2005

Understanding the norm of objectivity in visual communication education

Karin Margaret Higgins
San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses

Recommended Citation

Higgins, Karin Margaret, "Understanding the norm of objectivity in visual communication education" (2005). *Master's Theses*. 2767.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.g7kn-w8hu>
https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/2767

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

UNDERSTANDING THE NORM OF OBJECTIVITY
IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of
Journalism and Mass Communications
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Science

By

Karin Margaret Higgins

August 2005

UMI Number: 1429430

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 1429430

Copyright 2006 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

© 2005

Karin Margaret Higgins

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

APPROVED FOR THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND MASS
COMMUNICATIONS

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Dennis Dunleavy", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Dennis Dunleavy

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mr. Mack Lundstrom", written over a horizontal line.

Mr. Mack Lundstrom

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bill Tillinghast", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Bill Tillinghast

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ethan I. Williamson", written over a horizontal line.

ABSTRACT
UNDERSTANDING THE NORM OF OBJECTIVITY
IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

By Karin M. Higgins

This thesis addresses visual communication educators' conceptualization of the journalistic norm of "objectivity" in documentary photography during a period of transition from film and chemical-based processes to digital technologies. It examines the relationship between educators' understanding of objectivity and Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

This pilot study reveals that educators are redefining the norm objectivity. In journalism education, objectivity is no longer considered the principal ideal. In fact, educators indicate that objectivity is unachievable and instead, are teaching students that photojournalists can work ethically within the confines of subjectivity to achieve visual truth. These findings support a recent study by Coleman and Wilkins (2004) showing journalists to be highly developed in terms of moral values. This research also reveals that as digital technology continues to challenge journalistic values, ethical issues remain the same.

For my parents.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 Introduction	Page 1
Chapter 2 Review of the Literature	Page 9
Chapter 3 Theory	Page 29
Chapter 4 Method	Page 43
Chapter 5 Findings	Page 47
Chapter 6 Discussion	Page 60
Works Cited	Page 68

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How individuals, as a society, come to understand the role photography plays in constructing social reality through news and documentary work depends upon a complex array of ethical, moral, cultural, societal, and ideological beliefs. Is a picture really “worth 1,000 words,” and is “seeing” really “believing” in an age of seamless digital manipulation and technological change?

Beginning in the 1990s, the digital camera has challenged how educators understand and teach prescribed ethical standards and occupational norms in the field of visual journalism. For Julianne Newton (2001), visual journalism is “the guardian of the real,” acknowledging that “reality is constructed, but applies well-considered methods to record and interpret real occurrences in people’s lives in as authentic a manner as possible for others to see” (pp. 184–185). One of the more problematic norms in journalism has been both educators’ and professionals’ conceptualization of the long-standing tenet of objectivity. Recent scholarly work explicates how digital technologies impinge on the norm of objectivity in visual journalism (Cookman, 2003; Dunleavy, 2004; Lester & Elliott, 2003; Newton, 2001; Wheeler, 2002; Irby, 2003; Reksten, 2002). In fact, this study suggests that objectivity in photojournalism education is currently referred to only in terms of an unachievable ideal rather than the principal ideal.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate how educators conceptualize the photographic norm of “objectivity” in documentary photography during a period of transition from film and chemical-based processes to digital technologies. Using Kohlberg’s theory of moral development as an analytical frame, the central concern of this investigation explores how objectivity is defined in photojournalism education, especially in a digital context. Recent incidents involving breaches of photojournalistic ethics by professionals using digital technology make this study relevant to the fields of media ethics and photojournalism education (Irby, 2003; Elliott & Lester, 2003; Reksten, 2003).

Photojournalism and Documentary Photography

For educators, defining stylistic forms within the field of visual journalism can be categorized as either “documentary photography” or “photojournalism.” Both forms of photography are often confused because they resemble one another and even overlap at times (Coleman, 1998; Becker, 1998; Light, 2000). In terms of understanding “objectivity,” this study explores the various stylistic forms taught by visual educators. Some of the key concerns of this discourse may include, but are not limited to, the following questions: What delineates one form of photography from the other? Where do these terms come from? Who is using these terms and why is this important to visual communication education? How does objectivity reflect Kohlberg’s highest stage of moral development?

Kohlberg’s stages of moral development are appropriate for framing the observations found in this exploratory study of how educators conceptualize the

norm of objectivity in visual journalism. Through qualitative methods, an e-mail questionnaire was used to gather information from research participants.

Responses were then compared to Kohlberg's theory, which suggests that people develop moral values over time through stages. Recent findings by Coleman and Wilkins (2004) indicate that journalists rank high in terms of moral development.

According to A. D. Coleman (1998) documentary photography and photojournalism cannot be defined in terms of the specific subject matter addressed or in terms of specific image-making techniques or styles because there is considerable overlap. In fact, documentary photographers and photojournalists often photograph the same subject matter and use the same type of equipment (1998, p. 36).

Becker (1992) wrote that the meaning of these terms cannot be discovered by profound thought and analysis, but rather are just what people have found to be useful to them. We can learn about how people have used these terms as a cover for what they are doing, but can never actually define the terms. Becker (1992) explains:

Their meaning arises in the organizations they are used in, out of the joint action of all the people involved in those organizations, and so varies from time to time and place to place. Just as paintings get their meaning in a world of painters, collectors, critics, and curators, so photographs get their meaning from the way the people involved with them understand them, use them, and thereby attribute meaning to them (Online).

Photojournalism and documentary photography changed dramatically in the last third of the twentieth century. According to Coleman (1998), this change is the result:

. . . of complex interactions between such factors as the imperatives of practitioners, the editorial/distribution systems that deliver their work to the audience, the expectations and desires of that audience, and the emergent technologies for visual communication (pp. 35-36).

Coleman (1998) argues further that originally the function of photojournalism and documentary photography was both informational and representational.

However, the central mission of both forms of photography is to inform (p. 36). One of the greatest differences between photojournalism and documentary photography is time. While photojournalism almost always involves deadlines, most commonly within a day or two in which a picture is made, documentary work on the other hand, might not have a foreseeable deadline. Dunleavy (2003) explains, "In documentary work, there is never really a sense of when the project will end" (p. 244). Because the photographer spends a considerable amount of time working on a documentary project, often years, the photographer inherently becomes emotionally involved with the subject matter, and objectivity, in the traditional sense, is impossible.

Although both the photojournalist and documentarian strive toward visual truth, the documentarian presents the viewer with work from "an interrogative and alternative perspective that goes beyond the glare of a quickly forgotten headline or the triviality of a sound bite" (Dunleavy, 2003). Like photojournalism,

documentary work can provide visual truth, but there is a differentiation in the role subjectivity plays in the picture-making process. Dunleavy (2003) concludes that, “the skilled photojournalist responds to the world emotionally and intellectually by documenting it with honesty and humility” (pp. 242-243).

What is Truth and How Can it Be Taught?

The fundamental premise on which photojournalism is based is the search for visual truth (Newton, 2001, pp. 8, 84). For this reason, it is important to consider how the notion of images as truthful accounts of reality impinge upon the ethical formation of aspiring photojournalists. Dunleavy (2004) explains, “The seamless and malleable nature of digital information presents great opportunities as well as challenges for a profession which prides itself on producing accurate and timely visual reportage” (unpublished dissertation, p. 6).

Visual truth as defined by Julianne Newton (2001) is “authentic knowledge derived from seeing” (p. 84). Newton (2001) continues:

Photography’s inherent capacity for gathering visual information by recording points of light reflecting off physical entities and for conveying that information in a form that appears particularly similar to the world we perceive with our own eyes fostered an early and prevailing assumption about the authenticity of photographic representation (p.5).

This long-held belief that “seeing is believing” resulted in the notion that photography provides “proof” (Gitlin, 2003; Newton, 2003). Recently the validity of the photograph has been questioned by the introduction of digital media such as the digital camera and computer software applications such as Adobe Photoshop. These new tools make it easier to manipulate images resulting in

changes that are nearly undetectable. The ease of digital manipulation puts the premise of 'visual truth' in danger. As Newton (2001) suggests, because "new media allows photography to be easily manipulated, the issue of truth and the commitment to carrying the standard of visual truth by media professionals and users becomes increasingly critical" (p. 4).

Summary

In summary, this investigation seeks to provide a baseline for evaluating how educators conceptualize the norm of "objectivity" in a digital age. As visual journalism transforms to an all-digital environment it is important to evaluate the implications on professional ethical norms. This situation is complicated by the fact that visual journalism educators with backgrounds in traditional photographic practices are faced with teaching a complex array of new technologies that may challenge traditional ethical standards to the next generation of photojournalists. Although this study's focus is on visual journalism educators in higher education, this study also provides insight into the future of the industry.

