

CHAPTER 1

*THE WHO, WHAT,
WHERE, WHEN, WHY
AND HOW OF
JOURNALISM*



KEY TERMS

Agency; Churnalism; Communication; Ethics; Fourth estate; Free press; Ideology; Journalism; Journalism education; Journalism studies; Leveson; Profession; Public interest; Public sphere; Social media; Trade

“Journalism, like acting and prostitution, is not a profession but a vocation”, declared former *Times* journalist Louis Heren (1973 [1996]: 187–188) in his memoirs. Rather more recently, Sharon Marshall described former colleagues on assorted redtop tabloids as almost all “mad, drunken, immoral, sex-crazed chancers”. And those were just their good points, judging by her confession that “deep down I love every double-crossing, slippery, two-faced little one of them” (Marshall, 2010: 269). We can see something of the mythology of journalism at work in these two comments about both the weighty and the popular press. There’s a tendency among journalists to see themselves as slightly roguish, verging on the disreputable: ever-present members of society’s awkward squad, except when they are sucking up to the editor, proprietor or proprietor’s spouse. As Andrew Marr puts it in his own memoir:

Journalism is a chaotic form of earning, ragged at the edges, full of snakes, con artists and even the occasional misunderstood martyr. It doesn’t have an accepted career structure, necessary entry requirement or an effective system of self-policing. Outside organised crime, it is the most powerful and enjoyable of the anti-professions. (Marr, 2005: 3)

That phrase “outside organised crime” pre-dated the revelations of organised criminality at (and closure of) the *News of the World*, of course, but the point still stands that journalism can be powerful and infuriating and full of contradictions. Journalists routinely juggle complex intellectual, legal, commercial and ethical issues every day, simultaneously and at high speed, all while giving the impression of being little deeper than a puddle. And it can be fun.

COMMUNICATION

The basic questions of journalism highlighted in the title of this chapter – Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? – are echoed in an early model of the mass communication process, formulated by Harold Lasswell in 1948. For Lasswell, analysis of the media begins with the question: “Who says what to whom, through what channel and with what effect?” (McQuail, 2000: 52–53). This has been termed a “transmission” model of communication because it is essentially one way, from sender to receiver. This and later versions of the transmission model have been challenged in recent decades as too simplistic, too linear, too mono-directional to explain the complexities of communication. It has been argued that an “active audience” can filter messages through our own experiences and understandings, sometimes producing readings “against the grain”, or even suggesting multiple meanings. Increasingly, too, audiences are contributing to journalism directly via social media and user-generated content. The ways in which journalists engage with the audience on social media are considered in detail in Chapter 14 but also crop up throughout the book.

“Journalism largely consists in saying ‘Lord Jones Dead’ to people who never knew that Lord Jones was alive.”

GK Chesterton.

JOURNALISM

Journalists may indeed inform society about itself, but such a formulation falls far short of an adequate definition. Journalism is defined by Denis McQuail as “paid writing (and the audiovisual equivalent) for public media with reference to actual and ongoing events of public relevance” (McQuail, 2000: 340). Like all such definitions, this raises many questions – Can journalism never be unpaid? Can media be other than public? Who decides what is of public relevance? – but it remains a reasonable starting point for

In western, liberal democracies, at least, each of us is at liberty to commit acts of journalism if we so choose. That is because journalism is a trade, or a craft, rather than a “proper” profession along the lines of medicine or the law. It’s not complete liberty hall – in Chapter 2 we will consider some of the constraints that limit the behaviour and autonomy of journalists – but it does mean that journalists are not required to seek anyone’s permission to practise journalism. That, in turn, means that nobody can be denied permission to practise journalism, even if they turn out to be a con artist or a sex-crazed chancer.

So what is it all for? Journalism is a form of **communication** based on asking, and answering, the questions Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? Journalism is also a job. Journalists need to pay their rents or mortgages and feed their kids, and they have been known to refer to their workplaces as “word factories”. Yet being a journalist is not the same as working in other types of factory because journalists play a *social* role that goes beyond the production of commodities to sell in the marketplace. Imperfect though it might be, **journalism** informs society about itself and makes public that which would otherwise be private. Journalists have been described as a **fourth estate** of the realm, the eyes-and-ears of the people, acting in the **public interest**. Rather an important job, you might think, but “the people” don’t always agree.

