Your Journalism is Transparent, but is it Complete? Examining Objectivity's Successors

Alvie Proctor Hackle

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YOUR JOURNALISM IS TRANSPARENT, BUT IS IT COMPLETE?
EXAMINING OBJECTIVITY’S SUCCESSORS

by

Alvie Proctor Hackle

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
Major: Journalism and Strategic Media

The University of Memphis
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Dedicated to June and Walden, without whom my life would be substantially incomplete.
Abstract

Critics have assailed objectivity as a guiding principle of journalists for more than half a century, dismissing its practices as defensive routines or strategic rituals. This study compares transparency, often touted as a new ethical framework for news media, and substantial completeness, a truth-telling strategy that has received less attention, to gauge whether substantial completeness could more adequately replace objectivity as journalism’s core principle. A survey emailed to journalists nationwide drew 70 responses and confirmed the hypothesis that a majority of American newspaper and newspaper website journalists view substantial completeness as an ethical obligation when it is described as a reversible interaction, meaning that reporting contains all the information the journalist would want for decision-making as a reader. The survey also operationalized research questions comparing completeness and two forms of transparency as priorities and asking if time and space constraints make completeness impossible.
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Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, transparency has been posited by media influencers, from blogging gurus to journalism scholars, as a new ethic for mass media. Meanwhile, substantial completeness, a truth-telling strategy that could more adequately replace objectivity as journalism’s core principle, languished in the inner pages of journalism textbooks (in particular Klaidman & Beachamp, 1987) and received somewhat more attention in public relations. In discussions of journalistic truthfulness, mentions of completeness have tended to be dismissive, noting the impossibility of telling the whole truth or pointing out the time constraints inherent in reporting. But philosopher Sissela Bok’s (1978/1999) disentanglement of the possibility of truthfulness from the impossibility of knowing the whole truth was core to David Martinson’s (1996) proposal of a guideline of substantial completeness with reversibility—essentially the Golden Rule method of imagining oneself on the receiving end of one’s actions—for public relations practitioners. This study explores the possibility that journalists would adopt a version of Martinson’s principle, namely that communicators should provide information as complete as they would want for their own decision-making.

Much of the work on transparency itself has been conceptual (e.g., Plaisance, 2007; Allen, 2008), focusing on what transparency is in principle; or prescriptive (e.g., Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Blood, 2002), asserting rules or routines that supposedly constitute transparency in practice. In more recent years, applied research has been done that begins to link how journalists think or feel about transparency as a truth strategy and whether they believe in or apply some of the associated practices, especially in comparison to objectivity (Hellmueller, Vos, & Poepsel, 2013). Another informative line of research—of which this researcher discovered no existing examples—would examine the interplay of all three concepts. Several
scholars have asserted or repeated that “transparency trumps objectivity” (Hellmueller, et al., 2013, p. 288, quoting Singer, 2010, p. 122, who cited Karlsson, 2008, where this can be inferred but is not stated). This suggests questions of whether transparency also trumps completeness, or whether the reverse is true, or if, perhaps, journalists might see a completeness principle as encompassing the requirements of transparency.

The current study explores a few such questions. A survey of U.S. newspaper and newspaper website journalists is used to gauge the relative status they assign completeness and transparency as ethical requirements for their work. Other scholars have parsed transparency into disclosure and participatory forms (Karlsson, 2010; Hellmueller et al., 2013). Leaving aside participatory practices, this study checks whether journalists consider certain kinds of disclosure to be actual ethical obligations. Covering less often explored ground, the researcher also sought to determine whether journalists believe substantial completeness—defined as providing as complete a version of events to readers as the journalists would wish to have for themselves—to be an ethical concern. Indeed, this point supplied the study its central hypothesis, now confirmed. Further, journalists were asked whether disclosure transparency—revealing how stories are obtained and facts about the journalists themselves—obviates any obligation for substantial completeness, and vice versa. Finally, surveyed journalists answered whether time and space constraints render an ethic of substantial completeness impracticable in their work.

As background, the literature review explores transparency and then substantial completeness in detail. The idea here is not to assert that transparency and completeness are mutually exclusive, but to determine which could best serve as a compelling, overarching principle for journalistic action. Objectivity is explored in a more limited way, in relation to the
criticisms that have been leveled at it and what these say about the possibility of and need for positive reasons for decision-making about news content.

Literature Review

Reasons for action

Criticisms of journalistic practice and the principles that guide it are seldom if ever directed against the idea that reporting should be thorough, but often imply or identify shortcomings in completeness or depth. Nick Davies (2009) excoriated the British press for a practice he and others labeled “churnalism” (p. 59 and throughout) in which journalists churned out stories by repackaging press releases and wire stories and had no time to check facts or interview more than the most easily accessible sources. This bears certain resemblances to Doug Underwood’s revelations in When MBA’s Rule the Newsroom (1993) that a business-dominated stance in American newspapers resulted in “cutbacks in coverage, softening of news content, loss of depth” (p. 119). In a close reading of criticism of news media by bloggers during a single month in 2009, Vos, Craft and Ashley (2011) found that “much of the media criticism … focused on the perceived bias or the lack of impartiality and objectivity of traditional news media” (p. 857).

But the objectivity principle itself has been under fire for decades, and much of the criticism has also been directed at the idea that objectivity, as understood and practiced, has served as an excuse for sloppy and incomplete reporting. Looking back to the 1890s for the coming of age of American “objective” journalism, David Mindich (1998) focused on the failure of the Associated Press and self-consciously objective newspapers, in particular the New York Times, to expose the reality behind widespread lynching of African Americans in the South. In
his view, “objectivity” (used in quotation marks throughout Mindich’s book) provided an excuse to report the facts of these murders in a superficially balanced style, failing to express outrage and reflecting journalists’ own racism. When Brent Cunningham (2003) wrote a *Columbia Journalism Review* cover story calling for a rethinking of objectivity in the first years of the 21st century, he observed that “if space is a problem, time is an even greater one” and argued that “this lack of time makes a simpleminded and lazy version of objectivity all the more tempting” (p.27). The mechanism of his argument was that objectivity, understood in the sense of detachment and avoidance of bias, has been used to excuse an attitude in which reporters serve as passive conduits for official information, as in the build-up to the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. However, Cunningham (2003) did not reject objectivity, but argued for a reformed understanding of it, in which journalists acknowledge a degree of subjectivity and recommit to the active pursuit of news, developing expertise to sort through competing claims and provide explanations.

Another tactic of objectivity critics has been to expose exterior causes or ulterior motives for the adoption of supposedly lofty journalistic principles. Examining Adolph Ochs’ role in developing the *New York Times* to national stature beginning with his purchase of the paper in 1896, Andrew Porwancher (2011) argued “that objectivity was a contemporaneous legitimation of journalistic practices, a set of ideal interests used to camouflage or even further the press’ material interests: increased profit, advertising, and circulation as well as protection from legal sanctions” (p. 186). The posture reflected in Ochs’ famous declaration for reporting “the news impartially, without fear or favor, regardless of party, sect or interest involved” (Ochs, 1896, as quoted in Porwancher, 2011, p. 191) helped secure a broad readership while the Times, in Porwancher’s analysis, favored pro-business interests and made selective use of objective
reporting. Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese (1996) labeled practices associated with objectivity as *defensive routines*. In addition, these authors observed that the routines were not so much believed in by individuals as required by organizations:

> In this sense, objectivity is less a core belief of journalists than a set of procedures to which journalists willingly conform in order to protect themselves from attack. Their editors and publishers are equally concerned with jeopardizing their own positions. (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 112)

Shoemaker and Reese cited sociologist Gaye Tuchman, who more than 20 years earlier had assailed practices then associated with objectivity as “strategic rituals” (Tuchman, 1972, p. 678), which served to defend journalists from criticism.

Amid assertions that transparency was becoming an ascendant new ethic for journalists, early 21st century scholarship nevertheless portrayed it sometimes in the same terms of prudential self-protection and excuse-making that generations of critics have applied to the objectivity standard. Observing the tendency of bloggers to rely on news media sources but then bite the hand that feeds them, Singer (2007) stated that “journalists today can expect that anything they write or say will be scrutinized by someone able and more than willing to instantly publish the outcome of that scrutiny” (p. 89). Allen (2008) described the ethic of transparency as easy to understand in terms of the media facing increased examination and criticism of their daily product. Karlsson (2010) explicitly echoed Tuchman by labeling the new practices “rituals of transparency” (Karlsson, 2010, phrase used in article title and explained p. 536).

This researcher’s point is not to dismiss transparency as a mere assemblage of rituals or routines, but on the contrary to observe that a profession which continues to see
its central principles in terms of defensiveness, ritual and excuse is unlikely to make much of them as reasons for action. A philosophy of action, particularly where it distinguishes internal reasons from external causes, can provide a means of raking away the wreckage left by decades of attacks on the practices and principle of objectivity. In the philosophical tradition, a distinction between a person’s internal *reasons* and what are now generally called *causes* dates back to Aristotle, who identified four different types of “cause” (Causes, 1979). Among these, only the *efficient* cause corresponds to what in English is now termed a cause in the cause-and-effect sense. What we now call *reasons* are more closely aligned to what for Aristotle were *final* causes, including but not limited to conscious intentions (Causes, 1979). In the early to mid-20th century, Ludwig Wittgenstein brought new life to the distinction between final and efficient causes by asserting that people know their reasons for their actions with certainty but can only hypothesize about the causes (Wittgenstein & Waismann, 2003). As one interpreter put it, “Agents have first-person authority about their reasons for their actions: What they sincerely claim to be their reason is what we call their reason” (Schroeder, 2010, p. 557). Therefore, professional principles, when sincerely set forth as reasons for action, become such, even when sociological, financial or legal factors make these reasons particularly convenient. Ochs’ profit motive and acknowledged “devotion to the cause of sound money and tariff reform” (Ochs, 1896, as quoted in Porwancher, 2011, p. 192) did not rule out sincerity about impartial reporting.