It is postulated that visual journalism educators are redefining the norm of objectivity. By defining how educators train photojournalists to understand the ethical implications of their craft, inferences are drawn regarding the impact digital technologies have on the field. Scholarship in this area is expanding and includes research by Cookman, 2003; Lester & Elliott, 2003; J.H. Newton, 2001; Wheeler, 2002; Irby, 2003 and Reksten, 2002. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to this growing body of research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The central concern of this study explores how objectivity is defined in photojournalism education. Scholarship in this area is predicated on investigating the intrinsic and extrinsic behaviors of journalists in a democratic society (Cookman, 2003; Dunleavy, 2004; Gitlin, 2003; Irby, 2003; Lester, 1993; Lester & Elliott, 2003; Newton, 2001; Reksten, 2002; Schiller, 1981; Schudson, 2001; Schwartz, 1992; Tuchman, 1978; Wheeler, 2002). This section of the literature review briefly discusses some of these changes and explains the role and importance of ethics in journalism.

Ethics in Journalism Education: A Historical Perspective

The fundamental premise of journalism carries both a “constitutional and cultural tradition deeply rooted in ethical convictions” (Hastings Committee,

1979). Howard Chapnick (1994) explains, “ethics are a system of moral principles that serves as the foundation for the way we conduct ourselves as human beings” (p. 293). The complexity of this obsession with morality is evident in the vast changes that define what an ethical journalist is. It is important to examine how this definition has changed over time as well as the role of ethics in journalism education.

Before schools of journalism education were established in the early decades of the twentieth century, apprenticeship training had been the established educational method (Christians et al., 1980). Joseph Pulitzer initiated the change from informal training to formal instruction when he announced a major endowment to Columbia University for creating a School of Journalism in the year 1903 (Christians et al., 1980, p. 1).

Christians and Covert (1980) explain that this first generation of journalism educators was:

Inspired by the Progressive Era, in fact, by a particular brand of progressivism linked to the moralistic perspective of the small town. . . . Most of the rhetoric from journalism educators during the teens and twenties was couched in religious terms. . . . But the work of these early educators indicates that explicit progressive values swiftly became less significant than the dignity of journalism itself (The teaching of ethics in higher education, p. 1-2).

Since the 1920s, journalists and journalism educators have argued that journalism is in fact, a legitimate and honorable profession such as law or medicine (Christians et al., 1980; Smith, 2003). In order to prove its worth as a profession, early educators compared, “journalism to law and medicine as a

public trust, seeking for their occupation a professional status equal to that of those more venerable fields” (Christians et al., 1980, p. 2). According to Christians and Covert (1980), “Joseph Pulitzer echoed this rhetoric specifically,” and journalism education materials published between 1903 and 1930 explicitly mentioned and imitated aspects of the law and medical professions (p. 2).

Although law and medicine provided a model of professionalism, this model “proved inappropriate for a constitutionally protected process rooted in a profit-making enterprise” (Christians et al., 1980, p. 3). Journalism had strived to copy the codes, licensing and formal education that were inherent to the professions of law and medicine, but applying such rigid controls was problematic because they interfered with the premise of journalism: First Amendment protection of free expression (Christians et al., 1980; Harris, 1992).

This issue is addressed in a March 2003 *News Photographer* article titled, “Keeping the Code Alive” by Deni Elliott and Paul Martin Lester. Elliott and Lester (2003) pose the question, “If the government is prohibited from setting boundaries around a ‘free and unfettered press,’ why should professional associations and newsrooms strive to do just that”? (p. 8) The researchers explain that a common answer “is that self-regulation is the best defense against external regulation, and that self-regulation is the best preventative to actions by practitioners that might legitimately result in judicial protection for those harmed” (p. 8).

Rather than organizing a governing body to enforce strict codes and to control “the supply of entrants to the field through formal education and licensing,” (Christians et al., 1980, *Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education*, p. 3) professional societies emerged, setting broad principles. In fact, according to Christians (1997), the first informal, self-imposed moral guidelines were introduced by the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* during the Civil War.

In 1889, the word *ethics* first appears in W.S. Lilly’s essay on press criticism titled “Ethics of Journalism.” The Kansas Editorial Association officially adopted the first code of ethics for journalists in 1910. Christians (1997) explains that during the 1920s other state associations follow Kansas’ lead in officially adopting codes of ethics for journalists (pp. 15-16). According to Christians (1997), the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) was organized by Casper S. Yost of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* in 1922, with the purpose of promoting, “professional ideals among editors in chief, managing editors, and editorial-page editors of daily newspapers” (p. 16). One year later, ASNE adopted a code of ethics called the *Canons of Journalism* emphasizing “public interest, impartiality, decency, truthfulness, and accuracy” (Cohen et al., 1997, pp. 16, 17). During the 1920s several associations copied or imitated this code. Christians and Covert (1980) explain:

These groups developed codes, which served more as idealized statements on attitudes and performance than as enforced mechanisms for regulating conduct. Ethical behavior was policed rather by peer action on the basis of information transmitted via informal networks of communication (p. 4).

The fact that the public was questioning the legitimacy of the media was another contributing factor to the development of professional standards and codes of ethics.

As criticism of the press reached its peak in the 1940s, the media were forced to re-examine themselves. To enhance the respectability of the profession, following the Hutchins' Commission findings in 1949, journalism and journalism education began to focus on ethics with a social responsibility edge.

For McQuail (2000) social responsibility is:

Attributed to the mass media in certain normative theories of the press and based on propositions about the needs of (democratic) society, the unwritten obligations implicit in the freedom of publication as well as general ethical and moral principles relating to truth and justice (p. 503).

For Siebert et al. (1956) the major premise of the theory is that:

Freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under our government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society (p. 74).

As journalism evolved toward the last half of the century, professional standards and codes of ethics emerged. While the premise of developing such codes dealt directly with response to public outcry and the recognition of a legitimate profession, compared to that of law and medicine, these comparisons became few and far between. As mentioned previously, the field of journalism does not have a formal governing body to police its actions. Informal professional organizations such as the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) and ASNE attempt to police themselves. Christians and

Covert (1980) explain that sanctions such as “ostracism from the group, dismissal, failure to hire” were the consequences of not following the ethical standards defined by the group. According to Christians (1997), in 1929 ASNE members voted “for voluntary obedience rather than disciplinary action,” and “the concept of voluntary compliance with the ASNE code becomes standard policy for media codes of ethics from this point on” (p. 17).

Current codes of ethics follow this model. The NPPA code of ethics is actionable. Elliott and Lester (2003) explain that members can be charged with ethics violations by other members and, upon finding that the charges are justified,” members will be expelled from the association (p. 8). As a part of their application for membership, members are required to endorse the Code of Ethics.

Ethics in journalism and journalism education continued to change. According to Christians (1997), the Poynter Institute for Media Studies held its first seminar in applied ethics for reporters and editors in March of 1984. Two years later, the Institute introduced a four-day seminar for teachers of journalism ethics. This seminar, along with a seminar in applied ethics for both reporters and editors, is held annually as part of the Poynter Ethics Program (Christians, 1997, *Contemporary Ethical Issues*, p. 25).

In May of 1984, Edmund Lambeth of the University of Kentucky along with the support of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) launched the first annual Workshop on the Teaching of

Journalism Ethics (pp. 23-24). Christians (1997) explains that, "participants work through ethical theory, case studies, moral development models, instructional goals and learning theory" (p. 24).

According to Christians (1997), in the fall of 1985, Jay Black of Utah State and Ralph Barney of Brigham Young began publishing the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics (JMME)*, with the aim of bridging the gap between academics and professionals (pp. 24-25). Christians (1997) contends that:

After establishing the need during discussions with the AEJMC and the Society of Professional Journalists, the editors have their own universities underwrite *JMME* as a biannual (now quarterly) refereed journal" (pp. 24-25).

Media ethics continued to demand attention throughout the 1980s, 1990s and continues today. During the past two decades, several associations, scholarly journals, seminars, conferences, colloquia, studies and Web sites such as the Civic Journalism Interest Group (CJIG), *FineLine*, the Freedom Forum, and the Organization of News Ombudsmen, emerged to specifically address the concerns media professionals and educators have regarding ethics. As a result, most professional organizations such as the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), the NPPA, and ASNE are continually adapting their code of ethics to keep pace with the volatile ethics discussion.

Objectivity: Historical Perspective

Objectivity has remained the dominant professional norm of the news media for more than a century (McGill, 2004, *Our Code is Falling to Pieces*). Objectivity is still taught within the educational context of journalistic ethics

(Newton, 2001) and is concomitant with the training of entry-level professionals. For Smith (2003), journalists tend to see themselves as objective pursuers of truth, but this view becomes problematic when defining the terms of 'truth' and 'objectivity' (p. 56). According to Newton (2003), the official definition of objectivity refers to the state or quality of "being not influenced by personal feelings or prejudice" (p. 8). However, when asked, journalists will give confounding definitions of the term, or as Cunningham (2003) contends, "Ask ten journalists what objectivity means and you will get ten different answers" (p. 26).