Public opinion polls routinely remind journalists that we vie for bottom place with politicians and estate agents in the league table of trustworthiness; that has been the case since long before the 21st century phone-hacking scandal and Leveson inquiry into press ethics. Such attitudes have become all too familiar to Jemima Kiss, who explains:

It seems pretty much anyone outside the industry takes a sharp intake of breath when you say you’re a journalist, which means I often feel the need to say, “I’m not *that* kind of journalist.” The assumption is the cliché of a ruthless, doorstepping tabloid hack, I suspect, the type perpetuated in cheesy TV dramas.

Yet despite this image problem, a never-ending stream of bright young and not-so-young people are eager to

any analysis of the principles and practices of journalism. McQuail goes on to differentiate between different types of journalism: “prestige” (or quality) journalism, tabloid journalism, local journalism, specialist journalism, “new” (personal and committed) journalism, civic journalism, development journalism, investigative journalism, journalism of record, advocacy journalism, alternative journalism and gossip journalism (McQuail, 2000: 340).

Such differentiation is rejected by David Randall, who recognises only the division between *good* and *bad* journalism:

The bad is practised by those who rush faster to judgement than they do to find out, indulge themselves rather than the reader, write between the lines rather than on them, write and think in the dead terms of the formula, stereotype and cliché, regard accuracy as a bonus and exaggeration as a tool and prefer vagueness to precision, comment to information and cynicism to ideals. The good is intelligent, entertaining, reliably informative, properly set in context, honest in intent and effect, expressed in fresh language and serves no cause but the discernible truth. Whatever the audience. Whatever the culture. Whatever the language. Whatever the circumstances. (Randall, 2011: viii)

Whether it is as simple as that is a question we will explore further in this and subsequent chapters. For now, let’s stick with defining journalism as:

“Most of journalism, and all of the interesting part, is a disreputable, erratic business which, if properly conducted, serves a reputable end.”

Max Hastings.

A set of practices through which information is found out and communicated, often involving making public what would otherwise be private, and which is typically published or broadcast in a format such as a newspaper, magazine, bulletin, documentary, website, or blog. Journalism entails discovering or uncovering fresh, topical, factual material and making it publicly available, but it goes beyond that to include amplifying, contextualising, or commenting on facts and comments that have already been made public . . . (Harcup, 2014a: 148)

FOURTH ESTATE

The notion of the press as a “fourth estate of the realm” – alongside the Lords, the House of Commons, and the established Church – appears to have first been used by

become journalists. Why? Because it can be one of the most exciting jobs around. You go into work not necessarily knowing what you are going to be doing that day. You get the chance to meet powerful people, interesting people, inspiring people, heroes, villains and victims. You get the chance to ask stupid questions; to be one of the first to know something and to tell the world about it; to indulge a passion for writing, maybe to travel, maybe to become an expert in a particular field; to seek truth and campaign for justice; or, if that's your thing, to hang out with celebrities.

Then there's the thrill of seeing your byline or watching your own footage; and the odd experience of hearing your voice on a piece of audio. You can watch people share and discuss it on social media – or not, as the case may be. You can then do it all over again. And again. Little wonder, perhaps, that so many people are prepared to make sacrifices for a career in journalism. Sacrifices such as paying for your own training before even being considered for a job, unless you are either extremely lucky or are the offspring of a powerful figure in the industry; then being paid less than many of the people whose own complaints about low pay might make news stories. It was more than a century ago that journalists staged the first strike in the history of the National Union of Journalists, when they walked out of the *York Herald* in 1911 to protest against working hours and conditions that were described as being reminiscent of Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* (Mansfield, 1943: 159; Gopsill and Neale, 2007: 84–85). For many journalists relatively little has changed since then apart from the technology. If your priorities are a secure job with decent pay and predictable hours, you'd be better off looking elsewhere. The pay of most journalists, particularly those just starting out and particularly those working in the local or regional media, is nothing short of shameful. As one trainee reporter put it more than a decade ago:

Young people with a strong enough passion for writing will suffer low wages for the chance to work in journalism. But it is a disgrace to the industry as a whole that they should have to. The industry cynically manipulates our ambition. (Quoted in Journalism Training Forum, 2002: 57)

“Start-off pay is abysmal and if they are lucky it will move on to disgraceful after a year, and by the end of the training it will be only just short of appalling.”

Sean Dooley.

