremy Bentham developed his theory of utility, or the greatest happiness principle, from the work of Joseph Priestley, who is considered one of the most important philosophers and scientists of the eighteenth century. Bentham acknowledged Priestley as the architect of the idea that “the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation.” John Stuart Mill was the son of the Scottish philosopher James Mill and was tutored for a time by Bentham. Mill along with his wife, Harriet Taylor, expanded on Priestley and Bentham’s idea of utilitarianism by defining different kinds of happiness. For Mill and Taylor, intellectual happiness is more important than the physical kind. They also thought that there is a difference between happiness and contentment, which is culminated in Mill’s phrase, “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.” In utilitarianism, various consequences of an act are imagined, and the outcome that helps the most people is usually the best choice under the circumstances. However, Mill and Taylor specified that each individual’s moral and legal rights must be met before applying the utilitarian calculus. According to them, it is not acceptable to cause great harm to a few persons in order to bring about a little benefit to many. By the way, the reason history seldom acknowledges the important work of Harriet Taylor is that social customs of the day (and most saliently economic factors that influenced the publisher) denied Taylor her rightful place as an important contributor and co-author (Nathanson, n.d.).

Veil of ignorance. Articulated by the American philosopher John Rawls in his book A Theory of Justice in 1971, the veil of ignorance philosophy considers all people equal as if each member were wearing a cover so that such attributes as age, gender, and ethnicity could not be determined. Under such a rhetorical exercise, no one class of people would be entitled to advantages over any other. Imagining oneself without knowing the positions that one brings to a situation results in an attitude of respect for all involved. The phrase “walk a mile in someone’s shoes” is a popular adaptation of the veil of ignorance philosophy. It is considered one answer to prejudice and discrimination. Rawls taught at Harvard University for almost 40 years. In 1999 he received the National Humanities Medal from President Bill Clinton, who said that he “helped a whole generation of learned Americans revive their faith in democracy itself.” It is this philosophy that advocates the value of empathy that should be a prime motivating influence for mass communicators. A professional who exhibits empathy, as explained by John Rawls, is one who cares as much about others as she cares about herself (“Veil of ignorance,” 2017).

9. What creative and/or credible alternatives could resolve the issue?

Many times, a far-fetched, creative, unrealistic, and even wacky idea will trigger a way of looking at a situation in a different way so that a credible alternative emerges. You should come up with two creative and at least two credible alternatives.

10. What would you do as a member of the media?

As advocated by Sissela Bok in her three-step SEA, this final step asks you to make known your personal reaction to the case study being analyzed. Pretend you are a specific media professional involved with the case. What action would you take and why?
The SEA. Nothing to it, right? There’s an old joke that I shouldn’t even mention because I’m sure you’ve heard it, but I don’t care because I can’t see your reaction. It starts with a flummoxed tourist lost in New York City on her way to a concert. She stops a fast-walking passerby on the sidewalk and asks, “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” Without missing a beat, the hardened New Yorker answers, “Practice, practice, practice.” How do you get comfortable in using the SEA to solve your ethical dilemmas whether you are home alone with plenty of time to think about each step, on location at an assignment when you need an immediate answer, or with a group of your co-workers waiting for your solution because they know you read this book? Okay, you’ve got it. The Canadian author and journalist Malcolm Gladwell (The Tipping Point, Blink, What the Dog Saw, and David and Goliath) famously introduced in his book Outliers: The Story of Success the concept of the 10,000-hour rule (2017). He asserts that if you practice anything – from playing the guitar to learning a philosophical approach – for 10,000 hours you will become a world-class practitioner or expert. To put it in perspective, if you worked on an activity for eight hours a day, six days a week (I assume you take Fridays off), for 50 weeks a year (again, I’m assuming you take a week off in August and in March), in a little more than four years you would be the master of your domain (a blatant “Seinfeld” reference). But let’s get real. Eight hours a day? More realistically, if you practiced one hour a day three days a week for 30 weeks a year, you would achieve the goal of mastery in a mere 111 years. With this book you have the opportunity to become a visual ethics expert. At the end of each chapter there will be case studies in which you can practice with the SEA for as many hours as you choose.

