



Maintaining Journalistic Independence in Sports Journalism

Chris LaReau

Journalists must always act independently in order to report on the truth, allowing them to avoid conflicts of interest created by the news outlet's business interests.

Conflict of interest is a major ethical problem that journalists must avoid. Journalists main responsibility is to seek truth, report truth, and act independently. News organizations create a conflict of interest for their journalists through the news organizations business ventures. This conflict of interest could occur through the news organization acquiring a sister company that journalists report on. Another conflict of interest occurs when orders come down from the news organizations ownership on what should be reported on. In sports journalism, one of the more common conflicts of interest is created when the ownership of a news organization purchases a professional sports team, forcing the sports journalists to report on their sister company. It becomes the role of the journalist to ensure this conflict of interest is not reflected in their journalism.

Sport Ownership and Media Conflicts of Interest

Sport Ownership and Media Conflict of Interests

- Columbia Broadcast System (CBS) purchases 80% of the New York Yankees from 1964-1973
 - In 1981 the Tribune Company, parent company of the Chicago Tribune, purchases the Chicago Cubs for \$20.5 million until they sold the team in 2009
 - John Henry, successful businessmen and owner of the Boston Red Sox, purchased the Boston Globe from the New York Times for \$70 million in cash
- Potential Ethical Issue with Sport Ownership and Media
- Can journalists report truthfully and fairly while covering parent or sister businesses?
- Aftermath with Sport Ownership and Media
- Journalists maintained their responsibility in all of the above conflict of interest cases, understanding their need to seek truth, report it, and act independently is greater than any business related conflict of interest

Conflicts of Interest with ESPN

Conflict of Interest with ESPN

- ESPN pays billions of dollars to professional and collegiate sport leagues in order to cover the league
- Potential Ethical Issues with ESPN
- The payment of the leagues creates a conflict of interest as they are paying for these stories
 - According to the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), journalist must "be wary of sources offering information for money" as journalists must not pay for stories
 - The fact ESPN pays to cover leagues creates an ethical issue as they are clearly going against the SPJ Code of Ethics and are not acting independently
- Aftermath with Ethical Issues within ESPN
- ESPN's business relationship with the National Football League (NFL) has led to one questionable journalistic decision
 - Example: ESPN ended an investigation on head injuries in the NFL to maintain a good relationship with the league

How To Avoid Conflicts of Interest:

Suggestions Moving Forward

- Journalists must be sure that they value their ethical duties first and follow their business obligation after the ethical duties have been completed
 - While covering a team owned by the news organization, a journalist must cover the team truthfully and honestly as they did before the news organization owned the team
- Journalists must present all sides of a story and ensure they do not present on any artificially polarized points of view
 - When Chicago Tribune reporters cover baseball, they must make sure they are being truthful about the Cubs and White Sox, despite their ownership also owning the Cubs
- Journalist's must stay true to their key roll of seeking truth and reporting
- Journalist's must never accept money from stories in order to remain independence
 - In order to maintain independence in reporting, ESPN should not pay to cover leagues

Maintaining Journalistic Independence

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How NBC Deals with Sexual Misconduct Allegations

Emily Lawton

NBC dealt with sexual misconduct charges brought against them with complete disregard of being held accountable for wrongdoings within their corporation. Truth and transparency refers to presenting the facts to the public in as straightforward a manner as possible. Public awareness of information can be hindered by motives of maintaining a positive self-image enforced by those within NBC. NBC campaigns, news coverage, and Olympic themes suggest corporate opposition to truth and transparency. While the entertainment portion of NBC geared towards public distraction, the news side focused on trying to expose sexual misconduct charges. NBC's entertainment division failed to bridge the gap between accountability for sexual misconduct allegations which journalists strived to uncover.

The primary function of journalism is to serve as the foundation of truth, for people to be the gatekeepers of society. Journalists' must give the public information (foundation) of information so that they can deduct truth (what is actually occurring) in society. According to The Elements of Journalism, truth and transparency include the ability to remain objective, exercise humility, not fabricate additional information, never deceive, rely on original reporting, and expose methods and motives. In other words, journalists must double check facts, remove bias, treat everyone equally, rely on original facts and investigate motives of those involved in a story prior to publication

The article, "NBC Tiptoes around sexual misconduct in coverage of Shaun White- and the Olympics in General", was published by the Washington Post in efforts to show how accountability can be difficult task for journalists to achieve under corporate control. For the longest time, NBC ignored the accusations against Shaun White. The case occurred in 2016 and there has not been a lot published about it until NBC was put on the spot during the 2018 Olympics. An NBC Sports spokesman did not respond to a request for comment. Publicly admitting that the accusations were true could damage the reputation of the company, harm the reputation of White and cause viewership to fall.