Donald Davidson (1963/1980), agreeing with Wittgenstein to some extent, differed with him in a way that has defined much of the more recent debate in the philosophy of action. In contrast to Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein & Waismann, 2003), who
separated logical explanations from causal ones (p. 109), Davidson (1963/1980) maintained that reasons, or at least a kind called primary reasons, are, after all, causes for actions. For Davidson, a primary reason required two elements, first a desire, or “pro attitude toward actions of a certain kind” (p. 3), and second, a belief about how to realize that action. In Davidson’s examples, a pro attitude can be momentary, such as wanting to turn on a light, and a belief quite trivial, e.g., believing that flipping a switch will make this happen. But pro attitudes also include “moral views, aesthetic principles, economic prejudices, social conventions” (Davidson, 1963/1980, p. 4). While this does nothing in itself to sort out moral reasons from petty ones, and Davidson wished to re-identify rationalization as “a species of causal explanation” (p. 3), pro attitudes remained for him internal. “The relation between desire and action is not simply empirical; there are other, equally essential criteria for desires—their expression in feelings and in actions they do not rationalize, for example” (Davidson, 1963/1980, p. 15). For Wittgenstein, the essential point had been to distinguish reasons, as the essence of rationalization, from external causes he regarded as hypothetical. “The cause of an action is established hypothetically, i.e., such that further experience can confirm or contradict it. The reason is what has been specified as such” (Wittgenstein & Waismann, 2003, p. 107, italics in original). In another passage, Wittgenstein reportedly discerned motives as a species of reasons, stating, “The word motive we reserve for cases in which there is significance for human life,” (p. 429) and citing ethics and jurisprudence as realms where it is used. Both Davidson (1963/1980) and Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein & Waismann, 2003)
acknowledged the possibility of someone lying about their reasons, but neither made any provision for hypothetical causes, asserted by other persons, to trump honest reasons. Journalists, then, can assert ethical principles as pro attitudes or motives and prove their reasons by their actions.

**Transparency**

A peculiar thing about deeply theorized principles of journalism is that they often appear first in everyday practice and common-sense instruction. Probably the most commonly cited source for a transparency standard in journalism—appearing in the reference lists of at least seven other works that are in turn cited in this literature review—is a journalism handbook and its revision, Kovach and Rosenstiel’s *The Elements of Journalism* (2001; 2007). Citing no philosophical theories, case studies or surveys, Kovach and Rosenstiel simply prescribed a “Rule of Transparency” that “involves the journalist asking for each event, ‘What does my audience need to know to evaluate this information for itself? And is there anything in our treatment of it that requires explanation?’” (2001, p. 81).

Whether Kovach and Rosenstiel’s 2001 rule was really a precursor to, let alone a conscious influence on, many of the practices that have since been associated with transparency is debatable. They did weigh in on the further development of the idea with the revised version of their handbook (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007), rechristening their rule the “Spirit of Transparency” and adding a third element to the previous two questions: “Journalists should acknowledge the questions their stories are not answering.” (p. 95). But by then, transparency had gained popularity as an ethic of the blogosphere. Lasica (2003; 2004) and Singer (2007)

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2 Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001, 2007) did cite Walter Lippmann, as will be discussed later. He is usually considered a journalist and political commentator, not a philosopher, although he did write a book called *The Public Philosophy*. 
observed the development of transparency as the central norm of blogging and suggested that journalism and blogging needed each other’s influence. Singer cited *The Weblog Handbook* (Blood, 2002) as especially influential in setting forth ethical guidelines incorporating transparency.

In a set of six rules, “each” of which was intended “to bring transparency … into every aspect of blogging” (p. 116), Blood’s handbook (2002) advised bloggers to 1. publish as fact only what they believe true; 2. provide links to all referenced online materials; 3. make public corrections for information found to be false, including notes about previously published inaccuracies plus links to more accurate info; 4. add to, but not rewrite or delete, entries, thus treating every entry as permanent; 5. disclose conflicts of interest; and 6. provide notes on the nature of questionable sources (pp. 117-121, paraphrased). By implication, her first rule would bring general truthfulness under the rubric of transparency, much as objectivity was viewed by some journalists in the past as an all-encompassing ethic (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Mills, 1983; Merrill, 1985). But the rest of Blood’s list identifies several of the practices commonly associated with transparent journalism as practiced online, especially in regard to disclosure transparency.

A distinction between *disclosure transparency* and *participatory transparency* has been advanced by some authors (Karlsson, 2010; Hellmueller et al., 2013). Commonly reported practices of disclosure transparency include publishing links to original material and sources, acknowledging errors while publishing corrections alongside the original information, and “communicating the preferences and motifs of the media worker” (Karlsson, 2010, p. 537, 3

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3 However, Blood (2003), in an article published the year after her handbook, asserted that blogging is not a new form of journalism and “deliberately reject[ed] the journalistic standards of fairness and accuracy in favor of transparency as the touchstone for ethical blogging” (final para.). She did not suggest that the practices she recommended for bloggers should replace fairness and accuracy as standards for journalists.
referencing Hayes, Singer & Ceppos, 2007). The practices, or “rituals,” of participatory transparency are “ways in which people both inside and external to journalism are given a chance to monitor, check, criticize and even intervene in the journalistic process,” (Karlsson 2010, p. 538, quoting Deuze, 2005, p. 455). Deuze, however, had not made an explicit distinction between participatory and disclosure forms of transparency. Instead, Deuze (2005) wrote that concerns about control and transparency were intertwined in the changing media landscape and that “more shared control over newsgathering and storytelling increases opportunities for surveillance and processual criticism” (p.255). As examples of participatory transparency, Karlsson (2008) mentioned public discussions of publication decisions and revisions of subsequent drafts after input from users.

Some practices associated with transparency are roughly as new as the 21st century, even in their application to older media such as newspapers and broadcasting. Others are matters of emphasis. The strategy of having reporters and editors disclose their preferences, which may include political affiliations among other things, is a clear departure from the earlier “objective” practice, which stressed detachment and nonpartisanship (Mindich, 2001). The insistence on retaining erroneous versions is less of a break from the past, considering that earlier editions of newspapers lingered in morgues, libraries, and clip files. It reflected a concern, at the beginning of the millennium, that the digital environment provided the opportunity to “simply wipe [errors] out and set the record straight by immediately publishing a new version of a story” (Arant & Anderson, 2001, p. 58), which has also been a concern for bloggers, as seen in Blood’s (2002) third and fourth rules. However, the potential to update stories without acknowledging earlier errors had always existed, and radio and television, especially before home recording devices
became common, had greater potential for letting mistakes vanish into thin air than the Internet does.

Because cache functions and user downloads give earlier versions of Internet stories considerable durability, one motivation for the drive to transparency may have been an increased, rather than decreased, likelihood of being caught in errors or attempts to expunge them. Observing the tendency of bloggers to rely on news media sources but bite the hand that feeds them, Singer (2007) stated that “journalists today can expect that anything they write or say will be scrutinized by someone able and more than willing to instantly publish the outcome of that scrutiny” (p. 89), and Allen (2008) described the ethic of transparency as easy to understand in terms of the media facing increased examination and criticism of their daily product. So, the emphasis on transparency may not stem so directly from the Internet’s creation of some new ethical understanding as from the need for altered defensive behaviors to fit a new environment. Again, all of this discussion of defensive strategies echoes Tuchman’s (1972) assault on then-current practices as “rituals of objectivity” that served to protect journalists from criticism, as Karlsson (2010) made explicit when he labeled the newer practices “rituals of transparency.”

More positively, the move to greater transparency in journalism has been described as central to a shift from “gatekeeper ethics” to “relationship ethics” (Singer, 2010). Singer framed her version of the “transparency trumps objectivity” declaration as an important message bloggers had for journalists: “In a network, ‘transparency trumps objectivity.’ It becomes necessary to show what goes into the process of making news—and of making decisions about news” (Singer, 2010, p. 122). But she also observed that the shift had more to do with the reasoning seen as supporting ethical guidelines than with the specific guidelines themselves:
“When journalists move to a network, the ethical principles remain essentially the same, but the rationale for them changes to one based on relationships” (p.119).

Not surprisingly, as both are truth-telling strategies, objectivity and transparency can be seen as closely related. Seeking to help establish a “new journalism of verification,” Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001; 2007) invoked Walter Lippman’s 1920s efforts to place journalism on a more scientific basis. Lippmann (1920/2010) put this in terms of objectivity and of judging and revealing the reliability of sources, not transparency. But Kovach and Rosenstiel made the overlap explicit in their section titled “Transparency”:

In journalism, only by explaining how we know what we know can we approximate this idea of people being able, if they were of a mind to, to replicate the reporting. This is what is meant by objectivity of method in science, or in journalism. (2001, p. 81; 2007, p. 96)

Notably, their version of transparency emphasizes naming sources and admitting limitations, rather than audience participation or Internet-specific techniques.

Some authors have sought a theoretical basis in the writings of Immanuel Kant and Jurgen Habermas for journalistic transparency as an ethical concern. In this regard, Plaisance (2007) argued that the universal reach of Kant’s categorical imperative, “Act in accordance with a maxim of ends that it can be a universal law for everyone to have” (Kant 1797/1991, p. 395 as quoted in Plaisance, 2007, p. 190) has been overemphasized. Instead, Plaisance pointed to Kant’s principle of humanity—namely that people should be treated never merely as means but always as ends in themselves—as the basis both for the categorical imperative and Kant’s emphasis on telling the truth in all circumstances. Kant’s principle means treating every person as a free moral agent, and transparency is essential for moral agency because it is the basis of
trust. In other words, “society would not be possible if we did not place a premium on the spirit of openness, or transparent behavior” (Plaisance, 2007, p. 191). However, Plaisance qualified his Kantianism by observing that “insisting on transparency unmediated by other values can certainly become destructive and self-defeating” (p. 192).

Allen (2008) found the Kantian basis alone inadequate because “journalism ethics is not simply about individual action” (p.329) and looked instead to political theory. In particular, he cited Habermas’s discourse ethics, and the transparency apparent in an assertion that practical discourse would be rendered meaningless unless the participants brought with them “their individual life-histories, their identities, their needs and wants, their traditions, membership and so forth” (Habermas, 1982, p. 255, italics in original; also quoted by Allen, 2008, p. 331). Habermas was actually responding to a specific critic who raised doubts about “the abstract universality of a discourse ethic” (Habermas, 1982, p. 254). If accepted, that universality apparently would extend the ethic to journalists, requiring them to reveal much about themselves as “real life” participants in real communication. His concern for the universalizability of his ethics also keeps Habermas in the Kantian tradition, making Allen’s point one about the evolution or refinement of the tradition rather than a contradiction of it.

However, Allen also turned to Michel Foucault as a history-conscious thinker with doubts about transparency, and interpreted him as warning that “too much transparency serves only to tie citizens ever closer to disciplines and limits the ability of individuals to become what they want to become” (Allen, 2008, p. 334). At once a theorist and a critic of transparency, Allen suggested that revealing too much about how journalism is done might hinder journalists’ attempts to increase legitimacy and trust with the public. Of course, the ramifications depend on what, and how much, is disclosed. Undesirable effects of having reporters who cover politics or
government reveal how they voted in recent elections are easy to imagine, both in terms of cooperation from sources and credibility with audiences. Other scholars (e.g., Phillips, 2010) who see benefits to increased transparency also say there must be limitations, such as respecting journalists’ obligation not to reveal confidential sources.