Editors of early American newspapers held different opinions on the norm of objectivity from editors in today's newsrooms. For colonial editors, news consisted of highly opinionated political essays and promulgated opinions as what they believed to be truthful journalism. Smith (2003) argues that these early editors "scoffed at the idea of presenting opposing viewpoints" (p. 66).

As journalism evolved toward the last half of the 19th century, professional standards and codes of ethics emerged. The economic base of newspapers changed along with improvements in newspaper production techniques, which made printing newspapers cheaper. For Schudson (2001), this business model helped shape the perception of what accounts for professional journalism in today's society. Fact-based reporting in journalism emerged during this time: "Some contend that the very nature of police reporting added to journalism's understanding of objectivity" (Smith, 2003, p. 67). In addition, the press faced new challenges at the end of the 19th and the early 20th century. With the rise of

commercialism, the same democratic principles in which American journalism was founded, contributed to harmful effects. According to McQuail (2000), "It was clear that press freedom in the economic sense and in purely negative terms of rejecting government interference was also a potential weapon against the liberation of the people from their economic if not their political chains" (p. 148).

At the same time, research suggests that the introduction of news wire services, such as the Associated Press, propagated the necessity of objectivity by standardizing news content for mass-market newspapers across the nation.

Tuchman (1978) notes, "Although professionalism emerged among news workers in the 1890s, it was not until the 1920s that facticity connoted professional neutrality and objectivity, and that news workers and their impartiality by explicitly eschewing distortion and personal bias" (p. 160).

Additionally, for Smith (2003), "many journalists rethought their role in society in reaction to criticism of the 'yellow journalism' of the Hearst and Pulitzer circulation wars in New York City" (p. 67). Peterson (1956) contends that publishers eventually began to link the social responsibility of the press with freedom and formulated codes of ethical behavior:

The earliest of these codes, the Canons of Journalism, was adopted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1923. It called on newspapers to practice responsibility to the general welfare, sincerity, truthfulness, impartiality, fair play, decency, and respect for the individual's privacy (pp. 77, 85).

Criticism of the press, however, continued well into the 1940s and culminated in 1942 when a private commission to study the news was created.

For McQuail (2000), this was the first of many inquiries and reports “to look into the failure of the media to meet the needs of society” (p. 148). According to Smith (2003), “after two years of study, the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press issued a report that the press was in serious trouble” (p. 71). It was also at this time that the term social responsibility of the press emerged and called “on journalists to rethink their obligations to the truth” (Smith, 2003, Groping for Ethics in Journalism, p. 71).

The commission also reported that, “social responsibility should be reached by self-control, not government intervention” (Smith, 2003, Groping for Ethics in Journalism, p. 71). According to McQuail (2000), this “theory of social responsibility” involved a view of media ownership as a form of public trust or stewardship, rather than as an unlimited private franchise” (McQuail, 2000, p.149). As Tuchman (1978) contends:

By stressing methods, gathering supplementary evidence, presenting conflicting truth claims, inputting facts through familiarity with police procedures, and using quotations marks, to name some techniques . . . news workers produced a full-blown version of the web of facticity (p. 160).

However, by the 1950s, after Joseph McCarthy won election to the Senate, the press received a major lesson in their flawed view of objectivity. During a time when many Americans believed that communists were trying to take over the country, many newspapers were fed sensational charges and reported McCarthy’s accusations without question. In this way, McCarthy took advantage

of the press and redefined the role journalists played as objective pursuers of truth.

Objectivity in the Modern Era

During the Vietnam War, in the 1960s and early 1970s, official governmental sources often drastically conflicted with what reporters experienced in the field. Because of the reliance on a strict notion of objectivity, editors often chose to run the official reports even if they were not truthful. During this time, reporters and editors recognized that a more truthful report was possible by finding several sources rather than relying on one. By the 1970s, “getting the other side became the standard definition of truth-telling” (Smith, 2003, p. 70). Although journalism today does not meet the idealistic standards set by the Hutchins Commission, the principles of social responsibility continue to influence modern journalistic practices. The modified version of the idea of objectivity has adapted previous versions.

For Schudson (1978) objectivity refers to:

The belief that one can and should separate facts from values. Facts in this view are assertions about the world open to independent validation. They stand beyond the distorting influences of any individual's personal preferences. Values, in this view, are an individual's conscious or unconscious preferences for what the world should be; they are seen as ultimately subjective and so without legitimate claim on other people (p. 5-6).

Smith (2003) outlines three points defining the American journalists' goal of objectivity. The first point is the obligation to gather information, undaunted in the pursuit of truth, unhampered by conflicting interests in order, “to inform the public

about incidents, trends and developments in society and government.” The second point is, “to treat people . . . with fairness, respect, and . . . compassion,” in order to protect the trust and respect gained. The last point states, “to nurture the democratic process,” because the news media play a vital role in providing information to the public in a democratic society (p. 10).

Modern-day definitions of objectivity are not absolute because of the complexity of the issue at hand. The truth of the matter is that pure objectivity, as traditionally defined, is impossible as applied to journalism (Becker, 1975; Black & Steele, 1991; Cockburn, 1997; Cunningham; Davis, 1990; Davis, 2003; Dunleavy, 2004; Hagaman, 1990; Hodges, 1991; Newton, 2001; McDonald, 1978; Shenk, 1997; Smith 2003). Today, journalism has recognized that objectivity cannot be defined by an unobtainable standard. Instead, objectivity also refers to the avoidance of outside influences and bias (Davis, 2003, Online). As a result, many journalists have become more concerned with the importance of avoiding partisanship in their reporting in an effort to maintain the public’s trust. Smith (2003) explains that, “American journalists are backing away from the word ‘objectivity,’ preferring to substitute words such as ‘fair’ or ‘balanced’” (pp. 80-81). According to Schwartz (1992), the examination of “news production as a social activity has helped to place objectivity within an appropriate cultural frame, allowing us to see it as a professional value and set of communicative strategies employed by journalists” (Online).

Objectivity in Visual Journalism

Just as reporters cannot escape their own values and perceptions of what constitutes truth, photojournalists are affected by the same factors when taking a picture. However, the facticity of visual reporting is subsumed by the subjectivity of the process (Dunleavy, 2004). Therefore the possibility of objectivity diminishes with every choice made by the photojournalist, i.e. what angle to shoot from, what lens to use, what to include or exclude in the frame and so on. Each of these choices is subjective (Newton, 2001; Shenk, 1007). Schwartz (1992) pointed out this existing paradox in the professional practice of photojournalism: "News photographs are valued as neutral records at the same time that they are admired as carefully crafted pictures (Online)."

How the norm of objectivity contributes to photojournalistic standards and conduct has been addressed by such researchers as Tuchman (1978), Gans (1979), Epstein (1973), and Fishman (1980). From a photojournalistic perspective research includes work by Worth and Gross (1974), Hoy (1986), Kobre (1980), Schwartz (1992), Lester (1999), Newton (2001) and others. For Schudson (2001), objectivity is the chief occupational value in journalism, and by extension, visual journalism. Based on a set of moral ideals established through observable patterns in reporting and editing the news, "objectivity", albeit ambiguously defined, remains a catch-phrase for the industry (p. 149). Schudson (2001) explains that "according to the objectivity norm, the journalist's job consists of reporting something called 'news' without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way" (p. 150). However, for visual journalists

this operational norm has been problematic. For many photojournalists, the ethical codes articulated in the bylaws of the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) serve as guidelines for professional conduct. According to the code, “it is the individual responsibility of every photojournalist at all times to strive for pictures that report truthfully, honestly and objectively” (Online).

In this study of how educators conceptualize the norm of objectivity in training professionals, journalistic behavior may be influenced by a series of economic, technological, legal, political, social, cultural, and intellectual factors (Schudson, 2001). Educators are beginning to recognize and teach how these influences contribute to a photojournalist’s subjectivity and how they affect visual truth.

Seeing is Believing

The subjective nature of framing an event through a lens makes understanding the norm of objectivity problematic. For Shenk (1997):

By its nature, a photograph is an incomplete and therefore slanted picture of reality – a stylized depiction that represents exactly what the photographer wants you to see, and no more. Each photograph is like a story . . . behind every story is a storyteller (Online).

Within this framework, a photograph records, among other things, the relationship of the photographer to the people in the picture (Becker, 1998, p. 111). According to John Berger (1972), “we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves” (p. 9). Because people see things and extrapolate meaning differently is the very reason that no two photojournalists will photograph a scene in the same way. Many modern-day visual journalists have

adopted these ideas, rejecting the possibility of traditional notions of objectivity in their work. Newton (2001) explains that “some assert that all truths are constructions, that perceptions can never be objective, that even photographs we have assumed to be truthful . . . can be called into question” (p. 85). According to Dunleavy (2003) the emergence of photojournalism:

Has come to signify a social and empathic visual encounter with ‘reality’ . . . That photojournalism could ever be conceived of as ‘objective’ is rather difficult to accept. The magic of photojournalism after all, is to allow the viewer to see beyond the picture-making process by entering into and connecting with humanity and the world as it is fixed within a collective memory of place and time. However, it is in the subjective and emotional experience of the photojournalist that reality is observed, recorded, edited, and conveyed to us (p. 242).

