

AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY USING DOCUMENTED REPORTING  
PRACTICES TO DETERMINE THE APPLICABILITY OF JOURNALISM ETHICS  
CODES: THE MIAMI HERALD-GARY HART CASE

By

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTERS	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	1
Research Question.....	4
Need for Study.....	6
2 ETHICS CODES.....	8
History.....	8
Codes to Be Used.....	11
Discussion and problems of codes.....	13
3 METHODOLOGY.....	16
4 POSSIBLE CENSURE PROCEDURES.....	20
Private Censure.....	20
Organizational Censure.....	23
Public Censure.....	27
5 ETHICAL ISSUES AND ACTUAL PRACTICES.....	30
Story Documentation and Presentation.....	30
Generally Accepted and Unaccepted Practices.....	34

6 COMPARISONS .....	44
Innaccurate, Biased and Unthorough Reporting .....	44
Accountability to Public .....	46
Backgrounding Inaccuracies .....	46
Chance for Replying to Charges .....	49
Reporting on Self .....	49
Right to Know of Misuse of Power .....	52
Correcting Errors .....	52
Impartial Treatment .....	55
Privacy of People in News .....	57
7 CONCLUSIONS .....	60
Summary .....	60
Usefulness of Comparison? .....	61
Limitations .....	62
Implications .....	63
Methodology Concerns .....	64
Recommendations for Further Research .....	67
REFERENCES .....	66
APPENDICES	
A THE SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS, SIGMA DELTA CHI CODE OF ETHICS .....	74
B AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES .....	78
C ASSOCIATED PRESS MANAGING EDITORS CODE OF ETHICS .....	81
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....	85

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The research used a case study of The Miami Herald's stakeout of Gary Hart's townhouse as a device to see how journalism codes could be compared to documented practices. Accepted and unaccepted practices for code statements were determined from journalism ethics texts as parameters for the study. The documented practices of the reporters were then compared to the applicable code statement in a matrix to determine whether the practices in the case study followed the statement, or whether more case studies need to be applied to determine whether the codes are applicable or not.

The thesis reviewed possible censure procedures where the comparison methodology could be used. After reviewing private, organizational and public censure, the theses suggests that a professional ruling board which would decide on code violations seems plausible. Because journalism codes are presently vague and nebulous,

this board would look at cases and decide, much in the manner of this study, whether the intent of the code was followed.

The study found that documentation for the case study selected did not provide enough information for a useful comparison in most cases.

Recommendations for further research on journalism ethics codes include the study of licensing of journalists, further methodology possibilities, quantitative studies, and identification of specific practices viewed as ethical or unethical by practitioners in terms of one area, such as privacy.

More importantly, cases heard by the National News Council, the Minnesota News Council and other boards that have documented actual practices should also be compared to code statements to determine whether they can be applied.

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1 Actual practice used by <u>The Miami Herald</u> versus ethical issue involved. . . .	35
2 Accepted and unaccepted practices for code statement issue . . . . .	43
3 Matrix comparison of code statements to actual practices: Inaccurate, biased and unthorough reporting. . . . .	45
4 Matrix comparison of code statements to actual practices: Accountability to public. . . . .	47
5 Matrix comparison of code statements to actual practices: Background inaccuracies. . . . .	48
6 Matrix comparison of code statements to actual practices: Chance to reply . . .	50
7 Matrix comparison of code statements to actual practices: Reporting on self. .	51
8 Matrix comparison of code statements to actual practices: Public's right to know . . . . .	53
9 Matrix comparison of code statements to actual practices: Correcting errors. .	54
10 Matrix comparison of code statements to actual practices: Impartial treatment. . . . .	56
11 Matrix comparison of code statements to actual practices: Privacy of people in news . . . . .	58