Articles about news organizations’ actual adoption of transparency described or suggested a variety of different practices. Providing insight into how news is gathered is one theme, as when a television show and a website gave audiences a behind-the-scenes look at investigative reporting (Schapiro, 2008). Attribution of story sources was counted a transparency issue by a researcher who reported that British newspapers commonly printed press releases and stories taken from other papers without attribution (Phillips, 2010). Another author reported the reluctance of American news organizations to reveal reporters’ political leanings and suggested that disclosure could justify loosening newspapers’ bans on reporters becoming active in political and social organizations (Richardson, 2009). Lasica (2003) mentioned practices that include journalists “exposing the raw material of their stories-in-progress, asking readers for expert input, posting complete text of interviews alongside the published story, and writing follow-up stories based on outsiders’ tips.” (“Transparency of Reporting,” para. 2).

In a content analysis of 335 news items during one week from three major newspapers’ websites—one each in the United States, the United Kingdom and Sweden—Karlsson (2010) quantified 10 participatory transparency features: publishing journalists’ email addresses with news stories; using comment threads, discussion, blog links, chat, polls, and reader news; seeking reader collaboration, publishing reader contributions, and allowing readers to report errors. He also considered four disclosure transparency features: use of detailed time stamps, highlighting and explanation of corrections, use of external links, and publication of original
documents. Termed a pilot study, it reached a “somewhat divided conclusion” (Karlsson, 2010, p. 542) about the adoption of transparency practices at the various sites and made no comparison to objectivity practices. Nor could a content analysis alone uncover journalists’ motivations behind their practices, whether ethical, prudential, or merely habitual.

Explicitly contrasting their work to Karlsson’s (2010) study, which had looked for a shift in journalistic practices, Hellmueller, Vos, and Poepsel (2013) surveyed 228 U.S. newspaper journalists “about their procedural norms” (p. 289). More to the point, several key questions were aimed at whether journalists believe in procedures that the researchers had associated with transparency and objectivity. This focus on journalists’ beliefs about the rightness of certain approaches, combined with the inclusion of both transparency and objectivity, made the Hellmueller et al. study the most relevant precursor to the current study of any discovered. The researchers framed their work as an attempt to detect an incipient paradigm shift in journalistic “cultural capital” (Hellmueller et al, 2013, p. 290) from norms of objectivity to those of transparency. Whether that is what they actually measured depends on acceptance of the beliefs and procedures they associated with transparency and objectivity as actually constituting those norms. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with assertions on a five-point Likert-type scale. For the disclosure dimension of transparency Hellmueller et al. posed these statements: “I believe in telling everyone who comes across my work where my facts originated” and “… it is essential to show anyone who comes across my work that I include all concerned parties in my news stories.” For the participatory dimension, the questions were whether journalists believed it “important to allow readers to contribute to news content” and “acceptable to include user-generated information in [their] work” (p. 294). To measure what researchers called the factualness dimension of objectivity, they used statements about journalists’ belief in
“writing stories around verifiable facts” and whether “as long as I don’t willfully suppress relevant information I will write truthful stories” (Hellmueller et al., 2013, p. 294). To measure a neutrality dimension of objectivity they used the statements “I believe it is not acceptable for my reporting to cause readers to feel one way or another” and “… the way I write stories should not nudge readers to take a particular side of a debate or issue” (p. 295).

From a historical perspective, a better grounded approach to neutrality would have been to ask journalists whether they believe they should keep their own opinions out of their reporting and whether they take care not to let those opinions determine which facts they include. Neutrality of this type has long been seen as a central concept of objectivity, both within journalism (Streckfuss, 1990; Wien, 2005), and outside it, particularly in the sciences (Daston & Galison, 2007; Gaukroger, 2012). Yet Hellmueller et al. (2013) did not report asking any questions about how journalists approach their work in relation to their own opinions. Those unasked questions could have fathomed the neutrality dimension without the implication, inherent in Hellmueller et al.’s (2013) two neutrality questions, that an objective report must not cause readers to form opinions or even have feelings about the news. This implication clashes with the researchers’ observations that weight-of-evidence reporting can be associated as easily with objectivity as with transparency (p. 291) and that conclusions can also be drawn from balanced reporting. Noting that the association of objectivity with balanced reporting remains open to debate, the team led by Hellmueller poised balanced reporting, or “giving at least two sides to every story and letting persons draw their own conclusions” (p. 295, Table 2, italics added here) as a cross-tabulated question across the four dimensions of objectivity and transparency. However, they made including “all concerned parties in … news stories” (p. 294)
a definitive element of transparency—without explaining how this differs in substance from balanced reporting.

Hellmueller et al. (2013) also related these dimensions to respondents’ length of professional experience, their gender, whether they consider themselves to be “net natives,” and separately, to questions designed to measure their “online socialization.” Like their matrix of questions, the Hellmueller-led researchers’ findings were complex, and will not be discussed further here. But the 2013 study did demonstrate that a survey could compare journalists’ beliefs about objectivity and transparency as competing norms. Furthermore, Hellmueller et al.’s question about avoiding the suppression of relevant information, although used as a measure of objectivity, lets an elephant called completeness into the room.

**Substantial completeness**

The concept of substantial completeness, or more specifically *substantial completeness with reversibility*, has received some attention in public relations, but has roots in journalistic ethics and broader discussions of *truthfulness*. David Martinson (1996-97) combined the concepts of substantial completeness and reversibility as a prescribed norm for public relations practitioners. This juxtaposition transforms the principle of completeness into a strategy for truthfulness in professional communications generally, with the implication that the reversibility aspect should also be useful in journalism.

However, a brief history of the substantial completeness idea flows better, chronologically and conceptually, from a starting point in the work of philosopher Sissela Bok. In her widely influential book on lying, Bok (1978/1999) differentiated truth, in the epistemological sense of what can be known as true, from truthfulness in the ethical sense. Truthfulness involves intention. Confusion of the truth and truthfulness, coupled with assertions
that “the whole truth” is unknowable, have served as a pretext for shortchanging the issue of
thuthfulness in codes of ethics and in professional practices, argued Bok. “The fact that the
‘whole truth’ can never be reached in its entirety should not, therefore, be a stumbling block in
the much more limited inquiry into questions of truth-telling and falsehood” (Bok, 1978/1999, p.
13). The conception of truthfulness as a matter of intent leads to the realization that its opposite,
deception, takes other forms besides direct lying, including misdirection and withholding
information.

Just as knowing the whole truth may well be impossible in an epistemological sense,
telling the whole truth of an event or issue, in all its details, is impossible for media organizations
with limited time and space. Acknowledging this, Stephen Klaidman and Tom L. Beauchamp
(1987) advanced a standard for journalists called “substantial completeness, the point at which a
reasonable reader’s requirements for information are satisfied” (p. 35). This reasonable reader
model was also the gauge that Klaidman and Beauchamp applied to other journalistic virtues,
including accuracy, objectivity, and understanding. This involves empathizing with what a
reasonable reader, or more accurately, the reasonable reader, might expect. The reasonable
reader model brings the discussion close to ideas of reciprocity or reversibility, although
Klaidman and Beauchamp did not invoke these by name.

Instead, they explicitly modeled their reasonable reader threshold on “the reasonable
person” standard applied in legal decisions (Klaidman & Beauchamp, 1987). The legal standard
is an abstract, hypothetical one in which the reasonable person is not any one actual person.
Thus abstractly conceived, the reasonable reader does not have any unreasonable expectations, as
any actual individual can and probably does. “The reasonable reader, then, is a person with
needs for information about matters such as the risks, alternatives, and consequences of what is
being reported” (Klaidman & Beauchamp, 1987, p. 33). However, under the legal standard, what the hypothetical reasonable person expects from practitioners of a profession need not conform to the accepted practices of that profession (Klaidman & Beauchamp, 1987, p. 32). So, by adopting this model, Klaidman and Beauchamp recommended a set of journalistic standards that are ethically generalizable, differentiating their work from discussions of established norms or accepted practices within the industry. This resembles an application of Kant’s categorical imperative, with the abstract reasonable reader substituted for Kant’s quest for universal laws. In both instances, an attempt is made to reach a standard outside the individual, but applying it still involves judgment calls.

*Reversibility*, a modern name for the psychological mechanism of the ancient Golden Rule, is simpler to apply, if more subjective in appearance than the reasonable reader standard. Reversibility amounts to imagining oneself in the other person’s situation. James Jaksa and Michael Pritchard (1988) used a doctor’s decision whether to delay giving information to a patient as an example of reversibility. “In principle, Dr. Smith will have to acknowledge that relevantly similar situations could arise in which someone would be justified in withholding vital information from her” (p. 68). These thinkers related reversibility both to the justification of actions and to the universalizability of ethical principles. Jaksa and Pritchard’s book mentioned the Golden Rule only in a later passage, in regard to appeals to conscience (p. 95), but the acknowledgement that the hypothetical Dr. Smith is forced to make seems an application of the rule stated by Jesus in the New Testament as “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” and in similar ways in other religious and philosophical traditions.

Martinson (1996-97) explicitly melded substantial completeness and reversibility in prescribing truthfulness as an achievable goal for public relations practitioners. This prescription
was needed, he reasoned, in light of the profession’s historic reputation, exemplified by “father of public relations” Ivy Lee, for creating false impressions with factual statements. Citing Bok on the distinction between truth and truthfulness and Klaidman and Beauchamp for substantial completeness, Martinson asserted that the latter can become an objective, or in other words generalizable, standard. He then footnoted Jaksa and Pritchard for a definition of reversibility before formulating this maxim in the form of a question for P.R. people: “If the practitioner were the receiver of the particular communication rather than the transmitter, would he or she still believe it was substantially complete?” (Martinson, 1996-97, p. 44). Martinson’s rule could almost be Communicate unto others as you would have them communicate unto you. From the context of his essay, truthfulness is understood to be paired with completeness. He did not suggest doing so, but if necessary for clarity, the question could end ... truthful and substantially complete.