Disguised under motivational Olympic themes, NBC entertainment news focused on distracting the public from sexual misconduct charges. Prior to the 2018 Olympics, everyone was aware of the Nassar sexual misconduct charges, but as coverage appeared everything seemed to vanish for the most part. NBC has devoted little time to the Nassar scandal in its prime-time telecasts of the Games. NBC highlighted its efforts to opening counseling offices on Olympic grounds for those dealing with sexual misconduct. NBC's #SeeHer campaign aims at promoting realistic images for girls and women involved in advertisement. Instead of providing closure to those affected by sexual misconduct, NBC is responding by becoming involved in a movement that does not give justice to victims of sexual misconduct and their families.

Savannah Guthrie is an NBC journalist who tried to expose the sexual misconduct charges. She did not want to bring up harassment but felt compelled. Journalists must try to expose unethical conduct even if it has the possibility of harming their livelihood. White did not personally admit to his actions, but to growth over the years.

Powerful NBC personalities have been fired for sexual misconduct charges. of sexual misconduct since 2012.

Ann Curry's interview with Lauer suggested her efforts to expose wrong doings of people in a company she was previously employed by. "I'm trying to do no harm in these conversations" "We clearly are waking up to a reality, an injustice that has been occurring for some time, and I think it will continue to occur until the glass ceiling is finally broken"

Deception can come in many ways, shapes, and forms; however, it is the journalists' duty to provide the public with facts.

By making efforts to overlook sexual misconduct charges and disguising themselves under positive themes, NBC businessmen prevented truth from being exposed to the public as well as closure for victims. Exposing the truth to the public can lead to powerful individuals being fired, yet journalists like Ann Curry and Savannah Guthrie are trying to shed light upon sexual misconduct allegations. A true journalist must set aside his or her beliefs in an effort to expose wrong-doings, even if they are directly affected by them. Sexual misconduct has been encouraged, by NBC managers, to be reported. If they fail to do so, employees could be fired hiding the unjust actions of their colleagues.

Joe Zerang

A journalistic conflict of interest refers to the ethical dilemma of reporting an issue to which the journalist has a personal connection. This dilemma can often pose a difficult obstacle for journalists. If a topic comes up that a reporter has a strong opinion on, they should avoid covering that story. Covering controversial events, like a protest, can increase the likelihood for a conflict of interest issue. If a journalist has the chance to cover a protest, on which they have a personal opinion, they should avoid covering that story. By evading such a story, the journalist sidesteps damaging their credibility, as well as the credibility of that particular media outlet.

A major component in journalism that the Society of Professional Journalists discusses in their Code of Ethics is the importance of acting independently while reporting. This means that journalists should avoid common conflicts of interests, such as politics and other outside activities, which might compromise integrity or impartiality and may damage credibility.

The Women's March On Washington

During one of the recent Women's march's in Washington D.C., some questions were raised as to whether journalists who are not covering the event should attend as private citizens. The [New York Times](#), [The Washington Post](#) and [BuzzFeed News](#) all sent teams of reporters down to the march, however they did not allow their reporters to attend unless they were on assignment. In an article from Wear Women Daily, an online women's news source, Andrew Seaman, from the ethics chair for the Society of Professional Journalists, was asked about his thoughts on the decision made by these news sources. He explained that, "Although it doesn't explicitly address the topic of political rallies, it discourages journalists from taking part in political events. Guidance is especially important for any journalist who reports on politics and topics adjacent to politics." When covering a story like this women's march, journalists need to remain impartial and fair, despite the underlying political reasoning for the march.

Politics and journalism

The reason for the Women's March happening was because it was in response to President Donald Trump's attitude and actions towards females. Reporting politically charged stories can make for a complicated situation. Avoiding active involvement with politically affiliated causes keeps the journalists' impartiality in check. Failure to act impartially risks compromising the ability to report as well as the reputation of the publication.