Edmund Burke in the 18th century. Recalling this usage in 1840, in what is believed to be the first time it appeared in print, Thomas Carlyle had no doubt of its meaning:

Burke said there were three estates in parliament; but, in the reporters' gallery yonder, there sat a fourth estate more important far than they all. It is not a figure of speech, or a witty saying; it is a literal fact, very momentous to us in these times. Literature is our parliament too. Printing, which comes necessarily out of writing, I say often, is equivalent to democracy: invent writing, democracy is inevitable. (Carlyle, 1840: 194)

Ideas about democracy and a free press have to a large extent grown alongside each other and come together in the concept of the fourth estate. Although initially referring specifically to the parliamentary press gallery, the term has become a more general label for journalism, locating journalists in the quasi-constitutional role of “watchdog” on the workings of government. This is central to the liberal concept of press freedom, as Tom O'Malley notes:

At the centre of this theory was the idea that the press played a central, if unofficial, role in the constitution. A diverse press helped to inform the public of issues. It could, through the articulation of public opinion, guide, and act as a check on, government. . . . The press could only fulfil this function if it were free from pre-publication censorship and were independent of the government. (O'Malley, 1997: 127)

PUBLIC INTEREST

The concept of the public interest is much used in debates about journalism but it has not proved easy to define. For former *News of the World* journalist Paul McMullan, the public interest simply means what people are interested in, as he told the Leveson inquiry:

I mean, circulation defines what is the public interest. I see no distinction between what the public is interested in and the public interest. Surely they're clever enough to make a decision whether or not they want to put their hand in their pocket and bring out a pound and buy it. I don't see it's the job – our job or anybody else – to force the public to be able to choose that you must read this, you can't read that. (McMullan, 2011)

PRACTICE

And that was long before the financial crisis that began in 2007–08, since when wage rates – and freelance fees – have declined even further in comparison with the cost of living.

JOURNALISM OR CHURNALISM?

Some wannabe journalists *are* put off when they discover the awful truth about pay. Others become disillusioned by work experience in newsrooms, observing that too many journalists seem to be chained to their desks in a culture of “presenteeism”, processing copy and checking things out – if at all – on the telephone, online or via social media. It was when he was working as a business journalist with BBC Scotland that Waseem Zakir came up with the word **churnalism** to describe too much of today’s newsroom activity:

Ten or 15 years ago you would go out and find your own stories and it was proactive journalism. It’s become reactive now. You get copy coming in on the wires and reporters churn it out, processing stuff and maybe adding the odd local quote. It’s affecting every newsroom in the country and reporters are becoming churnalists.

It is true that an ever-increasing workload may reduce the chances of doing the very things that made journalism seem so attractive in the first place. On top of all that, young journalists have to listen to more experienced hacks grumbling that “it wasn’t like this in my day”. The old-timers may have a point, but even the journalists of 100 years ago looked back fondly on a supposed “golden age” of journalism circa 1870 (Tunstall, 2002: 238).

Even when disabused of romantic illusions about travelling the world on huge expense accounts, pausing between drinks to jot down the occasional note, large numbers of people are attracted by the fact that journalism remains an occupation in which no two days are exactly the same and where the big story may be only a phone call away. And by the fact that journalism *matters*. Many journalists around the world pay with their lives precisely because journalism matters, as we shall see in Chapter 2.

PRINCIPLES



PAUL McMULLAN
VIDEO AND
TRANSCRIPT

It would be fair to say that McMullan has been something of a lone voice, at least in public, in defining the public interest in such a way. The public interest will be considered in more depth later in this book, particularly in Chapters 2 and 13.

CHURNALISM

As far as I can tell, the portmanteau word “churnalism” was first published in the original edition of this book way back in 2004, credited to Waseem Zakir; so it is worth keeping in mind that, when he refers to “10 or 15 years ago”, that would now be more like 25 years ago. Churnalism later took on a new life when Nick Davies (2008: 56) referred to “what some now call ‘churnalism’” in his book *Flat Earth News*, having been informed of the term by one of my ex-students who was helping with his research. Since then countless academics, journalists and other commentators have told us without checking that Davies himself coined the term; he did not, nor did he ever claim to have done so. The funny thing is that most of those erroneously crediting him with the coinage have done so in the very process of criticising journalists for recycling material without checking. The word “ironic” is both overused and frequently misused, but it might just fit here.

Churnalism, meanwhile, is alive and well in the digital age, judging by a recent study of public relations in the field of science, which quoted a press officer explaining how it works: “You send out a press release and it gets picked up by a newswire and you can see it on 80 different websites. And for me it’s brilliant” (Williams and Gajevic, 2013: 516).