Substituting journalist for practitioner then makes this rule a contender to succeed objectivity as journalism’s core principle. Or, substituting communicator makes substantial completeness with reversibility a principle for every professional communicator, and perhaps even for all human beings in their capacity as communicators: If the communicator were the receiver of the particular communication rather than the transmitter, would he or she still believe it was truthful and substantially complete? This does not rule out journalists asking themselves if their expectations are those of a truly typical, reasonable reader. This formulation arguably steps beyond the Golden Rule’s insistence on what the communicator would wish for herself by asking the communicator to identify with the receiver. To identify with a variety of potential readers and viewers, journalists could use the processes of participatory transparency to better understand their audiences. What journalists learn through participatory practices and
empathetic thinking could also motivate them to attempt a form of reporting that would be less biased, or at least inclusive of multiple viewpoints.

Completeness, however, has received scant attention in studies of journalism content and surveys about journalists’ practices and attitudes. In scholarly articles, the idea appears more often in evaluations of medical information. For example, Davis (2000) reported two studies relating the completeness of risk statements about prescription drugs’ side effects to consumer perceptions of the drugs’ safety and appeal. Dutta-Bergman (2003) explored completeness of Internet-based health information. Two other communications researchers looked at the completeness of Wikipedia in comparison to topical books and field-specific academic encyclopedias (Halavais & Lackaff, 2008). But to find a published article specifically highlighting completeness as an ethical concern for journalists, this researcher had to look back to the mid-1990s.

Although Heider (1996) omitted the word substantial, he even quoted Klaidman and Beauchamp’s definition of substantial completeness as “the point at which a reasonable reader’s requirements for information are satisfied” (Heider, 1996, p. 5; Klaidman and Beauchamp, 1987, p. 35). However, what Heider conducted was an ethnographic case study, involving interviews and observations of Hispanic journalists at five television stations in one city in the American West. Although completeness was the first word in its title, the article’s only application of the principle was to relate it to the diversity of the news staffs. “Traditionally, completeness meant collecting all the pertinent information for a story. But that definition might not have included the practice of seeking out information from, or perspectives of, people of color” Heider stated in his conclusion (p. 14). To be clear, the current study reverts to what Heider called the
traditional meaning of completeness, but with the clarification that substantial completeness involves not only collecting the pertinent information but also reporting it.

Paradoxically, that supposedly traditional definition, about the inclusion of information, has received even less attention in research than the considerations Heider raised about the inclusion of a diversity of people. The connection he made between completeness and newsroom diversity is important because, again, identifying with the receiver of the information requires understanding the diversity of viewpoints. And again, the practices suggested by participatory transparency could be instrumental to such an understanding. But the current study considers the substantial completeness of stories as an ethical concern for individual journalists. They were asked whether they think about the completeness of their reporting in terms of what they as readers would expect. For this specific line of inquiry, this researcher has found no precedent.

**Hypotheses and Research Questions**

The researcher ventured only one hypothesis, but sought to answer additional research questions regarding journalists’ views of how substantial completeness and transparency compare as ethical priorities. Research questions are often deployed, in preference to hypotheses, in exploratory research that may be used later to develop hypotheses and for topics that have been only marginally studied (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Surely the status of completeness as an ethical standard for journalists qualifies as marginally studied. The one study identified that regarded completeness as an ethical concern for journalists (Heider, 1996) viewed it through case studies from a sociological standpoint. Reporting a series of interviews that followed a larger survey of journalists, Plaisance and Deppa (2008) quoted specific journalists who identified completeness as important to how they feel about their work, but these were not
generalizable results. In search of such results, the current researcher asserted the following hypothesis regarding substantial completeness as fundamental to his survey.

H1: A majority of American newspaper and newspaper website journalists in 2018 will view substantial completeness as an ethical obligation when it is described in terms of a reversible transaction.

Although this hypothesis may appear simplistic, recognition of completeness as an ethical value by a majority of journalists validates it as a topic of interest in this and future surveys of journalists’ ethical views and practices. This is not to say that popular acceptance is necessary to justify a principle as an ethical requirement, but some degree of buy-in seems necessary for substantial completeness to be asserted as a principle for journalists on which actions can be based. In the survey, a pair of questions were asked related to the hypothesis. The first (Appendix A; p. 41, question 5) set the stage by asking whether journalists consider it important that reporting contain all the information they would want as readers. The second survey question on this topic (Appendix A; p. 41, question 6) directly tested the hypothesis of whether journalists consider this an ethical obligation. If the hypothesis failed on the results of this question, strong showings on the preliminary question and related questions could still have suggested a need for further research.

No hypotheses were asserted in relation to transparency, but two pairs of survey questions were posed to take a preliminary look at how journalists prioritize two different forms of disclosure transparency in comparison to substantial completeness. As previously discussed, various authors have identified a constellation of different practices as constituting transparency. Plaisance and Deppa (2009) observed that while certain journalists they interviewed indicated they put strong personal emphasis on the concept of transparency, “few seemed able to discuss
its centrality as a critical professional standard” (p. 376). Hellmueller et al. (2012) found that participatory transparency, namely “including user-generated information and letting readers contribute to news content” (p. 295), was met with more skepticism by journalists than factualness, disclosure transparency or neutrality as truth-telling strategies. Seeking to limit the scope of the current study, the researcher left participatory disclosure aside to focus on the self-revelatory and process-explanatory aspects of disclosure transparency. These concepts appear, separately, in the first four of the five research questions that follow. The first and second research questions form a contrasting pair, pitting completeness against process-explanatory transparency. Likewise, the third and fourth research questions pit completeness against self-revelatory transparency. The fifth question seeks to gauge the perceived practicability of substantial completeness in the newsroom.

RQ1: To what extent do journalists believe that revealing information about how news is gathered relieves them of any obligation they might have to tell a substantially complete story?

RQ2: To what extent do journalists believe that telling a substantially complete story relieves them of any obligation to explain how the information was gathered?

RQ3: To what extent do journalists believe that telling a substantially complete story relieves them of any obligation to reveal information about themselves?

RQ4: To what extent do journalists believe that revealing information about themselves relieves them of any obligation they might have to tell a substantially complete story?

RQ5: To what extent do journalists believe that telling a substantially complete story is possible given the time and space constraints of their work environments?
Operational definitions

For the purposes of the survey, *substantial completeness*, as referred to in H1, is identical to telling a substantially complete story, which is the phrase used in all five research questions (RQ1-RQ5). In the survey instrument (Appendix A), this is equated with a journalist’s first-person concern “that the reporting contain all the information I would want as a reader to be able to make my own decisions” (Appendix A, Survey Q5). This concern is an applied principle of reversible substantial completeness. Although the word *reversibility* was not used in the survey, it was explicit in referring to reporting that “is substantially complete from a reader’s perspective” (Survey Q7).

*Process-explanatory disclosure transparency*, stated in RQ1 as “revealing information about how news is gathered” and in RQ2 as “to explain how the information was gathered” was operationalized in the survey as explaining “how the information was obtained, such as identifying sources when possible and explaining how they were contacted” (Appendix A, Survey Q8 & Q12).

*Self-revelatory disclosure transparency* is that set of practices or principles referred to in RQ3 and RQ4 as journalists revealing information about themselves. Survey questions explained this as “transparency about who the reporter is” (Appendix A, Survey Q10), “such as organizational or political affiliations that may affect the reporter’s views of the topic” (Survey Q10 & Q11) but did not limit the possibilities to these examples.

The quantitative element of each of the research questions, “To what extent do journalists believe …?” was measured through a four-point scale based on the gradations *strongly agree*, *somewhat agree*, *somewhat disagree*, *strongly disagree*, plus the neutral *don’t know/no opinion*. The hypothesis, H1, required only a majority belief to show direction, but degrees of agreement
or disagreement could be quantified using the same graduations. In the case of the hypothesis these registered almost exclusively on the agreement end of the scale.

**Method**

A nationwide survey of journalists, through invitations sent to their workplace email addresses, yielded 70 responses. A representative random sample of virtually any size population, providing a 95% confidence level at a probable sampling error rate within plus or minus 3% on any one question, can be obtained through a survey of fewer than 1,200 people (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011 p. 109, Table 4.4). However, a national survey of news consumers was outside the proposed study’s aims and beyond this researcher’s means. Given the lack of previous attention to completeness and the novelty of comparing it to transparency, a preliminary, national survey of journalists themselves was proposed to gauge the profession’s acceptance and ranking of these considerations as ethical principles. Because journalists often use published email addresses and can be expected to have some familiarity with Internet resources, they also presented a convenient population to be approached via email and asked to use an online survey tool, namely SurveyMonkey.

Surveys of journalists are a well-established media research tool. One of the most sustained efforts has been the series of telephone and online surveys reflected in the *American Journalist* and *Global Journalist* books by David H. Weaver, et al. (1986, 1996, 2007, & 2012) and Lars Willnat, et al. (2017). The *Global Journalist* volume (Weaver & Willnat, 2012) in its chapter on U.S. journalists in the early 21st century (Brownlee & Beam, 2012) briefly notes the work done in the previous four roughly decennial surveys, going back to 1971. Although the final sample in the 2002 survey (Weaver & Beam, et al., 2007) consisted of 1,149 U.S. journalists from print and electronic news media, only 156 daily and 120 weekly newspapers
were represented (Brownlee & Beam, 2012). Sample sizes for surveys reported in scholarly articles are often much smaller than the 1,100-plus respondent level. Plaisance & Skewes (2003), seeking to identify links between journalists’ values and their work roles, conducted a survey that drew responses from 349 American newspaper journalists, cited as “a national, probability sample” (Plaisance & Deppa, 2008, p. 336). As has been noted, Hellmueller, Vos, and Poepsel (2013) surveyed 228 U.S. newspaper journalists. However, to obtain that number of responses, the team led by Hellmueller initially emailed 499 journalists, which indicates a 45.7% response rate.

Relatively small samples can yield meaningful results. Although high confidence levels and a 3% or 5% margin for sampling error are traditional for academic research, they are not necessary for broad or preliminary studies (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Furthermore, as Fowler (2014) observes, "It is unusual for a researcher to be able to specify a desired level of precision in more than the most general way” (p. 38). For this study, the researcher originally set out to contact approximately 350 journalists, from a systematic random sampling of U.S. newspapers, in hope of obtaining 150 responses. This would provide a 95% confidence level that the real agreement on a particular answer was, at worst, within 8% above or below the survey result.

Systematic random sampling was applied at the level of selecting newspapers, with some intentional oversampling meant to ensure that daily newspapers—and among them the largest newspapers, which are relatively few but employ large numbers of journalists—would be adequately represented. According to the Editor & Publisher Newspaper Databook (Fleming, 2015), there were 1,331 daily newspapers in the United States as a January 1, 2015. In its second volume that year, devoted to weeklies, the Databook reported that there were 3,478 paid
community newspapers and 1,283 free community newspapers, also as of January 1, 2015. The free and paid categories overlap, but clearly there are more community newspapers than daily ones. The Editor & Publisher Databook also refers to the community newspapers as weeklies, although by definition they are published from one to three times a week. The Databook’s separate listings of daily and weekly newspapers, which are organized alphabetically by state and then by city, provided the sampling frame.