**SEA Analysis by Nikky Farinas**

**2016 Elections: False Balance**

**Brief Summary**

This case study highlights the idea of a “false balance” in the media, during the presidential election campaign of 2016, in an article by Liz Spayd (2016), the former public editor for The New York Times. This method of journalism ensures that both candidates are portrayed in the same light. Fairness being the main priority and not truth. This type of “balanced” coverage equates something minor and major in order to give candidates the same amount of coverage. This type of journalism has been criticized because it “masquerades as rational thinking.” For example, during the campaign people started to equate Hillary Clinton’s use of private email servers with the charge that Russian officials hacked into American computers. This strive for “balance” urged journalists to prioritize equal coverage rather than reporting facts.

**Step 1: Three Significant Facts**

1. One interesting fact from this article is that this year’s candidates had “the lowest approval ratings in history.” Spayd (2016) argues that this may be why journalists are having such a hard time covering the election. “Journalists are accustomed to covering candidates who may be apples and oranges, but at least are still both fruits.” This is significant because it becomes clear that we have never had a
candidate like Donald Trump. This election can serve as a learning experience for journalists and the media.

2. Spayd (2016) claims that a media who heavily favor one candidate is not the key to fair journalism. Rather, she claims that what is needed is more honesty and truthful reporting. No more striving for a “false balance,” just reporting the absolute truth whether it’s majority is good or bad for a candidate. It is important for journalists to understand that there is a solution to “false balance” in order for them to fix that problem.

3. Although Spayd (2016) targets journalism as a whole she does mention that “false balance” takes place mostly on “opinion pages and social media.” This is significant considering the amount of people that use social media sites as their only source of news. If the only content being given to them contains the “false balance” style of writing, they mold their opinions based on a biased article.

**Step 2: Facts to Know**

1. Is there a punishment for publishing “false balanced” stories?

   Although there is no punishment for publishing “false balanced” stories because it is not flat out lying about the candidates, but rather an exaggeration, there is also no punishment for publishing false news unless the news causes harm to someone or violates human rights (“False news”, n.d.).

2. As mentioned earlier, most of the “false balanced” stories took place on social media platforms and opinion pages. What percentage of voters got their information off websites like Facebook?

   According to Vox, around 44 percent of voters received their news from Facebook while 9 percent received their news from Twitter (Lee, 2016).

3. Why does it matter that these “false balanced” stories are published on Facebook, a social media platform and a news platform?

   Things we see on social media can trigger our way of thinking. A “study found that 41 percent of young people between the ages of 15 and 25 had participated in some kind of political discussion or activity online” (Green, 2016). That’s close to half of the percentage of young people voicing their opinions and obtaining information on social media platforms.

**Step 3: The Ethical Dilemma**

The issue here is that the story the journalists are trying to report ends up being manipulated. As they strive for “balance” between the candidates, “the press unfairly equates a minor failing of Hillary Clinton’s to a major failing of Donald Trump’s” (Shafer, 2016). Journalists strive to stay impartial during elections, however this method can be detrimental to people’s way of thinking. This is important because “A balanced treatment of an unbalanced phenomenon distorts reality” (Vanden Heuvel, 2014). This sort of biased style of journalism can be especially detrimental during an election year which is when many journalists strive for an even more balanced style of writing that is unbiased. Bias promotes a group of people, person, or
idea which “is a violation of the principle of journalistic ethics” (“Journalists Ethics Code”, n.d.). Bias and false balance “may prompt that news organization to right a wrong and take up an unpopular cause” (Dean, n.d.).

**Step 4: Moral Agent and RRRs**

Journalists. They report current and important events, assure the public that they are receiving all the facts accurately, report the story to the public, remain unbiased but truthful in all reporting.

**Step 5: Stakeholders and their RRRs**

The public. As citizens it is their duty to educate themselves on the two candidates which can be difficult when journalists are giving them “falsely balanced” stories, to vote and make a decision based on information they receive about the candidates. The candidates. Aside from their own media they put out into the public, their public image relies heavily on journalists; it is their role to win over the people of America which is done mainly through their public image.

**Step 6: Values**

Reporters: Ethical, truthful, unethically striving for balance
The public: Impressionable, civic minded, logical
The candidates: Civic minded, ambitious, selfish
*Most opposite values: Ethical vs. selfish*

**Step 7: Loyalties**

Reporters: Themselves, the public, their employers
The public: Themselves, the candidates, their fellow Americans
The candidates: Themselves, their party, the public
*Most opposite loyalties: Reporters vs. Candidates*

**Step 8: The Six Philosophies**

*Categorical imperative:* The categorical imperative philosophy is not a set of rules that is given, but rather it is “supposed to provide a way for us to evaluate moral actions and to make moral judgments” (Pecorino, 2002). As global citizens there is a moral expectation that everybody adheres to the rules. As servants to the public, journalists have a greater expectation to follow this philosophy.