PUBLIC SPHERE

The idea of the public sphere rests on the existence of a space in which informed citizens can engage with one another in debate and critical reflection; hence its relevance to discussions of the media. Jürgen Habermas traces the rise of the public sphere in Europe in the late 17th and early 18th centuries and argues that increasing commercialisation led subsequently to the decline of the public sphere and the press as a space that enabled “the people to reflect critically upon itself and on the practices of the state” (Stevenson, 2002: 49). Today, according to this analysis, such reasoned public discussion has been

“Some of my most memorable pieces have been interviewing ordinary people in extraordinary situations.”
Cathy Newman.

Explanations of *how* and *why* journalism matters depend, like so many things, on *who* is speaking. Journalism is variously said to form part of a **public sphere**, to support a **free press** or to inculcate us with the **ideology** of the ruling class. Journalism is probably all those things and more because there is not really just *one* journalism.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

Individual journalists have their own tales to tell, their own beliefs about what they do, their own reasons for pursuing a career in whatever field of journalism they work in. For each edition of this book I have interviewed a range of journalists from different generations, different backgrounds and different media, some of them several times. Their comments are taken from these interviews unless otherwise indicated. Here are just some of those you will hear from in subsequent chapters:

- Carla Buzasi, founding editor-in-chief of the online-only *Huffington Post UK*, who previously worked on the digital side of magazines such as *Glamour*, *Marie Claire* and *Vogue*. Carla ran the *Huffington Post's* UK operation from its launch in July 2011 (in the same week that saw the closure of the country's biggest-selling newspaper, the *News of the World*) until leaving to become global chief content officer for the fashion trend forecaster WGSN in 2014. She tweets as @carlabuzasi.
- Lindsay Eastwood, for many years a staff reporter on ITV Yorkshire's *Calendar* news programme, for which she still freelances. After working on her local newspaper (the *Craven Herald*) straight after leaving school, she moved to the *Watford Observer* and worked shifts on the nationals before returning north to the *Yorkshire Evening Post*. Lindsay later switched to news and documentary television and now also teaches journalism as well as tweeting as @lindsayeastwood.
- Paul Foot joined the *Daily Mirror* after university and also worked on the *Daily Record* in Glasgow before moving on to *Private Eye* and then *Socialist Worker*. He left when he was offered his own page

"Reporters are becoming churnalists."
Waseem Zakir.

replaced by "the progressive privatisation of the citizenry and the trivialisation . . . of questions of public concern" (Stevenson, 2002: 50). But, in turn, Habermas has been accused of idealising "a bygone and elitist form of political life" (McQuail, 2000: 158). As with many topics introduced in this chapter, this is not the last you will read of the public sphere.

FREE PRESS

Editors and owners alike are often heard extolling the virtues of a "free press", a liberal model based on the idea that everyone is free to publish a newspaper without having to be licensed by those in power. Hence the strength of feeling and rhetoric around the Leveson Report of 2012 and subsequent discussions about a royal charter to oversee self-regulation of the UK press. Although publishers must act within the constraints of laws ranging from defamation to phone-hacking, they do not have to submit to censorship in advance nor does anyone except broadcasters need to seek anyone's permission to publish. Through the democracy of the free market, so the argument goes, we get the press we both desire and deserve. However, this concept of a press selflessly serving the public does not go unchallenged. Colin Sparks, for example, points to an increasing concentration of ownership and to economic barriers on entry, keeping out competitors. He argues:

Newspapers in Britain are first and foremost businesses. They do not exist to report the news, to act as watchdogs for the public, to be a check on the doings of government, to defend the ordinary citizen against abuses of power, to unearth scandals or to do any of the other fine and noble things that are sometimes claimed for the press. They exist to make money, just as any other business does. To the extent that they discharge any of their public functions, they do so in order to succeed as businesses. (Sparks, 1999: 45–46)

For Sparks, a truly free press – presenting objective information and a range of informed opinions while acting as a public forum – is actually "an impossibility in a free market" (Sparks, 1999: 59).

IDEOLOGY

By ideology is meant "some organised belief system or set of values that is disseminated or reinforced by communication"



THE PAUL FOOT
AWARD

in the *Daily Mirror*, but eventually fell foul of the post-Maxwell regime at the paper and returned to his spiritual home at the *Eye*. When he was interviewed for this book he was on the staff of the magazine as well as being a columnist for the *Guardian* newspaper and a freelance contributor to a range of other publications. He died shortly after the first edition appeared in 2004, but is commemorated every year in the Paul Foot Award for Investigative Journalism (see Chapter 6).