As first proposed, this study would have used an elaborate procedure to ensure that journalists with differing amounts of experience were contacted. The three different versions of the initial contact message (Appendix B) were to be directed to an editorial staff member at each newspaper, asking them to identify journalists with different levels of seniority who would then be invited to take the survey. After emailing initial contact messages to editors at 70 newspapers on March 27, 2017, the researcher abandoned this multilayered invitation process. Only five editors responded with suggestions of journalists to include, and their recommendations were eventually incorporated into the address lists for the survey invitation email (Appendix C).

For most of the journalists who were sent the survey link, the researcher used the Editor & Publisher Newspaper Databook (Fleming, 2015) only to select the newspapers, applying the randomizing procedures described below. The researcher then searched the newspapers’ websites for email addresses, preferring those of reporters with recently published bylines and editors listed in current directories. This approach using websites was also allowed in the procedures approved by the University of Memphis Institutional Review Board (Appendix G, IRB Approval).

The original plan was to send the survey invitations to about 350 journalists. The researcher used a varied series of counting procedures to randomize the selection of newspapers.
First, from the list of the 100 largest daily newspapers, a sample of 10 newspapers was selected through the use of a counting sequence from a random numbers list (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011, p. 425, Table 1, starting with the bottom row), interpreting the random number 0 (zero) as the 10th newspaper after the previous one selected and the random number 1 as the next newspaper after the previous one. The 100 largest dailies constituted 7.5% of the 1,331 dailies, and the oversampling of 10 large newspapers provided 5.9% of the first 170 contacts with dailies.

Then, from the Databook’s (Fleming, 2015) general list of 1,331 dailies, the eighth newspaper and every eighth newspaper after it were chosen until 160 newspapers were selected by this method. In some cases a newspaper was found to be out of business or to have no current, specific email addresses, and the newspaper immediately before or after the eighth in series was substituted. Finally, from the Databook’s (Fleming, 2015) lists of paid and free community newspapers, treated as a continuous whole, the fifth newspaper and then every 25th newspaper after it were to be selected until 180 newspapers were identified by this method, interpreted to include at least one newspaper from every state. However, when some of the 25th newspapers in series were out of business or did not have working email addresses, the 20th newspaper was chosen instead, or the newspaper immediately before or after the 20th or 25th.

Using these same processes for newspaper selection, the researcher increased the number of addresses in the list to 400. On April 11 and 12, 2018, the survey invitation email (Appendix C) was sent to the first 400 addresses. After approximately 50 of those emails bounced back or produced autoreplies indicating that the journalists were no longer with the identified publications, the researcher eventually added an equal number of replacement addresses. The first-reminder email (Appendix D) was sent to 350 journalists’ addresses May 7, 2018, the
approximately 50 that produced bounces or autoreplies having been removed from the list. Then the survey invitation email was sent to added replacement addresses June 14 and June 27. The first-reminder email was sent to the added addresses July 16. Finally, the researcher sent the last reminder email (Appendix E) to all 400 addresses believed valid on July 30, 2018, and closed the survey collector Aug. 10, 2018.

**Results**

**Demographics**

National in reach if not in grasp, the survey link was sent to email addresses of journalists in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The invitation and reminders eventually went to 400 journalists’ apparently valid email addresses. How many of the invitations remained unseen in heaping junk-mail folders is unknown. In the end, exactly 70 cumulative survey responses were counted by SurveyMonkey. This amounts to a 17.5% response rate from those whose email accounts apparently received the survey invitations.

However, only two of the questions were actually answered by all 70 respondents, including the first question (Appendix F, Survey Q1), asking journalists their primary job role. Of those who responded, 36 identified as reporters. Another 26 were editors. So of those who started the survey, a little over 51% were reporters and 37% were editors. Another eight respondents chose “other,” and these included one “reporter, editor and photographer,” one “owner,” one “community/arts and entertainment editor and columnist,” one “editor and publisher,” another “publisher,” one “reporter/photographer/columnist/social media/webpage administrator,” another “reporter, photographer, editor and webmaster,” and another “editor/publisher,” as self-reported in a write-in space. No respondents identified purely as
photographers or sports writers, which were checkable choices. The researcher had intentionally included some photographers and sports writers or editors in the email addressing.

The number of respondents dipped to 69 with the second question (Appendix F, Survey Q2), asking how many years each has worked in journalism. Their responses show a good dispersion of experience levels, with 16 journalists having been in the profession five years or less, 15 journalists who have served 35 years or more, and from four to eight respondents filling each of the five-year service brackets between. A third question, asking where each journalist’s work is primarily published, was the last survey item to bring all 70 respondents aboard (Appendix F, Survey Q3). Of these, 34 indicated that their work is regularly published both in a newspaper and on its website, while 33 indicated that their work appears primarily in a printed newspaper. So, with more than 48.5% published both on a newspaper and newspaper website and more than 47% primarily in a printed newspaper, the respondents were clearly in the target population of newspaper and newspaper website journalists. In fact, another two respondents reported that their work is published primarily on a website, while the one remaining journalist checked “other” and explained that this meant appearing in a “print version six days a week, online seven days a week.” The number of participants dropped to 69 again with the fourth question, asking gender, but with 35 female and 34 male respondents, the survey could not have drawn a more balanced sample in this respect.

For the fifth survey item through the 10th survey item, beginning with the two questions directly pertinent to the hypothesis, 65 respondents answered each question. At the 11th survey item, which relates transparency to reporters revealing organizational or political affiliations, participation dropped to 64 individuals. Then 63 journalists answered the 12th, 13th, and 14th
items, and only 62 responded to the 15th and final item. However, strong levels of affirmation on several of the survey statements compensate for the limited participation.

**Hypothesis**

Despite the small sample size, the hypothesis is amply confirmed. More than 95% of respondents answered either “agree” or “strongly agree” on both of the survey items used to operationalize the hypothesis, and more than 80% of respondents answered “strongly agree” to both assertions. The first of the two assertions reflected the hypothesis more generically, positing the idea of substantial completeness as important for empowering decision making without referring to this as an ethical obligation for journalists: “When I am reporting on a subject or supervising how it is reported, it is important to me that the reporting contain all the information I would want as a reader to be able to make my own decisions” (Appendix F, Survey Q5). Of the 65 journalists who responded to this assertion, 61 individuals, or 93.85 percent (MOE = ±5.84%, CI = 95%, z = 1.96), selected “strongly agree.” Subtracting the margin of error, this indicates with a high level of confidence that at least 88% of the target population would also strongly agree. The other four journalists who answered, or 6.15% of all respondents, selected “somewhat agree.” So, 100% of those who responded at all agreed with the assertion to some extent. None availed themselves of other possible choices: “somewhat disagree,” “strongly disagree” or “don’t know/no opinion.”

Following immediately after that item, the next survey question tested the hypothesis directly by asserting that “(m)aking reporting substantially complete, so that it contains all the information that the journalist would want as a reader, is an ethical obligation for a journalist” (Appendix F, Survey Q6). In effect the previous question served to introduce the idea of
substantial completeness as giving recipients of information the ability to make their own decisions, and this question put it to the direct test as a perceived ethical obligation. Of the 65 journalists who responded to this question, 53 individuals, or 81.54% of the respondents (MOE = ±9.432%, CI=95%, z=1.96), strongly agreed with the assertion, and this alone is sufficient to confirm the hypothesis with a high degree of confidence for the target population. Subtracting the margin of error indicates that at least 72.1% of the actual target population would strongly agree. Another 11 journalists, or 16.92% of those responding, agreed but did not strongly agree, for a total of 64 journalists, or 98.46%, agreeing or strongly agreeing with the assertion of ethical obligation. The one other journalist, being 1.54% of the 65 respondents, indicated that she or he somewhat disagreed with the assertion. No journalists selected “strongly disagree” or “don’t know/no opinion.”

Because the test instrument was a survey and the hypothesis sought only majority acceptance, a test of the results’ significance to the hypothesis as such is unnecessary. More to the point, because the margin of error for a sample size decreases as the percentage of a particular response increases, the hypothesis results are shown to be significantly reflective of the overall target population. Applying the margin of error formula MOE = z \sqrt{ \frac{p (1-p)}{n} } and using the accepted value z = 1.96 for a confidence level of CI = 95%, a combined affirmative response of 98.46% obtained from a sample of 65 respondents yields a margin of error of ±2.99%. This suggests that at least 95.47% of American newspaper and newspaper website journalists would either agree or strongly agree that making reporting substantially complete is an ethical obligation.

However, the researcher senses something suspect in analyzing the hypothesis-affirming responses collectively in this way, with the “somewhat” and “strongly” responses combined as a
single “yes” response. Treating these responses separately yields much larger margins of error, and this is the way respondents actually made their choices, selecting single levels of agreement, not a combination of two. For the 16.92% of respondents who merely “somewhat agree,” the margin of error becomes ±9.115%, providing a range of 7.8% to 26% of American newspaper and newspaper website journalists (CI=95%) who agree at this level. The ±9.432% margin of error for the 81.54% strong agreement response indicated a range of 72.1% to 90.97%.

Assuming maximum overlap and simply adding the lower ends of both ranges (72.1% + 7.8%) affirms, maintaining the confidence level of 95%, that at least 79.9% of American newspaper and newspaper website journalists agree or strongly agree that making reporting substantially complete is an ethical obligation.

So, on the basis of even this limited study, the researcher is confident that a majority of American newspaper and newspaper website journalists in 2018 view—or would view—substantial completeness as an ethical obligation when it is described in terms of a reversible transaction. However, the researcher is wary both of the level of self-selection apparent in the relatively small number of journalists who bothered to respond to such a survey and the possibility that the preceding framing question—whose 100% “yes” response will not be submitted to further analysis—was also a leading question or even a coaxing question. These limitations will be explored in greater detail in the discussion section.

Research Questions

Overview. Together, the first four of the five research questions attempt to establish whether substantial completeness or two specific varieties of transparency ethic have priority in journalists’ perceptions. These questions form two contrasting pairs. Paired RQ1 and RQ2 relate substantial completeness to transparency about how the news was gathered, while paired
RQ3 and RQ4 relate substantial completeness to transparency in the form of journalists’ revealing information about themselves. Each research question was directly operationalized by one survey item. However, the survey item directly pertaining to each research question followed other survey items that helped define the types of transparency under consideration, and those items in turn followed the two survey items—those already noted as pertinent to the hypothesis—that defined the idea of substantial completeness. Finally, RQ5 stands alone, operationalized by a single survey item relating substantial completeness to time and space constraints.