Although scholars have proven the impossibility of achieving the traditional definition of objectivity, photojournalism as a profession is coming to terms with its role as subjective storytelling. “We can shift the assumption that a photograph is true because it looks real to the assumption that what we know from an image is the product of perception” (Newton, 2003, p. 184).

Lester (1999) argues:

We have all fooled ourselves, our editors, our subjects and our readers into thinking that we are objective, truthful and ethical photojournalists. The truth is, there are pressures and time constraints put upon us that sometimes cause ethical problems (NPPA Special Report: The Ethics of Photojournalism, p. 1).

There is no clear answer to ethical concerns, but as Lester (1999) suggests, the solution may be for photographers to continually educate themselves, discuss and analyze the topic. According to Chapnick (1994):

Photojournalists should take pictures, not make pictures. Press photography, photojournalism, provides the eye of authority, a necessary role in our need to establish credibility of the flow of images that for more than 150 years has interpreted and documented our times. To preserve that authority, pictures must be unimpeachable and unquestionable. That means that the photographer cannot pose, re-create, tamper with, manipulate, manage, rearrange, direct, or in any way intrude on the reality of the event being photographed . . . journalism must always be right in fact (Truth Needs No Ally, p. 306).

Long (1999) further explains, "Journalists have only one thing to offer the public and that is credibility . . . without credibility we have nothing" (Online). Newton (2001) explains that:

Photojournalism is visual journalism. The guardian of the real. In that function, visual reportage acknowledges that reality is constructed, but applies well-considered methods to record and interpret real occurrences in people's lives in as authentic a manner as possible for others to see. In that role, those who practice visual reportage must consider the significance of ethics to their being and, in turn the significance of their being to how they work as journalists (pp. 184-185).

It is possible that visual journalists can embrace subjectivity and fulfill traditional journalistic ideals (Newton, 2001; Chapnick, 1994). Chapnick (1994) explains that, "subjectivity in journalism carries with it an obligation to be fair, to present the other side even if it is personally antithetical to your thinking" (p. 338).

In summary, ethics in journalism has changed dramatically over time. Within this context, objectivity has remained the dominant professional norm of the news media for more than a century (McGill, 2004, Our Code is Falling to Pieces). While journalists once considered themselves objective pursuers of truth, today's journalists are recognizing that objectivity is an unachievable

standard. Word and visual journalists continue to learn how to fulfill traditional journalistic ideals within the confines of their own subjectivity.

CHAPTER 3

THEORY

Throughout the centuries philosophers have been intrigued with human behavior. As a result, many have attempted to clarify a theoretical system of ethics. The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of ethical theory, and to provide a framework for this study. Ethical theory, according to Bowie (2003), "examines the different philosophies, systems, ideas or principles used to make judgments about right/wrong/good/bad things or what we mean by those words" (Online). For Louis Pojman (1995), ethics attempts to answer questions such as:

What is it to be a moral person? What is the nature of morality? Why do we need morality? What function does it play? What is the Good, and how shall I know it? Are moral principles absolute, or are they simply relative to social groups or individual decisions? Is morality, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder? Is it always in my interest to be moral? Or is it sometimes in my best interest to act immorally (p. 2)?

The focus of this overview will be on normative ethics, which involves:

. . . how people ought to act on the principles, how they make moral choices, and how rules apply to individual lives. It includes a consideration of the importance of human freedoms on, and a discussion of the limits of a human responsibility for moral decisions and for the consequences of actions . . . Consideration for the role of conscience in moral decision making . . . This may come from an established group of culture, such as the Christian tradition, or it may be based on some other way of thinking. This is the traditional way of doing ethics (RS-Web, Online).

For Elliott (1996), “all theories of justification address the same problems of the causing of human suffering” (Images that Injure, p. 4). For clarification, several ethical theories are offered in chronological order of development.

Thomas Hobbes and The Social Contract

During the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes' ideas were met with criticism and considered controversial by religious scholars (Pojman, 1995; Smith, 2003). Garrath Williams (2003) explains that Hobbes, an English scholar was influenced by his contempt for scholastic philosophy and religious authority of the time (online). As a result, according to Smith (2003), “both the Catholic Church and Oxford University wanted to burn his books” (p. 44). Williams (2003) further explains that Hobbes also had a “deep admiration for the emerging scientific method, alongside an admiration for a much older discipline, geometry” (Online).

The basis of Hobbes' moral philosophy is what he called “social contracts.” According to Smith (2003), Hobbes believed that prehistoric mankind, “sought peace, prosperity and the avoidance of death” by forming “alliances” (p. 45). For Smith, people entered into social contracts for the reason of self-interest and that “people were motivated entirely by self-interest” (p. 45). Pojman (1995) explains, “reason advises us not to depend on anyone except ourselves, for others will let us down if it is in their interests to do so,” therefore everyone is on guard, protecting their own vital interests (p. 61). Pojman further explains that Hobbes' reasoning tells us, “it would be better for all of us, individually and

collectively, if we adopted certain minimal rules that would override immediate self-interest” (p. 61). Smith contends, Hobbes believed that all people wanted to live their lives “in a peaceful, prosperous, orderly society” (p. 45). Smith (2003) continues:

The framework of that society depends on people living up to their social contracts. If they break their promises, they risk damaging the peace of their society. Therefore . . . reasonable people recognize it is in their own interest to keep the promises, in most instances (p. 45).

The role of the government was to enforce laws to ensure these social contracts and ultimately secure the peace and prosperity of its citizens (Smith, 2003, p. 46). Further, without a set of common moral laws and consequences for breaking these laws, Hobbes explains that, “society itself would be impossible” (Pojman, 1995, Ethics: discovering right and wrong, p. 221).

John Locke expanded on this idea. According to Smith (2003), Locke explored the idea, of social contracts working in two ways: “Government existed to ensure peace and prosperity and had power over people. But if that government was not achieving that goal, citizens would replace it” (p. 46). Both Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine acknowledged that they were influenced by the writings of Locke and both Locke, and Hobbes’ words are echoed in the American Declaration of Independence (p. 46). Following a long tradition of thinking in terms of the social contract, other theorists followed suit.

John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism

While ethical theory as a whole attempts to answer a variety of practical questions, the basic premise of utilitarianism is to answer the question, “What ought a man to do” (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online)? Utilitarianism is a tradition originating from the late 18th and 19th century philosophers and economists Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. The basic concept of utilitarianism is that “an action is right if it tends to promote happiness and wrong if it tends to produce the reverse of happiness.” This includes not only the happiness of the performer of the action, “but also that of everyone affected by it” (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online). Smith (2003) explains that the utilitarian view suggests, “the purpose of ethics is to guide people in doing things that will make the world a better place. . . . Everyone should try to act in a way that will produce ‘the greatest good for the greatest number’” (p. 47). In this view, “the consequences of our actions - not our motives or intentions - are what matters most” (p. 47). Although utilitarianism theory branches into several subsets, the focus of this overview is on the classical definition as defined by John Stuart Mill.

According to Timmons (2002), utilitarianism makes specific claims about three things: “how actions are related to their consequences in determining their rightness”, “which kinds of valuable consequences count morally,” and “ the scope of concern regarding such consequences of actions” (p. 104). First and foremost, Timmons (2002) explains that, “utilitarianism is characteristically understood to involve a maximizing conception of right action” (p. 104). Mill (1951) states that utilitarianism is based on a foundation of morals known as

“Utility, or the greatest Happiness Principle,” that “holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness” (p. 8). Pojman (1995) explains, “The utility principle states that the only thing that is good in itself is some specific type of state” such as pleasure, happiness or welfare (p. 111). From the hedonistic view shared by Bentham and Mill, pleasure is considered “the sole good and pain as the only evil” (Pojman, 1995, p. 111).

Mill believed that human actions are motivated entirely by this principle, concluding that “since happiness is the sole end of human action, the promotion of happiness is the test by which to judge all human conduct” (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online). Mill (1951) explains:

. . . pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain (p. 8).

According to Timmons (2002) the value of happiness is identical with pleasure and pleasure can be defined as bodily pleasure, and every sort of intellectual and aesthetic pleasure (p. 107). Further, Timmons explains that utilitarianism is only interested in those consequences that “have to do with the welfare of individuals” (p. 104). Timmons asserts:

The actions we perform can, and often do, have effects on the welfare or well being of others, and ourselves and it is the goodness or badness of the consequences of our actions in relation to the welfare of individuals that determines the rightness or wrongness of an action (p. 104).