- Sarah Hartley is a freelance journalist and the former head of online editorial at MEN Media in Manchester, where she helped run a converged editorial operation across print, TV, radio and the web. Sarah started out as a trainee on the weekly *Leamington Spa Observer* and later became news editor of the *Northern Echo* newspaper. She switched to the *Echo*'s website before moving to the *Manchester Evening News* online operation and, later, to the world of freelancing where she now blogs about journalism and other topics at www.sarahhartley.me.uk/ and tweets as @foodiesarah.
- Jemima Kiss is head of technology at the *Guardian*, which she joined in 2006 initially as an online new media reporter. She did not train as a journalist but studied fine art at college before working at the Brighton Media Centre, where she helped develop the centre's website. Jemima began writing freelance technology-based features for websites produced by a company based at the centre before becoming a full-time journalist for www.journalism.co.uk in 2003, writing about the digital publishing industry. She mostly learned on the job but was also sent on several short training courses about writing for the web and media law. She tweets as @jemimakiss.
- Neal Mann is multimedia innovations editor at the *Wall Street Journal* in New York, having trained as a broadcast journalist before working at *Sky News* as researcher, field producer, deputy news editor and digital news editor. After leaving *Sky* he went to the *WSJ*, initially as social media editor. He describes the multimedia innovations editor job as “looking

(McQuail, 2000: 497). Marxists believe that a ruling-class ideology is propagated throughout western, capitalist societies with the help of the mass media. Ideology may be slippery and contested, but it is argued that the principle remains essentially as expounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels more than 160 years ago:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: ie, the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas . . . (Marx and Engels, [1846] 1965: 61)

Ideological power has been described as “the power to signify events in a particular way”, although ideology is also “a site of struggle” between competing definitions (Hall, 1982: 69–70). To illustrate the point, Stuart Hall refers to media coverage of industrial action in the UK public sector:

[One] of the key turning-points in the ideological struggle was the way the revolt of the lower-paid public-service workers against inflation, in the “Winter of Discontent” of 1978–9, was successfully signified, not as a defence of eroded living standards and differentials, but as a callous and inhuman exercise of overweening “trade-union power”, directed against the defenceless sick, aged, dying and indeed the dead but unburied “members of the ordinary public”. (Hall, 1982: 83)

“The heroes of journalism are reporters.”
David Randall.

Viewed from this perspective, the “news values” employed by journalists in the selection and construction of stories can be seen not as the neutral expression of professional practice, but as ideologically loaded (Hall et al, 1978: 54). Thus, for all the apparent diversity of the media, and taking into account various exceptions, the routines and practices of journalists *tend to privilege* the explanations of the powerful and to foreclose discussion before it strays too far beyond the boundaries of the dominant ideology (Hall et al, 1978: 118).

at how we can change the way we do journalism, to deliver content to the audience on a variety of different platforms, and create experiences”. He has also spent time in Sydney, having been seconded to help News Corp Australia do something similar there. Neal tweets as @fieldproducer.

- Jane Merrick is political editor of the *Independent on Sunday* and a columnist on the *Independent*, having previously worked for the *Daily Mail*, the Mercury news agency in Liverpool, and the Press Association (for whom she was working when interviewed for this book). She tweets as @janemerrick23.
- Cathy Newman presents *Channel 4 News* but also reports on many stories herself as well as conducting investigations for the *Dispatches* current affairs programme. Before switching to television in 2006, initially as a political correspondent, she worked for the *Independent* and *Financial Times*, specialising first in media, then in politics. As well as appearing on screen, Cathy is a regular blogger (including for the *Telegraph*) and helped create the *Factcheck* blog on the C4News website. She tweets as @cathynewman.
- Andrew Norfolk is chief investigations reporter for the *Times*, having previously worked for the *Evening News* in Scarborough and then the *Yorkshire Post*, where he was a member of a team that exposed the “Donnygate” corruption scandal. In 2014 he was named Journalist of the Year in the British Journalism Awards, following his Paul Foot Award two years earlier, for a lengthy investigation into the reluctance of police and care agencies to protect vulnerable young girls in Rochdale, Rotherham and elsewhere from being groomed for sexual exploitation. His series of *Times* stories prompted two government-ordered inquiries, a parliamentary inquiry and a new national action plan on child sexual exploitation.
- Deborah Wain also won the Paul Foot Award but from the other end of the journalistic food chain. She was not working for a well-heeled national news organisation, but for an under-resourced weekly newspaper, the *Doncaster Free Press*, when becoming the joint winner of the award in 2007 for an

“The business of the press is disclosure.”
John Thaddeus Delane.