RQ1. In answer to the first research question, most responding journalists do not believe that revealing information about how news is gathered relieves them of an obligation to tell a substantially complete story. RQ1 was operationalized in one survey item (Appendix F, Survey Results Q12) requesting a response to the statement: “When a story reveals how the information was obtained, such as identifying sources when possible and explaining how they were contacted, this relieves the reporter of any further obligation to tell a complete story that includes all the information the reporter would want if he or she were the reader.” Of the 63 journalists who responded, 46 individuals, or 73.02%, strongly disagreed with this statement. Another 14 individuals, or 22.22%, somewhat disagreed with it. This gives a total of 60 individuals, or a combined 95.2%, who rejected the proposition to a great or lesser extent. Only two individuals, or 3.17%, somewhat agreed with the statement, and none strongly agreed with it, but one chose “don’t know/no opinion.” So on the one hand, a large majority of respondents do not believe that process-revelatory transparency trumps substantial completeness.

RQ2. On the other hand, in answer to RQ2, most of the journalists who responded do not believe that substantial completeness obviates the need for some transparency about the reporting
process, either. This research question was conveyed directly in the survey item (Appendix F, Survey Q14) vetting the statement: “When reporting is complete from the reader’s perspective, including all the information the journalist would want if he or she were that reader, this relieves the journalist of any further obligation to reveal how the information was obtained.” Of the 63 journalists who responded, 34 individuals, or 53.97%, strongly disagreed with this statement. An additional 20 individuals, or 31.75%, somewhat disagreed with it. So a total of 54 respondents, or a combined 85.71%, rejected the statement to a greater or lesser degree. Six individuals, or 9.52%, somewhat agreed with the statement, one journalist, or 1.59%, strongly agreed with it, and two journalists, or 3.17% of all respondents, chose “don’t know/no opinion.” As will be discussed further, the high levels of disagreement with the direct assertion of both RQ1 and RQ2 do not so much contradict each other as indicate that many journalists see both substantial completeness and transparency about sources and methods as important.

Two preceding survey items (Appendix F, Survey Q8 and Q9) gave respondents context for this variety of transparency. Of 65 journalists who responded to the assertion that explaining “how the information was obtained, such as identifying sources when possible and explaining how they were contacted” (Survey Q8) is important, 44 individuals, or 67.69%, strongly agreed and 20 individuals, or 30.77% somewhat agreed, while one individual, or 1.54%, somewhat disagreed. So the importance of this form of transparency was acknowledged, to a greater or lesser extent, by a combined 98.46% of those responding. Their levels of agreement then corroborated their contrasting rejection of the RQ2 statement, as posed in Survey Q14.

Of 65 journalists also responding to the statement that transparency about sources and methods rises to the level of ethical obligation (Survey Q9), 42 individuals, or 64.62%, strongly agreed, and 21 individuals, or 32.31% somewhat agreed, while one individual, or 1.54%,
strongly disagreed. Another individual indicated “don’t know/no opinion,” but there were no respondents who only somewhat disagreed. With 63 of 65 respondents either strongly or somewhat agreeing, their combined level of a partial to total acceptance of this form of transparency as an ethical obligation was 96.92%.

**RQ 3.** To the third research question, this study revealed ambivalence among responding journalists as a group on whether telling a substantially complete story removes any obligation for self-revelatory transparency. Conveying RQ3 directly, the last item in the survey (Appendix F, Survey Q15) asserted that when reporting “is complete … including the information the journalist would want” as the reader, this relieves journalists of any further obligation to reveal things about themselves. Of the 62 who responded, 19 individuals, or 30.65%, somewhat disagreed, and 13 individuals, or 20.97%, strongly disagreed with this statement. Meanwhile, 17 individuals, or 27.42% of all respondents, somewhat agreed with the statement, and another 13, again 20.97%, strongly agreed with it.

Two survey items (Appendix F, Survey Q10 and Q11) meant to underpin the comparison presented by RQ3 and RQ4 also produced mixed results. The first of these items (Survey Q10) introduced political affiliations as an example: “When reporting a story, it is important to reveal information about who the reporter is, such as organizational or political affiliations that may affect the reporter’s views of the topic.” Of the 65 journalists who responded, 23 individuals, or 35.38% strongly disagreed with this statement, while 15 individuals, or 23.08%, somewhat disagreed. So a total of 38 individuals, or 58.46%, weighed in as disagreeing this assertion. Meanwhile, 13 individuals, or 20% of the total, somewhat agreed with the statement, and 12 individuals, 18.46%, strongly agreed with it, while two respondents, 3.08%, chose “don’t know/no opinion,” here counted as a neutral response. Finally, the survey item (Q11) positing
that this form of transparency is an ethical obligation yielded the most ambiguous result in the survey, although not a result directly related to a research question. Of the 64 journalists who responded, 18 individuals (28.13%) strongly disagreed with the assertion, 15 individuals (23.44%) somewhat disagreed, another 15 (again, 23.44%) somewhat agreed, and 14 individuals (21.88%) strongly agreed, while two (3.13%) expressed “don’t know/no opinion.”

RQ 4. However, the response on the survey item (Appendix F, Survey Q13) directly operationalizing the fourth research question yielded an unambiguous collective response. Most respondents do not believe that revealing information about themselves, at least a particular sort of information, relieves them of an obligation to be substantially complete in what they report. The survey item used “such as organizational or political affiliations that may affect the reporter’s views of the topic” as an example of the kind of revelation of “who a reporter is” expected to obviate “any further obligation to tell a complete story.” Of the 63 journalists who responded, 50 individuals (79.37%) strongly disagreed with the assertion, 10 individuals (15.87%) somewhat disagreed, only one (1.59%) somewhat agreed, and none strongly agreed, while two (3.17%) expressed “don’t know/no opinion. Worth noting here, the “political affiliations” example was not included in the generically worded survey item (Q15) that yielded a more mixed result for RQ3.

RQ 5. In response to the final research question, a majority of respondents believe they have time and space to tell a substantially complete story. The seventh survey item tested this in an inverted form. Of the 65 journalists who responded, 34 individuals, or 52.31%, strongly disagreed with the statement that “(a)t our publication, time and space constraints make it impossible for us to be concerned about whether our reporting is substantially complete from a reader’s perspective” (Appendix F, Survey Q7). Another16 individuals, or 24.62%, somewhat
disagreed with the assertion, making the total who disagreed with the statement to one extent or the other 76.92%. Again applying MOE = \( z \sqrt{\frac{p (1-p)}{n}} \) and using the accepted value \( z = 1.96 \) (CI = 95%) indicates a margin of error of ±10.24% for the combined disagreement response, suggesting that at least 66.68% of the target population would agree with the assertion. Breaking this down to allow for any overlapping error in the actual responses, the margin of error for the 52.32% strong disagreement response is ±12.14%, making the range 40.18% to 64.46%. But MOE = ±10.47% for the “somewhat” disagreement level of 24.62%, giving a range of 14.15% to 35.09%. Adding the floor levels of those ranges (40.18% + 14.15%) gives 54.33%, showing that at least that portion of the target population of journalists, a majority, would reject the statement to a greater or lesser extent (CI = 95%). Meanwhile, 14 survey respondents, or 21.54%, somewhat agreed that time and space constraints at their publication make the studied form of substantial completeness impossible, while one individual, or 1.54% of those responding, strongly agreed.

**Discussion**

To mean anything, a profession’s ethics must be more than defensive routines or strategic rituals, believed even by practitioners to be motivated by profits, company loyalty or self-protection. As a profession where truthfulness and trust are essential, journalism needs ethical principles that rise to the level of pro attitudes or asserted reasons capable of guiding and even motivating action, and could benefit from having a central principle in which others are grounded. An ethical principle should also have some basis in actual moral reasoning, and a principle for communication requires a basis in the justice of human interactions. This study has shown that a majority of newspaper and newspaper website journalists in the United States would accept substantial completeness, described specifically as reporting containing “all the
information I would want as a reader to be able to make my own decisions” (Appendix F, Survey Q5) as important. Further, in confirmation of this study’s hypothesis, they view making reporting substantially complete in this way as “an ethical obligation for a journalist” (Appendix F, Survey Q6). To the extent that these survey results can be trusted, relatively few journalists will maintain that time and space constraints in their particular situations make such reporting impossible. Therefore, the researcher concludes that substantial completeness with reversibility both would be acceptable to most U.S. newspaper and newspaper website journalists as an ethical obligation and is seen by them as practicable in their work environment.

Nonetheless, a considerable element of self-selection among the participants to a survey such as this must be acknowledged. Firstly, any respondents to this survey will have become aware of it by first receiving an invitation email (Appendix C) or noticing at least one of two reminder emails ( Appendices D & E), all of which noted that the survey concerns completeness and transparency in reporting. The first two of those emailed notices also stated that the survey was about whether these are “useful as guiding principles in reporting and editing” (Appendices C & D). Secondly, when would-be respondents advanced to the survey itself, they saw as the first page the informed consent document, which stated, “The survey’s specific purpose is to measure the extent to which journalists see transparency and completeness in reporting as ethical obligations” (Appendix A, first page). Ironically, informed consent requirements and the researcher’s ethical compliance, or perhaps over-compliance, made a clean survey on an ethical topic impossible in regard to self-selection. Although not necessarily all actively interested in journalism ethics, respondents at least saw themselves as having time for a survey on such a topic.
Additionally, on the question of whether time and space constraints render substantially complete reporting impossible, more journalists who might have said so were probably excluded by those very—if only perceived—time demands. Perhaps relevant here, the informed consent document predicted “about 10 minutes” (Appendix A, p. 54) as the survey completion time, and SurveyMonkey dashboard showed the actual average completion time as four minutes. Regardless, an industry where time constraints rendered a felt ethical obligation impossible to fulfill would need to make other changes, not abandon that obligation.

This study made substantial completeness with reversibility its focus both because very little research had been done on the topic and because it offered the possibility of a clean definition around a core principle. As shown in the literature review, a variety of concepts and practices, not always of equal weight or clarity, had already been piled under the rubric of transparency. But as also previously acknowledged, a number of the transparency practices do have value from an ethical standpoint, and the concepts of transparency and substantial completeness certainly are not mutually exclusive. Significant majorities of respondents also agreed that transparency about how information is gathered, including identifying sources when possible and how they were contacted, is both important and an ethical obligation for journalists. Although identified as a form of transparency in one of the supporting survey questions, this could also be seen as a part of telling a substantially complete story from the reader’s perspective. Perhaps research could be done to sort out whether the perceived motive for including such information is transparency or completeness, but either would suffice.