Ultimately, Timmons (2002) concludes that the utilitarian theory is both universalist and impartialist with regard to the issue of whose welfare counts in determining the rightness of actions. The universalist perspective includes the values of the consequences of actions on all individuals who might be affected as morally relevant, and the impartialist element rules out any special exceptions. Timmons explains, “every individual whose welfare will be affected in some way by one’s action is to count equally” (p. 104).

In summary, in Bentham and Mill’s utilitarianism theory, “An action is determined entirely by how much value the action would produce, where value has to do with welfare, and where we are to give equal consideration to all individuals who will be affected by the action in question” (Timmons, 2002, p. 105). In this view, moral decisions are determined by making quantitative measurements and impartially applying the principle of maximizing pleasure and minimizing suffering (Pojman, 1995).

Immanuel Kant and The Categorical Imperative

Unlike utilitarianism, Immanuel Kant, a German who lived at the same time as Mill, believed that the intentions of one’s actions were more important than their consequences. Smith (2003) explains that:

If a person acts out of goodwill, Kant would consider the actions ethical, regardless of the consequences. . . . He believed the real test of a person’s morality is whether they do the right thing even if it is against their own self-interest. Because of this emphasis, Kant’s approach is often called duty-based ethics (pp. 49 - 50).

In this sense, actions need to be made objectively, without reference to other ends (Pojman, 1995, p. 269)

Kant developed a method to judge whether actions are ethical or not by applying what he called the Categorical Imperative. Kant (1797) explains, "According to these categorical imperatives, certain actions are allowed or not allowed, that is, are morally possible or impossible" (p. 22). In his Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals, Kant's Categorical Imperative is formulated in three different ways: The first, known as the Universal Law formulation states, "act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Online). Secondly, the Humanity or End in Itself formulation states, "act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end" (Online).

Lastly, the Kingdom of Ends formulation combines the previous two, stating, "all maxims as proceeding from our own [hypothetical] making of law ought to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends" (Online). For Smith (2003), "Kant meant that we should make ethical decisions as if we were creating laws or rules that everyone should follow" (p. 50).

John Rawls' Veil of Ignorance

John Rawls introduced the concept of the ethics of the "veil of ignorance" in a work titled, A Theory of Justice. In the twentieth century, Rawls believed that "people were constantly creating social contracts with everyone they encounter"

and that “we should try to make each of these contracts ethically right” (Smith, 2003, p. 46).

In order to determine what is considered ethically right, Rawls offered a test. Smith (2003) explains:

Before entering into a social contract, people should consider the agreement as if they didn't know which role they would play. Rawls referred to this as being under a 'veil of ignorance' Rawl's idea is that people should consider the effects of their behavior from the point of view of everyone involved (p. 46).

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget and the American philosophers John Dewey and James Mark Baldwin Lawrence inspired Kohlberg's theory of moral development. For Barger (2000), these three philosophers “emphasized that human beings develop philosophically and psychologically in a progressive fashion” (Online). As indicated by Duska et al. (1975), research by both Piaget and Kohlberg “concentrates on people's patterns of reasoning about moral decisions rather than on people's behavior” (p. 3). According to Murray (1997), modifying and elaborating on Piaget's work concerning the moral development of children, Kohlberg determined “that the process of attaining moral maturity took longer and was more gradual than Piaget had proposed” (Online). Murray (1997) continues:

On the basis of his research, Kohlberg identified six stages of moral reasoning grouped into three major levels. Each level represents a fundamental shift in the social-moral perspective of the individual (Online).

Duska et al. (1975) explains that Kohlberg's research, "showed that when one looks at the reasons a person gives for his moral judgments or moral actions, significant differences in moral outlook become apparent"

(p. 43). For example, an individual might indicate that cheating is wrong because one can get caught, while another person might indicate that cheating undermines the trust necessary to preserve society. Duska et al. (1975) clarifies, "A significant difference in the maturity of the reasoning process and in the reasons given are obvious" (p. 43).

Kohlberg believed that individuals could only progress through the stages of moral reasoning one stage at a time and they could not skip any stage. As indicated by Barger (2000) this classification can be outlined in the following matter:

<u>Level</u>	<u>Stage</u>	<u>Social Orientation</u>
Pre-conventional	1	Obedience and Punishment
	2	Individualism, Instrumentalism and Exchange
Conventional	3	"Good boy/girl"
	4	Law and Order
Post-Conventional	5	Social Contract
	6	Principled Conscience

Barger (2000) explains that the first level of moral thinking is generally found at the elementary school level. Barger (2000) contends:

In the first stage of this level, people behave according to socially acceptable norms because they are told to do so by some authority figure (e.g., parent or teacher). This obedience is compelled by the threat or application of punishment (Online).

The second stage of this level of moral thinking, "is characterized by a view that right behavior means acting in one's own best interests" (Online). Murray (1997) notes that, "there is the early emergence of moral reciprocity," at this time (Online).

At the conventional level individuals "have a basic understanding of conventional morality, and reason with an understanding of norms and conventions to uphold society" (Murray, 1997, Online). Barger explains that, "the first stage in this level (stage 3) is characterized by an attitude which seeks to do what will gain the approvals of others," and, "the second stage (stage 4) is one oriented to abiding by the law and responding to the obligations of duty" (Online).

Kohlberg felt that most adults never reached the third level of moral thinking (Barger, 2000; Murray, 1997). The first stage (stage 5), "constitutes an understanding of social mutuality and a genuine interest in the welfare of others" (Barger, 2000, Online). Lastly, Stage 6, according to Barger, "is based on respect for universal principle and the demands of individual conscience" (Online).

Hersh et al. (1979) explains principled conscience as, "the belief as a rational person in the validity of universal moral principles and as sense of

personal commitment to them” (p. 61). According to Hersh et al., the social contract in this sense can be defined as:

A sense of obligation to law because of one's social contract to make and abide by laws for the welfare of all and for the protection of all people's rights. A feeling of contractual commitment, freely entered upon Concern that laws and duties be based on rational calculation of overall utility, 'the greatest good for the greatest number' (p. 60).

Kohlberg (1963) explains that conventional examples of moral principles include this utilitarian principle, known as the Golden Rule, and Kant's categorical imperative. For Kohlberg:

A moral principle is an obligatory or ideal rule of choice between legitimate alternatives, rather than a concrete prescription of action Moral principles, of course, are not legally or socially prescribed or sanctioned, they are social ideals rather than social realities (p. 28).

Duska (1975) further explains that moral principles are more abstract than concrete rules:

Principles are overarching formulas which are meant to be applied. There are memorable ones: Christ's law of love, Augustine's "Love and do what you will," etc. They don't tell one specifically how to act in this or that case (p. 79).

This individual conscience denotes an "understanding that elements of morality such as regard for life and human welfare" that, "transcend particular cultures and societies and are to be upheld irrespective of other conventions or normative obligations" (Murray, 1997, Online).

A recent study by Coleman and Wilkins uses Kohlberg's theory as its foundation, found journalists to be highly developed in terms of moral values.

For Kohlberg, education is directly related to moral development. Focusing on the conceptualization of objectivity, this study explores the ethics and values of visual communication educators, using Kohlberg's theory as the foundation.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

The qualitative method for this study evaluates educators' opinions concerning objectivity in relation to Kohlberg's stages of moral development. Using a purposive sample of respected visual communication educators from around the country, an e-mail questionnaire was used as a way of evaluating perceptions and attitudes toward teaching the journalistic norm of objectivity. Thirty-five potential subjects were identified as possible informants from a membership list of the Visual Communication group. These non-affiliated, influential visual educators meet yearly to discuss ongoing research and ideas.

Educators were initially sent an e-mail query asking for assistance with the study and follow-up e-mails were sent.

The following questions were included in the e-mail questionnaire:

1. How do you define objectivity?
2. Is it important to teach objectivity in visual journalism? Why or why not?
3. How do you teach objectivity in the classroom and what are the major issues that you are dealing with when teaching objectivity to your students?
4. How has digital technology affected your understanding of objectivity?
5. How do you differentiate between teaching the journalistic norm of objectivity in digital photography when compared to traditional film-based techniques?
6. How has the definition of objectivity as applied to photojournalism changed over time?
7. How do changing technological and normative trends affect photojournalism and documentary photography differently?
8. Do you believe there is a difference between objectivity in word journalism and in visual journalism? If so, what is it? And, how do you deal with it when you teach?