An emphasis on the ideological content of journalism is frequently challenged for downplaying the agency of journalists themselves and/or for failing to take account of the complex ways in which audiences may actually “read” media texts.

AGENCY

Within the study of journalism, agency means the extent to which individual journalists can *make a difference* to media practices and content: “To have agency is defined by the ability to be able to actively intervene” (Stevenson, 2002: 226). To say that journalists have agency is not to deny that they operate in a world of constraints (see Chapter 2), nor to ignore the political and economic pressures to replace journalism with churnalism and/or user-generated content; it is to argue that structural forces do not totally determine all the actions of individuals. Yet many academic critics of the media seem to allow little room for agency and to downplay the role of journalists, preferring to concentrate on structural or market issues, as Angela Phillips (2015: 139) points out. Take Sparks’ explanation for the “lurid, sensational and sometimes offensive material” he finds in much of the media:

None of these elements can be traced to the shortcomings of individuals. Newspaper proprietors may be, in the main, bullying reactionary bigots who force their editors to print politically biased material. But even if they were self-denying liberal paragons, it would still make sense for editors to act in the same way, because that is the best business model available to them. Again, editors and journalists may well be moral defectives with no sense of their responsibility to society and to the people upon whose lives they so pruriently report. But even if they were saintly ascetics, it would still make sense for them to publish the same sorts of material, because that is what best secures the competitive position of their newspapers. (Sparks, 1999: 59)

Little sense there of the flesh-and-blood journalists we will hear from in these pages. Yet if journalism matters – as is argued in this book – then the actions of individual journalists must matter too.

investigation into a local further education college. Deborah had gone into journalism straight from school, starting out on the *Matlock Mercury*. Then, after a stint on the *Derby Evening Telegraph*, she went to university to study drama and fine arts. She has now left the *Free Press* but continues to write, including dramas for BBC Radio Four.

- Martin Wainwright was for many years the northern editor of the *Guardian*, having previously worked for the London *Evening Standard*. He retired in 2013, but not before building the *Northerner* blog into a lively presence on the *Guardian* website. He continues to make occasional BBC radio programmes about how grim it's not up north and he tweets as @mswainwright.
- Brian Whittle started on the weekly *Harrogate Herald* at the age of 17 and went on to work for the Bradford *Telegraph and Argus*, the *Northern Echo*, the *Sun*, the *Daily Sketch*, the *Sunday People*, the *National Enquirer* and the *Daily Star* before launching his successful Cavendish Press news agency in Manchester. Brian died in 2005, but the agency lives on.

**"All human life is there."
Old News of the World
motto.**

Among the other journalists featured in this book from time to time are Trevor Gibbons of BBC online; David Helliwell, who was interviewed while assistant editor of the *Yorkshire Evening Post*; consumer affairs reporter Kevin Peachey, who was interviewed while working for the *Nottingham Evening Post*; and Abul Taher, a former news editor of *Eastern Eye* who was interviewed while working for the *Sunday Times*.

Another presence felt throughout this book will be that of the author. As a journalist for the best part of four decades now, I have first-hand experience of working for a range of media large and small, mainstream and alternative. As a long-standing member of the National Union of Journalists, I have engaged with the ethics and social role of journalism as well as the industrial issues that impact upon the working conditions of journalists, including staffing and pay. As someone who now teaches on vocational courses accredited by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) along with the Broadcast Journalism Training Council (BJTC) and the Professional Publishers Association

(formerly the PTC), I have first-hand experience of practical journalism training. And as someone who has tried my hand at research, I am aware of the insights that can be achieved by academic scholarship about, critical engagement with, and reflection upon the principles and practices of journalism.