As to whether telling a substantially complete story relieves journalists of any further obligation to reveal information about how the information was obtained, a combined 85.71% (MOE = ±8.64%, CI=95%, z=1.96) of respondents either somewhat or strongly disagreed.
Meanwhile, a combined 95.24% (MOE = ±5.26%, CI=95%, z=1.96) somewhat or strongly disagreed with the proposition that revealing how the information was obtained, including identifying sources and how they were contacted, would relieve them of the obligation to tell a substantially complete story. So the safest interpretation is that journalists view this form of disclosure transparency and substantial completeness both as priorities, and do not believe that the fulfillment of one obligation obviates the other.

Far fewer respondents were willing to accept a form of disclosure transparency that required revealing a reporter’s organizational and political affiliations even though these “may affect the reporter’s views of the topic” (Appendix F, Survey Q10 and Q11). Of those who responded, 58.46% (MOE = ±11.98%, CI=95%, z=1.96) rejected this as important and 51.5% (MOE = ±12.24%, CI=95%, z=1.96) rejected it as an ethical obligation. Given the large margins of error for results this close to the 50-50 break for a small sample size, these results cannot be generalized to the whole population of U.S. newspaper and newspaper website journalists. But if a similar mixed result or stronger rejection were attained from a study with an improved sample, this would not be surprising given Richardson’s (2009) observations about American news organization’s reluctance to reveal political leanings, which sometimes extends to bans on reporters becoming active in social and political organizations. Certainly such reluctance runs contrary to any Habermasian imperative for communicators to reveal “their individual life-histories, their identities, their needs and wants, their traditions, membership and so forth” (Habermas, 1982, p. 255, italics in original). But Allen (2008) may be justified to caution that oversharing could damage journalists’ efforts to build public trust, and Plaisance (2007) similarly warned against “transparency unmediated by other values” (p. 192).
Again, when this form of self-revelatory transparency, dubious to more than half of the responding journalists, was put up against substantial completeness with concern for the reader, collectively 95.2% of respondents rejected self-revelatory transparency as sufficient to relieve them of the obligation to tell a substantially complete story. But when the question was turned the opposite way, 51.61% (MOE = ±12.44%, CI=95%, z=1.96) somewhat or strongly rejected the suggestion that telling a substantially complete story would relieve them of any obligation to reveal such things about themselves, while a corresponding 48.39% strongly or somewhat rejected it. Again, no conclusion about a majority opinion can be generalized from such a close split in a small sample. But all of this suggests a line of research into whether journalists would be benefitted or harmed by revealing political affiliations, which is interesting but tangential to the current study.

Obviously, much in this study depended on operational definitions and the wording of survey questions. To have asked journalists simply if they believe that transparency is important in their work or an ethical obligation might have produced responses. But given the myriad practices and concepts associated with transparency, this would have meant virtually nothing. Instead, two specific types of disclosure transparency were defined in the survey questions. A survey asking directly and without explanation whether journalists view substantial completeness with reversibility as an obligation would have been even more preposterous. At best, it might have resulted in some emails asking for more information. Instead, this form of completeness was defined in the survey questions as reporting that contains all the information the journalist would want as a reader to be able to make his or her own decisions. This is all it means, and that is the beauty of substantial completeness with reversibility as an ethical guiding principle. It need not be associated with other practices, rituals or routines not directed toward the stated end.
If questions that give definitions are necessarily leading questions, and if a survey that asks about practices that might be ethical obligations necessarily coaxes respondents to answer that these are indeed obligations, then the survey unintentionally both led and coaxed. That even 45 percent of respondents chose to agree that revealing their political affiliations is an ethical obligation could hint at such an unintended bias. However, comparing that to the more than 98% level of agreement that telling a substantially complete story is an ethical obligation shows that respondents were thinking differently in regard to the individual practices.

Substantial completeness is a general concept, so further study of how it can be applied is warranted. This researcher, in a paper presented several years ago at an academic conference (Hackle, 2014), suggested one potentially controversial area for the application and study of substantial completeness, the question of when the race of suspects and victims should be included in crime stories, understood to entail the race of police officers in stories about officer-involved shootings. After noting how quickly race became an issue in the then-recent fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed, 18-year-old Black man, by a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, the conference paper briefly outlined the work of other researchers on the prevalence of race mentions in news reports. The author noted that objectivity more often suggests what to leave out of a story than what to include and that disclosure transparency generally says nothing about news content as such. Participatory transparency practices might arrive at an answer by involving the audience. But the central question of substantial completeness with reversibility—whether the communicators would think that the information was complete if they were its recipients—provided the clearest guideline, the author concluded.

Journalists answered this question in the Michael Brown case by reporting race as relevant, indeed as central to the story. Some might also answer it by reporting, as a kind
of baseline, how often unarmed citizens are killed by police officers of the same race.

(Hackle, 2014, p. 21)

Unfortunately, police shootings, crime reporting and race remain a potentially fertile field for research into the application of substantial completeness.

This area of application also suggests limitations of the reversibility concept, because reporters cannot simultaneously fulfill the desires of all readers and should not specify race in stories where it would be relevant only to readers with racist motives. So, something akin to the reasonable reader standard (Klaidman & Beauchamp, 1987) must be maintained. An assumption of reversibility is that, in the effort to identify with news consumers, journalists will think about the decision-making needs of those who are as reasonable as themselves but who differ in other ways. Another line of questioning, not pursued here, should make explicit whether journalists actively consider the needs of news consumers whose political views and life situations are markedly different from their own.

**Conclusion**

Journalistic objectivity, long considered a core principle, has been questioned in its foundations and undermined by critics for at least 50 years. This study examined transparency and substantial completeness as possible successors, with a special focus on completeness as less often researched and capable of being asserted as a specific ethical maxim. Transparency, like objectivity before it, has been associated with a number of varied practices that do not necessarily form a coherent package. However, key practices of transparency, such as revealing methods as well as sources when possible, are not only compatible with but called for by substantial completeness.
The advantage of substantial completeness is that it can be boiled down to a single question, to be answered many times in the process of reporting different stories. A majority of American newspaper journalists clearly will accept substantial completeness as an ethical principle of importance when it is explained to them. Besides the survey’s main purpose as a research instrument, it had a secondary purpose, to inform. This year, at least for an average of four minutes each, 70 working journalists scattered across the nation thought about substantial completeness in terms of giving readers what they need to make their own decisions.
References


Retrieved from Amazon.com


Appendix A

Survey of newspaper and online journalists

(In SurveyMonkey format; begins on next page with informed consent document.)
Informed Consent:

Thank you for participating in this survey, which is being used for academic research into journalists’ opinions. It consists of 15 questions and should take about 10 minutes to complete.

Your thoughtful responses and honesty are important.

The survey’s specific purpose is to measure the extent to which journalists see transparency and completeness in reporting as ethical obligations. After four basic questions about you, items 5-15 ask you to rate statements about the research topic on an agreement-disagreement scale.

I do not anticipate that taking this survey will involve any risk or inconvenience to you. Furthermore, your participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw it at any time without penalty. All information collected will be used only for my research, and there will be no connection to you specifically in the results. Your contact information and name will be kept confidential. Once the study is completed, I would be happy to share the results with you if you desire. In the meantime, if you have any questions please ask, or contact me:

Alvie P. Hackle
aphackle@memphis.edu

Or you may contact my faculty advisor:

Dr. David Arant,
Chair, Department of Journalism,
The University of Memphis
darant@memphis.edu

Additionally, if you have any concerns about your treatment and rights as a participant in this study, please call or email the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at irb@memphis.edu or at 901-678-2705. Although the administrator may ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

By clicking the Next Page button below you are affirming that you have read the explanation of the study, that you are at least 18 years old and that you agree to participate. Please read all questions carefully and answer all that you feel are appropriate.
1. What is your primary role as a journalist? Please check one:

- Reporter
- Editor
- Photographer or photojournalist
- Sports writer
- Other (please specify; for example, columnist, reviewer, opinion writer)

2. How many years have you been working as a journalist?

- 5 or less
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- more than 35

3. Where is the work you produce or edit (or that of journalists you supervise) primarily published?

- In a printed newspaper
- On a website
- Regularly both in a newspaper and on its website
- Other (please specify)

4. What is your gender?
5. When I am reporting on a subject or supervising how it is reported, it is important to me that the reporting contain all the information I would want as a reader to be able to make my own decisions.

6. Making reporting substantially complete, so that it contains all the information that the journalist would want as a reader, is an ethical obligation for a journalist.

7. At our publication, time and space constraints make it impossible for us to be concerned about whether our reporting is substantially complete from a reader’s perspective.

8. When reporting or editing a story, it is important to explain how the information was obtained, such as identifying sources when possible and explaining how they were contacted.

9. Transparency in how information is gathered, such as identifying sources when possible and explaining how they were contacted, is an ethical obligation for a journalist.
10. When reporting a story, it is important to reveal information about who the reporter is, such as organizational or political affiliations that may affect the reporter’s views of the topic.

Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree Don’t know/No opinion

11. Transparency about who the reporter is, revealing things such as organizational or political affiliations that may affect the reporter’s views of the topic, is an ethical obligation for a journalist.

Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree Don’t know/No opinion

Transparency and Completeness in Reporting: 15 Questions

Your priorities: how these ideas stack up

12. When a story reveals how the information was obtained, such as identifying sources when possible and explaining how they were contacted, this relieves the reporter of any further obligation to tell a complete story that includes all the information the reporter would want if he or she were the reader.

Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree Don’t know/No opinion

13. When a story reveals who the reporter is, such as organizational or political affiliations that may affect the reporter’s views of the topic, this relieves the reporter of any further obligation to tell a complete story that includes all the information the reporter would want if he or she were the reader.

Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree Don’t know/No opinion

14. When reporting is complete from the reader’s perspective, including all the information the journalist would want if he or she were that reader, this relieves the journalist of any further obligation to reveal how the information was obtained.

Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree Don’t know/No opinion
15. When reporting is complete from the reader’s perspective, including all the information the journalist would want if he or she were that reader, this relieves the journalist of any further obligation to reveal information about himself or herself.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know/No opinion</th>
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</table>

Thank you for completing our survey!
Appendix B

Initial contact messages

Each first newspaper contacted:

Hello [insert contact name here or used Fellow Journalist if no name determined]:

I’m both a newspaper reporter and a University of Memphis graduate student working on a thesis in journalism ethics. I’m surveying journalists about whether they see transparency and completeness in reporting as ethical requirements. As we seek a variety of respondents, we’re asking that you direct us to one of the two members of your reporting and editing staff who have worked there the longest.