9. How do captions contribute to the public's perception of objectivity in visual journalism?

Limitations of the Study

This study is confined to investigating visual journalism in higher education that is generally considered applied, professional or vocational in nature. The standards for determining which programs meet this description include whether they offer a degree in visual journalism rather than art photography, whether they offer internships, and whether their stated approach to and philosophy about visual journalism education is professional in nature. The educators in this study have been selected because their visual communication programs are linked by the ultimate goal of preparing students for working in the field of visual journalism. Photography education lacking this approach has different motivations, reasons and standards for developing curriculum. Implementing modern-day ethics as well as digital technology into visual journalism programs for the purpose of preparing students for the workplace is a core motivation for this study. Therefore, only educators from programs that include these two areas in their curriculum were considered in this study.

Only full-time faculty members with programs that meet the requirements from the aforementioned descriptions are included in this study. Full-time professors are instrumental in curriculum development within their institutions, therefore their involvement in the study is more applicable. At the same time, part-time faculty members teaching photojournalism courses are generally working professionals and may have a different perspective on teaching ethics than full-time academics.

Because of the purposive sampling of educators, findings should be considered suggestive rather than definitive. The purpose of this study is descriptive and explanatory, focusing on gathering data from an unstudied population and understanding relationships between ethical norms and moral development. It is not the intention of this study to generalize to the overall population of visual communication educators. Rather, this study explores epistemological relationships and is comparative in nature. This method is appropriate as an exploratory study to provide insight for future studies.

In summary, a purposive sample of visual communication educators, drawn from a membership list of the Visual Communication group was used to contact potential research participants. Informants answered a questionnaire and their responses were compared to Kohlberg's theory. This is considered a pilot study, exploring relationships between ethical norms and moral development.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Out of thirty-five potential subjects initially contacted through email, ultimately six educators participated in the study. This chapter is organized according to the nine questions informants answered in the e-mail questionnaire. Please refer to Chapter Six for a more detailed comparative analysis of these findings.

Q1: How do you define objectivity?

Although respondents' answers to this question varied, most agreed that the traditional definition of objectivity is impossible to achieve. Two professors shared the view that objectivity requires a journalist's neutrality. One professor answered, "Favoring no particular viewpoint in any form of discourse." Other answers went into more explanation of objectivity as an unachievable ideal. One professor explained:

Journalists try to provide the facts, the unbiased news. Journalists try to put a mirror up to society to show them what is going on in the community, but it is impossible to do this without bringing ourselves into the equation.

This professor concludes that a journalists' subjectivity is impossible to escape.

Other respondents defined the term using different journalistic values.

Professor B explained that objectivity is, "upholding the traditional journalism values such as accurate, fair, balanced, unbiased, truthful, and so on." Likewise, another professor defined objective journalism as "being free of influence to gather news accurately and truthfully." Professor C also used similar language in her answer:

For a visual journalist objectivity is defined by the compromise between the audience and the sender of the message. As a journalist, I am aware that my biases and preferences exist and I try to the best of my abilities to be fair and responsible bringing the most accurate visual picture of the events witnessed.

For some educators, journalistic values such as truthful, accurate, responsible, fair and balanced reporting are replacing the traditional norm of objectivity.

Q2: Is it important to teach objectivity in visual journalism? Why or why not?

Similarly to the previous question, several respondents refer to teaching other values in place of objectivity. Professor A wrote, "Objectivity is impossible to achieve. It's far healthier to focus on accuracy, balance and fairness." Instead of teaching objectivity, Professor D, explained, "It is important to teach honesty in journalism, to teach students to be true to themselves and their communities." His answer indicated that good journalism requires accuracy and responsibility, rather than objectivity.

Answers indicated that educators are no longer teaching objectivity to visual communication students. Rather, educators are teaching students to be aware of their own subjectivity and to be responsible in their reporting. As one professor explained, "I teach responsibility instead of objectivity." Professor A contended that because we all make subjective decisions, "objectivity is impossible," and, "we need to get over that." Another professor contended that objectivity is an important ideal to teach, but difficult because of an individual's subjectivity. Several respondents specifically mentioned the importance of teaching responsibility and ethics in journalism, rather than objectivity.

Q3: How do you teach objectivity in the classroom and what are the major issues that you are dealing with when teaching objectivity to your students?

Because respondents chose not to specifically teach objectivity in the classroom, the answers to this question are redundant. Most professors explained the importance of students' recognition of their own subjective stance. One professor explained:

I don't [teach objectivity in the classroom]. I teach them to realize that they are making subjective decisions, then focus on what is most fair and accurate in the telling of the story, utilizing the photojournalist's viewpoint rather than trying to set them up for failure by pushing for an unachievable objectivity.

Other informants explained the importance of using actual examples to illustrate professionals' commitment to values such as "fairness, "accuracy," "balance," "truth," and, "bias." Professor B explained that he shows "a lot of work by others that exhibit balanced reporting, and makes "sure students try to get as many sides of an issue represented." Similarly, Professor C said she tells her students:

. . . of personal stories when I was a shooter and I didn't like a particular political candidate or party and I had to cover their speech or their winning celebration after the elections. As a person I was sad, but as a professional I had to do my job.

Informants expressed the importance of teaching students to provide fair and balanced coverage of a story, even when personal views conflict. This infers that educators believe that visual journalists' commitment to public exceeds self-interest. For example, Professor C compared "our profession with other service professions like doctors and vets and nurses who have to help you even if they do not like you."

Another professor contended that personal ethics takes precedence over journalistic norms such as objectivity. Rather than remaining detached, Professor D explained the importance of treating all "kinds of people" with respect. He implies that keeping an open mind, and adhering to a personal code

of ethics will lead to good journalism. Professor D contended, “I teach my students to only do things that they can be proud of. . . . The bottom line is not to do anything you wouldn’t admit to.” Likewise, another professor explained, “I try to teach to a high moral standard of maintaining integrity.” One professor said he encourages his students to ask themselves, “Does the photo you shoot for a publication reflect accurately what happened?” If the answer is yes and a person who attended the same event could agree, then the journalists reached their goal. In general, informants’ answers implied that ethics are regularly addressed in the classroom, excluding the traditional norm of objectivity as a current standard.

Q4: How has digital technology affected your understanding of objectivity?

Answers regarding the affects of digital technology on informants’ understanding of objectivity varied. Terms such as truthful, fair and accurate reporting are used in place of objectivity. Respondents’ answers indicated that digital technology has challenged visual truth. For Professor A, the ease of digital technology is problematic because digital cameras and computer programs make alterations virtually impossible to detect. Another professor explained, “I am amazed at having to constantly re-educate students about what not to do . . . with digital alterations.” Two professors mentioned the fact that the more people have access to the tools that can lead to unethical manipulations makes their job more complicated. Professor A contended that with digital

technology “it’s so much easier to doctor an image, so we have to be doubly aware of the difference between truth and falsehood.”

One professor suggested that digital technology has the capacity to change photojournalism in its entirety. Professor C contended:

Now I have to discuss examples of photographers making their own photographs out of other photos taken in a series and explain why that is unethical and unprofessional. The technology has allowed photographers to bridge openly and directly their responsibility to bring what they saw and not their point of view or interpretation. In a way photojournalism is changing into a more artistic medium, one where the possibilities of interpretations are greater.

Going beyond the recognition of human subjectivity, Professor C implied that digital technology allows for photojournalists to improve upon reality through digital manipulation. As a result, visual truth would be replaced by idealized reality.

In contrast, Professor D argued that digital technology helps to define current ethical standards. Even though technology allows manipulations to be made with ease and with little detection, it does not make it ethical. He implied the question: If it were unethical before digital technology, why would it be ethical today? He explained:

There are certain lines you do not cross. Digital technology has not changed whether or not we act as [moral] individuals. We are still in command of what we think and what we photograph.

For Professor D, digital technology has reaffirmed his ethical stance.

Another professor contended that the digital camera affects interpersonal relationships. According to Professor E, this technology has specifically changed

“interpersonal relationships between the seer and the seen.” For example, the digital camera allows photojournalists to immediately share images with their subjects. By allowing subjects to preview images, digital cameras have introduced, “the possibility of influence” to affect the process.

Q5: How do you differentiate between teaching the journalistic norm of objectivity in digital photography when compared to traditional film based techniques?

Nearly all respondents agree that there is no difference between teaching the journalistic norm of objectivity in digital photography when compared to traditional film-based techniques. One professor insisted that, “truth has to always be your guideline.” Although the tools are different, ethical concerns such as photo manipulations still exist today.

One professor explained that the only difference that he addresses with students is the importance of preserving original work. He explained that “working with digital media, they are working with originals . . . there are no negatives, so an ethical attitude is vital in making sure the original does not get altered.”

Q6: How has the definition of objectivity as applied to photojournalism changed over time?

Respondents’ answers regarding the definition of objectivity over time varied greatly. While one professor insisted that this definition has not changed, everyone else claims otherwise. The explanations of how this definition has changed vary from person to person.

In her experience, for one professor explained that students confuse photography's role in various media functions. For example, the use of photography in an advertisement has a different purpose than photos published with a news story on the front page of the daily newspaper. One use of photography is assumed to be 'objective' while the other is never expected to be. Professor C posed the question, how do "we allow some of the technical aspects of those fields to dictate our behavior as photojournalists?"