*Utilitarianism:* In the utilitarian world, their main concern is that we make choices in our lives that “maximize utility, i.e. the action or policy that produces the largest amount of good” (Nathanson, 2016). It is the journalists’ main goal to do as much good in the world by providing the public with as much truth and current news that is happening in the world at that time.

*Hedonism:* The philosophy of hedonism is that “all pleasure is intrinsically good, and nothing but pleasure is intrinsically good” (“Hedonistic theories,” 2009). It focuses on the idea that pleasure is the only thing that brings value into our lives and anything less has no value (Moore, 2004). Most journalists follow this philosophy to a certain degree. Otherwise,
“false balance” wouldn’t exist. False balance strives to be equal to promote “fairness and equality” to these candidates, ideas that promote pleasure and goodness.

The golden rule: The golden rule is one that is known worldwide and valued in different traditions and philosophies. It appeals to need of humans to have fairness and goodness in their lives. “The Golden Rule also emphasizes values of mutuality, interdependence and reciprocity” (“Understanding the Golden Rule,” 2016). Journalists follow this rules in their everyday practice, or else they wouldn’t be in the career path they are on now. Journalists have a sort of “watchdog” protection over the public and this sense of duty to help the public, a sort of interdependence relationship.

The golden mean: Put plainly, the golden mean is the mean between two extremes. When you pick the mean, you are seen as acting morally (“Aristotle – The Golden Mean,” 2016). The golden mean is what is suggested that journalists do in order to rid the journalism world of “false balance.” Not to exaggerate the bad things candidates have done and not to hide the better aspects of the candidates either, but rather to report the story just as it is.

Veil of ignorance: The veil of ignorance is a philosophy in which people are not judged based their “personal characteristics and social and historical circumstances” (Freeman, 2014). Journalists invoke the veil of ignorance when they report their stories with complete truth and unbiasedness. However, this is the philosophy that tends to be forgotten once journalists start adhering to the idea of a “false balance.”

Step 9: Creative and Credible Alternatives

Creative: Ban any journalist who functions under the “false balance” style of writing. Place the journalist on a “do not hire” or “do not publish” list. This would prevent them from having their “false balance” style of writing from being publishing. This ban would only last for 6 months before the journalist could have their work published again.

Creative: Have journalists pick a party to affiliate with and only write about that party’s candidate. This would eliminate any need for the journalists to be “fair & balanced” when reporting about the election.

Credible: Journalists be made more aware about “false balance” therefore they can be more conscious of their writing style while covering the election. The more other journalists reprimand other journalists for this type of writing the more journalists will be aware that this style of writing is looked down upon.

Credible: Journalists make an effort to write better stories. Stories that don’t strive to be “equal” but rather, truthful. It can also be an option that editors be in charge of assuring that stories with a “false balance” styles of articles are not published.

Step 10: What Would You Do as a Media Professional?

If I were a media professional, I would try and assure that stories are better written. I would encourage news directors and editors to be more alert to the stories they publish. This encourages more awareness and double-checking of the angles of how stories are being written and that they aim to be truthful and not only “fair.”

Annotated Sources

In this piece, Paul Lester briefly defines visual ethics. He explains that while some people, perhaps especially reporters, think of news photography as easy, it is actually extremely powerful and more likely to be remembered by readers than are words. Moreover, because pictures tend to capture the shocking, the violent, and the strange with particular precision, photographers have a special duty to take ethics seriously in applying their craft.


Here, Lester outlines the relationship between privacy and ethics, and notes that what photographers, reporters and others can do legally is often different – that is, more permissive – than what they should do ethically. Lester describes how digital media and the advance of smartphone technology make it easier than ever for citizens to invade one another’s privacy rights, sometimes for newsworthy purposes, and oftentimes not. The essay concludes with an alphabetized list of ethical concerns and possible injuries students should think through in deciding whether an action they might take is justified, or not.

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Ethical Issues and Analytical Procedures

Citizen Journalism


Advertising and Public Relations


Typography and Graphic Design


Informational Graphics and Cartoons


Mixed and Virtual Reality


Editing Challenges


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Conclusion


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