Would you please respond with the name and email address of one such willing survey participant, or you could respond yourself if you fit the category.

Thanks, Al Hackle
aphackle@memphis.edu

Each second newspaper contacted:

Hello [insert contact name here or used Fellow Journalist if no name determined]:

I’m both a newspaper reporter and a University of Memphis graduate student working on a thesis in journalism ethics. I’m surveying journalists about whether they see transparency and completeness in reporting as ethical requirements. As we seek a variety of respondents, we’re asking that you direct us to for one of the two newest members of your reporting and editing staff. Would you please respond with the name and email address of one such willing survey participant, or you could respond yourself if you fit the category.

Thanks, Al Hackle
aphackle@memphis.edu

Each third newspaper contacted:

Hello [insert contact name here or used Fellow Journalist if no name determined]:
I’m both a newspaper reporter and a University of Memphis graduate student working on a thesis in journalism ethics. I’m surveying journalists about whether they see transparency and completeness in reporting as ethical requirements. We’re asking that you direct us to a member of your editorial staff who is neither the longest serving nor the newest (unless those are the only staff members available, in which case either will do). Would you please respond with the name and email address of one such willing survey participant, or you could respond yourself if you fit the category.

Thanks, Al Hackle
aphackle@memphis.edu
Appendix C

Survey invitation email

Transparency and Completeness in Reporting: 15 Questions

Dear fellow journalist,

As a University of Memphis graduate student in journalism and also a working reporter, I am conducting a survey about completeness and transparency and whether these are – or aren’t – useful as guiding principles in reporting and editing. Your cooperation and input are greatly appreciated as we attempt to obtain a national sample of newspaper and newspaper website journalists. This should take less than 10 minutes to complete. You will be asked for a limited amount of personal info that will be used to determine how journalists’ views of the subject may vary according to factors such job assignment or years of experience. However, your name will not be linked to your response, and no individual respondents will be identified either by names or their workplaces in the published results.

The survey does not ask your age, but only journalists age 18 and up should participate. Clicking here on Go-to-Survey will take you to the survey on SurveyMonkey, where the first page serves as an informed consent document.

Thank you,

Al Hackle
aphackle@memphis.edu
Appendix D

First reminder email

Journalists’ Transparency & Completeness Survey

Thank You! If You Have / Reminder if You Haven’t

Dear working journalist,

I’m the full-time journalist and sometime University of Memphis graduate student who contacted you a couple of weeks ago for my survey about whether completeness and transparency are useful as guiding principles in reporting and editing. Because the survey platform doesn’t attach responses to email addresses, I’ve no way of knowing whether you have completed the survey. So if you have, I’d like to thank you very much,* and if you haven’t, I’d like to remind you of the survey and ask again, as I’m trying to get a representative sample.

The survey includes 15 questions and should take about 10 minutes to complete. It does not ask your age, but only journalists age 18 and up should participate. Clicking here on Go-to-Survey will take you to the survey on SurveyMonkey, where the first page serves as an informed consent document.

Thank you,

Al Hackle
aphackle@memphis.edu

*If you completed the survey, please do not attempt to take it again. But if you did a portion of the survey, you should be able to return to it and pick up where you left off. Just please make sure you click the “Done” button at the end when you’re finished.
Appendix E

Last reminder email

Last chance to help out with my

Journalism Transparency & Completeness Survey

Dear working journalist,

Remember me? I’m the University of Memphis graduate student in journalism doing the survey about completeness and transparency in reporting. If you’ve already completed it, please accept a great big “THANKS!” and don’t worry, this is my last notice to everyone.

But if anyone still hasn’t done the survey* and needs one more chance, remember, the survey includes 15 questions and should take less than 10 minutes to complete, and your name won’t be connected with it. It does not ask your age, but only journalists age 18 and up should participate. Just clicking on the link here, Go-to-Survey, will take you to the survey on SurveyMonkey, where the first page serves as an informed consent document.

Thank you,

Al Hackle
aphackle@memphis.edu

*If you completed the survey, please do not attempt to take it again. But if you did a portion of the survey, you should be able to return to it and pick up where you left off. Just please make sure you click the “Done” button at the end when you’re finished.
Appendix F

SurveyMonkey data summary

Q1 What is your primary role as a journalist? Please check one:

Answered: 70
Skipped: 0

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<td>Reporter</td>
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<td>Editor</td>
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<td>Photographer or photojournaler</td>
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<td>Sports Writer</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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Q2 How many years have you been working as a journalist?

Answered: 69   Skipped: 1

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<td>21-25</td>
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<td>26-30</td>
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<td>31-35</td>
<td>10.14%</td>
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<td>more than 35</td>
<td>21.74%</td>
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Q3 Where is the work you produce or edit (or that of journalists you supervise) primarily published?

Answered: 70   Skipped: 0

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<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
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<td>In a printed newspaper</td>
<td>47.14%</td>
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<td>On a website</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Regularly both in a newspaper and on its website</td>
<td>48.57%</td>
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<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>1.43%</td>
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Q4 What is your gender?

Answered: 69  Skipped: 1

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<td>Male</td>
<td>49.28%</td>
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Q5 When I am reporting on a subject or supervising how it is reported, it is important to me that the reporting contain all the information I would want as a reader to be able to make my own decisions.

Answered: 65  Skipped: 5

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<td>3.94</td>
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Q6 Making reporting substantially complete, so that it contains all the information that the journalist would want as a reader, is an ethical obligation for a journalist.

Answered: 65  Skipped: 5

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<th>STRONGLY AGREE</th>
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69
Q7 At our publication, time and space constraints make it impossible for us to be concerned about whether our reporting is substantially complete from a reader's perspective.

Answered: 65   Skipped: 5

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<th>STRONGLY AGREE</th>
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<th>SOMETHAT DISAGREE</th>
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<td>65</td>
<td>1.72</td>
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Q8 When reporting or editing a story, it is important to explain how the information was obtained, such as identifying sources when possible and explaining how they were contacted.

Answered: 65  Skipped: 5

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Q9 Transparency in how information is gathered, such as identifying sources when possible and explaining how they were contacted, is an ethical obligation for a journalist.

Answered: 65    Skipped: 5

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Q10 When reporting a story, it is important to reveal information about who the reporter is, such as organizational or political affiliations that may affect the reporter's views of the topic.

Answered: 65    Skipped: 5

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Q11 Transparency about who the reporter is, revealing things such as organizational or political affiliations that may affect the reporter’s views of the topic, is an ethical obligation for a journalist.

Answered: 64  Skipped: 6

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14 15 15 18 2
Q12 When a story reveals how the information was obtained, such as identifying sources when possible and explaining how they were contacted, this relieves the reporter of any further obligation to tell a complete story that includes all the information the reporter would want if he or she were the reader.

Answered: 63  Skipped: 7

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Q13 When a story reveals who the reporter is, such as organizational or political affiliations that may affect the reporter’s views of the topic, this relieves the reporter of any further obligation to tell a complete story that includes all the information the reporter would want if he or she were the reader.

Answered: 63  Skipped: 7

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Q14 When reporting is complete from the reader’s perspective, including all the information the journalist would want if he or she were that reader, this relieves the journalist of any further obligation to reveal how the information was obtained.

Answered: 63  Skipped: 7

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|                | 1              | 6              | 20                | 34                | 2                      |       |                  |
Q15 When reporting is complete from the reader’s perspective, including all the information the journalist would want if he or she were that reader, this relieves the journalist of any further obligation to reveal information about himself or herself.

Answered: 62
Skipped: 8

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Appendix G

IRB Approval #4222

Jessica McMorris
on behalf of
Institutional Review Board

Hello,
The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed and approved your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

**PI NAME:** Alvie Hackle

**CO-PI:**

**PROJECT TITLE:** Your journalism is transparent, but is it complete? Examining objectivity’s successors

**FACULTY ADVISOR NAME (if applicable):** Morgan Arant

**IRB ID:** #4222

**APPROVAL DATE:** 10/07/2016

**EXPIRATION DATE:** 10/07/2017

**LEVEL OF REVIEW:** Expedited

*Please Note: Modifications do not extend the expiration of the original approval*

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. If this IRB approval has an expiration date, an approved renewal must be in effect to continue the project prior to that date. If approval is not obtained, the human consent form(s) and recruiting material(s) are no longer valid and any research activities involving human subjects must stop.
2. When the project is finished or terminated, a completion form must be completed and sent to the board.
3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without prior board approval, whether the approved protocol was reviewed at the Exempt, Expedited or Full Board level.
4. Exempt approval are considered to have no expiration date and no further review is necessary unless the protocol needs modification.

Thank you,

James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.

*Note: Review outcomes will be communicated to the email address on file. This email should be considered an official communication from the UM IRB.*
Institutional Review Board
Office of Sponsored Programs
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg

Memphis, TN 38152-3370

Sep 1, 2017

PI Name: Alvie Hackle
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI:
Submission Type: Modification
Title: Your journalism is transparent, but is it complete? Examining objectivity’s successors
IRB ID : #4222
Level of Review:

Approval: Sep 1, 2017
Expiration: *

The modification is approved.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:
1. This IRB approval for modification has an expiration date, an approved renewal must be in effect to continue
the project prior to that date. If approval is not obtained, the human consent form(s) and recruiting material(s)
are no longer valid and any research activities involving human subjects must stop.

2. When the project is finished or terminated, a completion form must be submitted.

3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without prior board approval.

*Modifications do not extend the expiration of the original approval

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.
Institutional Review Board
Office of Sponsored Programs
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

PI: Alvie Hackle
Co-Investigator:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Morgan Arant
Department: Users loaded with unmatched Organization affiliation.
Study Title: Your journalism is transparent, but is it complete? Examining objectivity’s successors
IRB ID: 4222
Submission Type: Renewal
Level of Review:

IRB Meeting Date:
Decision: Approved
Approval Date: Sep 1, 2017
Expiration Date: Sep 1, 2018

Research Notes:
Findings:

The IRB has reviewed the renewal request.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:
1. If this IRB approval has an expiration date, an approved renewal must be in effect to continue the project prior to that date. If approval is not obtained, the human consent form(s) and recruiting material(s) are no longer valid and any research activities involving human subjects must stop.
2. When the project is finished or terminated, a completion form must be completed and sent to the board.
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Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.