Two professors remarked that this confusion carries over into the public. One professor explained:

I think the public is far more suspicious of photojournalistic practices and in this way more on guard for instances when lines are crossed. Objectivity used to be equated with impartiality and neutrality. I don't think people see it that way anymore.

Although by definition, photojournalism and other photography styles differ, the public does not distinguish between them. For Professor F, "Readership in general today are skeptical of what they see. Since they know what crazy things can be done, they sometimes assume a great photo might be a digital manipulation." As digital technology makes the public aware of the ease of manipulations, assumptions are made that the field of photojournalism does the same. As a result, the public's assumption of objectivity diminishes.

Professor B explained that objectivity has changed when applied to documentary photography. He explained that a current debate exists concerning the nature of documentary photography: Is it, "ok to have a point of view when

shooting” a documentary project? In the past, documentary photography claimed to have a more objective stance than it does today.

Q7: How do changing technological and normative trends affect photojournalism and documentary photography differently?

Informants’ answers regarding the difference in effects of digital technology on photojournalism and documentary photography also varied. The biggest difference was in the distinction between the two styles of photography. While one professor claimed to “see documentary photography and photojournalism as one,” because both aim to “document life as accurately as possible,” others see a clear distinction. Three professors explained that the difference lies in the amount of the photographer’s subjectivity. Professor B explained that, “Photojournalism should still be the place for balanced, unbiased stories, whereas documentary can be more free-wheeling.” Professor D further explained:

In its essence, documentary photography must be one-sided. A successful documentary photography [project] involves taking a stand on an issue and proving your point. Photojournalism is not supposed to be one-sided. It is purposefully sticking to the facts so that the community can interpret what is going on and react if necessary.

In regard to the effects of digital technology on each form, answers varied. For one professor, the effects are the same: digital technology allows more work to be shown to a wider audience. Various media such as the Internet allow more images to be shown, which would otherwise go unpublished. Conversely,

Professor E argued that most people will not see a difference with the new technology.

Q8: Do you believe there is a difference between objectivity in word journalism and in visual journalism? If so, what is it? And, how do you deal with it when you teach?

Half of the informants maintained that objectivity is the same in both print and visual journalism. Professor C explained, “ I see both fields the same way, except one describes a scene with words and the other with a camera angle.” For one of these professors, the difference lies in the public’s perception. He explained:

Photojournalism is always judged harder than print journalism because a picture seems to be self-sufficient. For example, a story is rewritten and nobody looks at the first or second draft, but a photojournalist’s work is seen as complete, from frame to frame and such it is judged.

Professor E, who sees no difference regarding objectivity in word or visual journalism, wrote:

People are used to the idea that a picture is worth a thousand words and that the camera never lies. They trust the image as fact, not fiction. At the same time, the public looks at writing as more interpretative and semantic.

Both professors implied that students must be aware of this difference.

Professor D, who claims that it is easier to be objective with the camera than with the pen, explained, “The photographer cannot create something that is not there to begin with,” whereas writers can make deceptions with ease. In the classroom, Professor D teaches “students to shoot everything in any given

scene, not to selectively shoot only frames of what they want to say.” Professor A disagrees with this view, explaining that just like a reporter, a photojournalist cannot avoid his or her own subjectivity. He maintained, “In words, you subjectively choose words and story organization; in visual journalism, you subjectively choose your perspective and content.” Another professor insisted that no difference exists simply because “objectivity is a myth.”

Q9: How do captions contribute to the public’s perception of objectivity in visual journalism?

All respondents agreed that captions have the ability to help the reader understand the accompanying image. Professor D explained that, “captions add credibility to the visual report because they anchor the context in which an image was made with words.” For Professor A, “captions give perspective, background and information. Images are visceral and emotional. Captions are informative.” One professor explained that the purpose of captions is to explain what is happening in a photograph. Their existence lies in helping the reader to objectively understand, rather than place judgment. Two respondents argued that even though the purpose of captions are to help inform, bias can exist.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Examination of the e-mail questionnaire answers suggests that the journalistic norm of objectivity as defined by visual communication educators continues to change, and the term may in fact be obsolete. Further comparison to Kohlberg's stages of moral development support the findings of a recent study by Coleman and Wilkins (2004) showing journalists to be highly developed in terms of moral values. The results of this paper have been compared to Kohlberg's theory and discussed accordingly.

The informants in this study indicate that the age-old journalistic norm of objectivity no longer holds a significant role in visual journalism education. While objectivity has remained ambiguous since the beginnings of journalism itself, it seems that visual communication educators no longer deem it a necessary ingredient to good journalism. In fact, educators teach their students that objectivity is an unobtainable ideal. Rather, students and professionals alike should recognize their subjective stance and work responsibly.

This study also indicates that educators are teaching other journalistic values in place of objectivity. A common response to any given question regarding the teaching of objectivity indicated that educators do not teach objectivity and instead teach values such as "accuracy," "responsibility,"

“honesty,” “truth,” and “fairness.” In fact, every informant used these terms throughout his or her answers to the questionnaire. This suggests that educators are teaching students that photojournalists can work ethically within the confines of subjectivity to achieve visual truth. This is important because Kohlberg associates education with highly developed moral values.

Since the digital camera was introduced to the field of photojournalism, educators’ understanding and teaching of ethical standards and occupational norms have been challenged. Despite the impact of digital technology on the field of photojournalism, it appears that objectivity is considered by educators to be an archaic concept. Despite this finding, educators indicate that the ease and accessibility to digital technology continue to challenge the journalistic values that have replaced objectivity. Informants argued that although the technology is new, the ethical issues remain the same. For example, manipulations were once made in the darkroom and now they are made in the computer – both are unethical. As one informant explains, “truth has to always be your guideline.”

This study also found no difference in visual communication educators’ conceptualization of objectivity in documentary photography as compared to photojournalism. As explained previously, informants reject the ideal of objectivity, therefore there is no difference regarding the norm of objectivity in the two styles of photography. As a result, the original purpose of this study was not fulfilled but does not make this study irrelevant.

Although the original purpose of this study was to evaluate how educators conceptualize the photographic norm of “objectivity” in documentary photography in a digital age, informants’ answers point to other areas of research. The findings of this study focus on moral development as educators shift away from teaching the journalistic norm of objectivity, focusing on other journalistic values in its’ place. As a result, a considerable portion of the comparison and discussion of this study are focused on these topics.

This exploratory study expands on a growing body of research and provides a framework for understanding visual communication educators’ conceptualization of the journalistic norm of objectivity, as well as moral development. At this point, drawing conclusions or generalizations about educator’s conceptualization of the journalistic norm of objectivity is problematic. The researcher acknowledges that this qualitative investigation marks only an entry point into an area that needs further study. The purpose of this study, then, is to raise questions concerning objectivity and moral development in journalism education. Further study of the relationship between moral development in journalism education and the journalism profession needs to be explored.

When compared to Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, informants’ answers support an earlier study’s findings that journalists are strong ethical thinkers. Values such as “accuracy,” “responsibility,” “honesty,” “truth,” and “fairness” are repeatedly emphasized by informants, indicating a sense of social

responsibility. Also, informants place great importance on teaching extreme sensitivity, concern and respect for others.

A comparison can be made to Kohlberg's highest stage of moral development. In this stage, an individuals' sense of commitment is to universal moral principles. For example, educators teach that an obligation to be fair exceeds personal allegiances. Educators are teaching the pursuit of visual truth through universal moral principles where "accuracy," "responsibility," "honesty," "truth," and "fairness" are of utmost importance.

In summary, visual communication educators are directly affecting the field of photojournalism. By teaching students to think morally, educators' ensure optimal moral development for their students. This commitment to the teaching of highest levels of moral reasoning only ensures future photojournalists' ability to make ethical decisions.

Educators seem to be redefining visual journalism education. Instead of teaching outdated norms such as objectivity, educators are teaching students that it is possible for visual journalists to embrace subjectivity and fulfill traditional journalistic ideals. As technology continues to change and challenge ethical and normative trends, educators also adjust. The journalistic norm of objectivity appears to exist only as a "buzz word" and no longer exists in photojournalism education as it once did. Objectivity in photojournalism education is currently referred to only in terms of an unachievable ideal rather than the principle ideal. Even though digital technology has certainly affected the field of photojournalism

and photojournalism education, it is possible that it has in fact made ethical issues clearer than they ever were before.