However, I am also aware of the gap of understanding that too often separates those who *study* media from those who *produce* media. In the UK, as Richard Keeble (2006: 260) notes with regret, "mutual suspicion persists between the press and academia. . . . Scepticism about the value of theoretical studies for aspiring reporters remains widespread". Similarly, in the USA, Barbie Zelizer highlights this disconnection:

As a former journalist who gradually made her way from wire-service reporting to the academy I am continually wrestling with how best to approach journalism from a scholarly point of view. When I arrived at the university – "freshly expert" from the world of journalism – I felt like I'd entered a parallel universe. Nothing I had read as a graduate student reflected the working world I had just left. . . . My discomfort was shared by many other journalists I knew, who felt uneasy with the journalism scholarship that was fervently putting their world under a microscope. (Zelizer, 2004: 2–3)

Under a microscope is perhaps not the most comfortable place to be, which might explain why so many who earn their livings within the media in general and journalism in particular feel the need to either ignore or attack those looking down the lens. As David Walker (2000: 236–237) notes, "The academic literature of sociology, media studies or cognate disciplines nowadays goes almost entirely unread by journalists". Many journalists seem happy to cover stories about the work of academic researchers on a vast range of subjects, from the health effects of drinking coffee to the psychology of sexual attraction, but when journalism itself comes under scrutiny, such academic study is suddenly deemed to be a waste of time and money. "It's difficult to think of another field . . . in which practitioners believe that the study of what they do is irrelevant to their practice", observe Simon Frith and Peter Meech (2007: 141 and 144): "If journalists look

at university journalism courses and find evidence that academics simply don't understand the realities of journalism, so academics look at journalists' accounts of themselves and find evidence of a striking amount of myth-making."

The press "is fearful of being dissected", in the words of one national newspaper reporter (Journalism Training Forum, 2002: 46). Yet surely there are *some* insights to be gained from such dissection and from what has been described as "the melding of theory and practice in a judicious mix of skills and experience along with scholarly study" (Errigo and Franklin, 2004: 46)? I believe there are, and I think that journalists and academics alike have something useful to contribute to the process of understanding; that is why I wrote this book. The aim is to help bridge the conceptual divide between those journalists (practitioners) who feel academics have little to teach them, and those academics whose focus on theory is in danger of denying journalists any degree of autonomy (or **agency**). This book makes explicit some of these different ways of exploring the principles and practices of journalism. In a dialogic approach, each chapter begins from a practitioner viewpoint but includes a parallel analysis from a more academic perspective. These two ways of seeing are not to be read in isolation, as each engages in dialogue with the other; they talk to each other, as do the best journalists and the best scholars.

This book does not attempt to go into too many of the specifics of, for example, being a foreign correspondent, a war correspondent, a celebrity blogger, a courtroom tweeter, a sub, a sports reporter, a showbiz diarist, a presenter, a motoring correspondent, or most of the other specialisms that all have their own rules and folklore; that is because the fundamentals of journalism must be grasped before more specialised roles can be carried out effectively or understood at more than a superficial level. The experience of Edward Behr rings a bell that echoes down the years. As a young reporter, Behr went to work for the Reuters agency in Paris:

In London, Agence France-Presse (AFP) correspondents rewrote Reuters' copy, as fast as they could, and the finished product ended up as part of the AFP news service. In Paris we shamelessly rewrote Agence France-Presse

copy, serving it up as Reuters' fare. All over the world lesser news agencies were writing up *their* versions of Reuters' stories and serving them up as authentic Indian, Spanish, or Brazilian news agency stories. Somewhere, at the bottom of this inverted pyramid, someone was getting a story at first hand. But who was he, and how did he set about it? (Behr, 1992: 72)

He may not be a "he", of course, but it is this reporter who will be the focus throughout this book: the reporter who goes out, whether physically or virtually or both, and gets a story at first hand.

JOURNALISM EDUCATION

This book is designed to help readers produce such reporting, with a necessary emphasis on the basics. Therefore, many of the practices discussed here will be those that developed originally within print journalism in general, and newspapers in particular, because they remain a solid foundation for a career in journalism that today embraces online, television, radio, magazine, mobile and other formats. The practical emphasis will be on the *core* journalistic skills that will be part of any good training course covering journalism in any – or all – media. Such skills cannot be allowed to diminish in importance, even if too many media organisations have in recent years made themselves dazed and confused by trying to leap aboard every passing technological bandwagon, even before

they have a clue where it might take them. "There is no possibility of standing still," argues media commentator Roy Greenslade (2008), because "what is state-of-the-art today will be old hat by tomorrow".

