



It takes a village: Communitarianism and Spotlight

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Abstract

Communitarians argue that social identity is formed through the connection between individuals and their communities. This textual analysis focused on the breakdown of four Boston institutions depicted in the film *Spotlight* that failed their community, allowing decades of sexual abuse to go unrecognized and unpunished. Through the lens of communitarian ethics, the researchers argue that stakeholders must recognize the need for a strong community from which the press can report, explain, correct, and connect.

Method

Researchers applied textual analysis of the 2005 film *Spotlight*, which allowed them to examine written artifacts because the “behavioral patterns, values, and attitudes found in this material reflect and affect the behaviors, attitudes and values of the people who create the material” (Berger, 1998, pg. 23; Creswell, 2006).

Specifically, both researchers individually watched the film multiple times and then compared notes. While coding themes and patterns, the researchers isolated something “(a) that happen[ed] a number of times and (b) that consistently happen[ed] in a specific way” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, pg. 215). After writing a draft of the findings section, the researchers independently watched the film again to ensure that all major themes and patterns were included in the analysis.

Conclusion

News organizations only make sense in terms of public and public life (Christians et al., 2009; Dewey, 1954). They are part of a community and function properly as part of a larger, interconnected institutional ecosystem. They are also responsible for providing citizens information that allows for effective self governance. In both of these responsibilities, *Spotlight* shows communitarian failure in its institutions. These findings are important for three reasons:

1. They show the importance of examining the world through the lens of communitarianism.
2. They help explain how such an ecosystem for abuse can develop in a community.
3. They set a precedent for how newsrooms can shed light on and break out of such ecosystems.

Literature Review

Communitarianism and public discourse:

Individuals are interdependent. No one is born except in dependence on others.... The human being is an individual because of and in relations with others. Otherwise, he is an individual only as a stick of wood is, namely, as spatially and numerically separate (Dewey, 1985, 227).

Communitarians seek a balance between individual rights and social responsibilities, believing that the self is neither autonomous nor exists in isolation; instead, it is shaped by values and culture of interdependent communities (Etzioni, 1993).

Communitarianism and media:

The press, then, has two coexistent obligations: justice for the oppressed (Tillich, 1963,1954) and civic or social transformation (Christians et al., 1993) that could occur at the local, state, regional, national, or international level.

Spotlight:

- A detailed summary of the investigation by Roy J. Harris Jr. (2007).
- Criticism of *Spotlight's* reporting by Mary Marcel (2013). She argued that the *Spotlight* team’s choice to only interview male victims was damaging to both female victim and the gay community.

Due to their extensive nature, the findings and bibliography are available at request. Thank you for your patience, cooperation, and interest in this research.