WORKS CITED

- Barbatsis, G., Kenney, K., Moriarty, S. & Smith, K. (Eds.). (2005). *Handbook of visual communication: Theory, methods and media*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Barger, R. N. (2000). A summary of Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development. Retrieved February 2, 2005, from <http://www.nd.edu/~barger/kohlberg.html>
- Becker, H. S. (1998). Visual sociology, documentary photography, and photojournalism: It's (almost) all a matter of context in visual sociology. Retrieved October 15, 2004, from <http://home.earthlink.net/~hsbecker/visual.html>
- Belsey, A. & Chadwick, R. (Eds.). (1992). *Ethical issues in journalism and the media*. New York: Green Publishing.
- Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of seeing*. London, England: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.
- Black, J. & Steele, B. (1991). *Red light ethics vs. green light ethics in NPPA photojournalism ethics protocol*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the National Press Photographer's Association, Washington D.C.
- Bok, S., & Callahan, D. (Eds.). (1980). *Ethics teaching in higher education*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Bowie, R. A. (n.d.). Ethical theories. Religious studies on the web. Retrieved Jan 23, 2005, from <http://www.rsweb.org.uk>
- Chapnick, H. (1994). *Truth needs no ally*. Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press.
- Christians, C. G. & Covert, C. L. (1980). The teaching of ethic three: *Teaching ethics in journalism education*. New York: The Institute of Society, Ethics and Life Sciences.
- Cockburn, A. (1997, September). The ethics of photojournalism: Everybody's trashing the paparazzi, but for even legendary photojournalists, moral ambiguity comes with the territory. *Media Circus*. Retrieved October 27, 2004, from <http://facweb.stvincent.edu/Academics/English/faculty/wissolik/faces2/sld003.htm>
- Cohen, E. D. & Elliott, D. (Eds.). (1997). *Journalism ethics: Contemporary ethical issues*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO.

- Coleman, A.D. (1998). *Depth of field: Essays on photography, mass media and lens culture*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Coleman, R. & Wilkins, L. (2004). The moral development of journalists: A comparison with other professions and a model for predicting high quality ethical reasoning. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 8/3, 511-522.
- Cookman, C. (2003). The evolving status of photojournalism education. *ERIC Digest*. Retrieved October 11, 2004, from <http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-1/status.htm>
- Cunningham, B. (2003, July/August). Rethinking objectivity. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 24-32.
- Dan, S. (1981). *Objectivity and the news. The public and the rise of commercial journalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Davis, J. (1990, Spring). News; Beyond the myth of objectivity. *Center for media literacy*, 50, Article 48. Retrieved October 11, 2004, from http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article48.html
- Dunleavy, D. (2003). Chapter 8. *Graphic Communication Today* (5th ed.). Conover, T., Clifton (p. 242-244) Park, NY: Delmar Learning.
- Dunleavy, D. (2004). In the age of the instant: The influence of the digital camera on the photojournalistic routines of productivity, empowerment and social interaction between subject and photographer. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon.
- Duska, R. & Whelan, M. (1975). *Moral development: A guide to Piaget and Kohlberg*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Editors of Time-Life books. (1972). *Documentary photography*. New York: Time-Life, Books.
- Elgar, K. (2004, September). Fuzzy rules on digital images. *The Australian*. Retrieved October 11, 2004, from <http://n.paulin.free.fr/>
- Elliott, D. (1991, July). *Deception and imagery in NPPA Photojournalism Ethics Protocol*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the National Press Photographer's Association, Washington D.C.

- Elliot, D. (2003, May). Does NPPA's code of ethics need updating? *News Photographer*, 16 & 19.
- Elliott, D. & Lester, P. M. (2003, March). Keeping the code alive. *News Photographer*, 8 & 11.
- Elliott, D. & Lester, P. M. (2003, October). Manipulation: Surrogate eyes can't lie. *News Photographer*, 12-13.
- Elliot, D. & Lester, P. M. (n.d.). Aesthetics vs. ethics: When will we ever learn? *News Photographer*, found <http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/lester/writings/alski.html>
- Gillmor, D. (2005, January 20). A conversation about the future of journalism "by the people, for the people" and occasional other thoughts. Posted to http://dangillmor.typepad.com/dan_gillmor_on_grassroots/2005/01/the_end_of_obje.html
- Gitlin, T. (2005). Objectively speaking. Retrieved on March 2, 2005, from <http://www.reclaimthemedias.org/stories.php?story=05/01/18/0380451>
- Hersh, R. H., Miller, J. P. & Fielding, G. D. (1980). *Models of moral education: An appraisal*. New York: Longman, Inc.
- Hersh, R. H., Paolitto, D. P. & Reimer, J. (1979). *Promoting moral growth*. New York: Longman, Inc.
- Hodges, L. (July, 1991). *The moral imperative for photojournalists in NPPA photojournalism ethics protocol*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the National Press Photographer's Association, Washington D.C.
- Hong Kong Journalists Association. (n.d.) Joint code of ethics of the four journalistic organizations. Retrieved October 31, 2004, from the Hong Kong Journalists Association website: <http://www.hkja.org.hk/ethics/code/joincode.htm>
- Irby, K. F. (2003, August). A photojournalistic confession. *Poynter Institute*. Retrieved on October 15, 2004, from <http://poynter.org/>
- Kant, I. (1965). *Metaphysics of morals*. (J. Ladd, Trans.). New York: The Bobbs-Merill Co., Inc. (Original work published 1797)
- Kobre, K. (2000). *Photojournalism: The professional's approach* (4th ed.) Boston: Focal Press.

- Kohlberg, L. (1963). The development of children's orientations toward a moral order. *Vita humana*, 6, 11-33.
- Kohlberg, L. (1987). *Child psychology and childhood education: A cognitive development view*. New York: Longman, Inc.
- Light, K. (2000). *Witness in our time: documentary photographers*. London: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Lester, P. M. (1995). *Visual communication: Images with messages*. Boston: Wadsworth Publishing Co.
- Lester, P. M. (Eds.). (1996). *Images that injure: Pictorial stereotypes in the media*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Long, J. (1999) Ethics in the age of digital photography. National Press Photographer's Association. Retrieved November 2, 2004, from <http://www.nppa.org>
- Lovell, R. P. (2002). *Pictures and Words*. New York: Delmar Learning.
- McDonald, D. (1978). Is objectivity possible? In E. E. Dennis, A. H. Ismach & D. M. Gillmor, *Enduring Issues in Mass Communication* (pp. 146-160).
- McGill, D. (2004). Our code is falling to pieces. Retrieved February 2, 2005, from New York University, Journalism department Web Site: http://www.journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2004/10/29/mcgill_essay.html.
- McQuail, D. (2000). *McQuail's mass communication theory* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Mill, J. S. (1951). *Utilitarianism, liberty and representative government*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc.
- National Press Photographers' Association (2004, July 10). NPPA board adopts new "modernized" code of ethics on the NPPA website. Retrieved on November 19, 2004, from <http://www.nppa.org>
- Neri, G. (n.d.). Ethics and Photography. *The Digital Journalist*, 101. Retrieved November 1, 2004, from <http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0101/neri.htm>
- Newton, J. H. (2001). *The Burden of Visual Truth: The Role of Photojournalism in Mediating Reality*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Pepper, S. C. (1960). *Ethics*. New York: Appelton-Century-Crofts, Inc.
- Pojman, P. Louis. (1995). *Ethics: discovering right and wrong*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Schramm, W., Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., (1956). *Four theories of the press*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Shaw, D. (2005). Ethical journalists? Hey it turns out we really are. Los Angeles Times (2005, February 13). Retrieved February 20, 2005, from <http://www.latimes.com/news/columnists/cl-ca-shaw13feb13,1,7539271,print.column?coll=la-news-columns>
- Shenk, D. (1997, October). *Every Picture Can Tell a Lie*. Wired News. Retrieved on November 6, 2004, from <http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,7815,00.html>
- Schudson, M. (1978). *Discovering the news*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Shenk, D. (1997, October 20). *Every picture can tell a lie*. Wired News. Retrieved August 13, 2003, from <http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,7815,00.html>
- Schudson, M. (2001). The objectivity norm in American journalism. *Journalism*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (149-170). California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Schwartz, D. (1992). To tell the truth: Codes of objectivity in photojournalism. *Communication*, 13, 95-109. Retrieved from http://sjmc.cla.umm.edu/faculty/schwartz/contents/To%20tell%20truth/body_to&tell%20the%20truth.html
- Smith, R.F. (2003). *Groping for ethics in journalism* (5th ed.). Ames, IA: Iowa State Press.
- Steele, B. (July, 1991). *Protocols for ethical decision-making in the digital age in NPPA photojournalism ethics protocol*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the National Press Photographer's Association, Washington D.C.
- Timmons, M. (2002). *Moral theory: An introduction*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

- Tuchman, G. (1972). Objectivity as strategic ritual: An examination of newsmen's notion of objectivity. *The American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 77 (660 – 679). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- West, H. R. (n.d.). Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. Retrieved on March 7, 2005, from <http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article?tocId=9381661&query=utilitarianism&ct=>
- Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2005, from http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categorical_imperative
- Worth, S. (1981). *Studying visual communication*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.