This title goes beyond practical instruction in skills to encourage understanding of, and critical reflection upon, our practice. Media employers have been accused of wanting cheap young journalists to be schooled in the routines of work through "basic skills, relevant knowledge and an unquestioning attitude", unencumbered by engagement with ideas from critical theory (Curran, 2000: 42). The book is certainly aimed at supporting students and



JOURNALISM
EDUCATION



JOURNALISM AS
AN ACADEMIC
DISCIPLINE

**"Get it right. Get it fast.
But get it right."
Old Press Association
motto.**

trainee journalists in the acquisition and application of reporting and writing skills to complement the other necessary elements of journalism training, such as shorthand, media law, and knowledge of public affairs. Yet, at the same time, it will introduce and engage with some of the more academic analysis that aids our understanding of how journalism works. To this end, the book is aimed at supporting *journalism studies* as well as *journalism training*. Taken together, the two elements can be said to constitute *journalism education* (Bromley, 1997: 339). By asking

Why journalists do certain things – as well as the Who, What, Where, When and How – the study of journalism can offer insights that complement journalism training and encourage a questioning attitude and a more reflective practice.

Much of the material discussed in these pages may be seen as culturally and historically specific to the UK in the second decade of the 21st century, but there will be many points of wider relevance. Each chapter will raise questions that could form the basis of individual reflection and/or group discussion. Each chapter also suggests further readings that, together with the references listed in the extensive bibliography, will provide a wealth of stimulating material to encourage further exploration of the issues discussed

here. The ethics of journalism, highlighted so publicly during the Leveson inquiry, will be addressed specifically in Chapters 2 and 13. However, because ethical issues have implications for *all* aspects of journalistic practice, questions about ethical issues will also be raised at appropriate points throughout the text, just as ethical issues crop up throughout a journalist's working life – often when least expected.

Journalism is sometimes said, usually by journalists to their critics, to be merely a mirror that reflects society. It is also sometimes said, not so much by journalists, to be a distorting mirror. Clearly journalism cannot be a simple *reflection* of everyday reality because it is both selective and organised (up to a point). As Walter Lippmann observed as long ago as 1922, reporting is not “the simple recovery of obvious facts” because facts “do not spontaneously take a shape in which they can be known. They must be given a shape by somebody” (quoted in McNair, 2000: 71). That's where journalists come in. Journalism is not simply fact-gathering. It involves dealing with sources, selecting information and opinion, and telling stories – all within the framework of the constraints, routines, principles, practices and ethics that will be discussed in the following chapters.



SUMMARY

Journalism is not simply another product but a process of communication, although not necessarily a one-way or linear process. Journalism is said to play a social role in informing society about itself, yet there is a gap of knowledge and understanding between vocational journalism training and academic journalism study. This book will describe the practices of practitioners, while engaging with the principles that inform both practice and analysis. A number of concepts introduced in this chapter will reappear at various points throughout this book.

QUESTIONS

- If journalism is not a profession, what is it?
- What role does journalism play in society?
- Why are journalists apparently so mistrusted by the public?
- What skills does a good journalist need?
- Why does media studies get such a bad press?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

You work for a news organisation that expects you personally to find, write, edit and publish around 12 stories every day; to push those stories out via social media to drive traffic to the website; and to engage with readers and others who make comments on the stories. What do you think journalists faced with such demands do, and what would you do?



HOW MIGHT YOU TACKLE THIS ISSUE?

FURTHER READING

No journalism student should be without their own copy of the *Oxford Dictionary of Journalism* (Harcup, 2014a), even if I say so myself. Then, one of the more thoughtful introductions to journalism from the perspective of a reflective practitioner is David Randall's (2011) *The Universal Journalist*, now in its fourth edition. Other useful introductions to journalism – these ones from journalists-turned-academics – include those by Sheridan Burns (2013), Keeble (2006) and Sissons (2006). The edited collection by Bromley and O'Malley (1997) includes valuable historical material that ought to be of interest to students, producers and consumers of journalism alike. McQuail (2000) is a comprehensive and largely comprehensible introduction to media and mass communication theories, while McQuail (2013) explores arguments about the importance of journalism to society. For further exploration of journalism studies scholarship, see Zelizer (2004), Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009) and Phillips (2015). Further suggestions will be made at the end of every chapter.

TOP THREE TO TRY NEXT

Tony Harcup (2014a) *Oxford Dictionary of Journalism*
David Randall (2011) *The Universal Journalist* (fourth edition)
The news – from a variety of media and platforms, every day

SOURCES FOR SOUNDBITES

Chesterton, 1981: 246; Hastings, 2004; Dooley, quoted in Slattery, 2005; Newman, interview with the author; Zakir, interview with the author; Randall, 2011: 1; Delane, quoted in Wheen, 2002: xi.

