Summary and Keywords

Since the earliest years of the film industry, journalists and journalism have played a leading role in popular culture. Scholars debate whether journalism films—and by extension television programs, plays, cartoons, comics, commercials, and online and interactive stories and games—are a distinct genre, or whether journalists are featured in a variety of genres from dramas to comedies and satires to film noir. They also debate whether a film needs to feature a journalist doing journalism as a primary character or whether having a journalist as a secondary character still counts as a "journalism" film.

Regardless, research into depictions of journalists in popular culture is important because the depictions influence public opinion about real-world journalists, as well as the credibility and public trust of the journalism field. Indeed, the influence might be greater even than the actual work performed by real-world journalists. Popular culture cultivates legend and myth, and this cultivation is especially true for a field such as journalism because the majority of the public will never see the inside of an actual newsroom. Popular culture myths about journalism focus on its normative role. Journalistic heroes are the foreign correspondents and investigative reporters who stand for community and progress. Journalistic villains are the lovable rogues, remorseful sinners, and unrepentant scoundrels who break journalistic norms and roles.

A wide range of heroes and villains have been depicted on the big and small screen. For every Woodward and Bernstein working tirelessly to expose a corrupt presidential administration in *All the President's Men*, there is a Chuck Tatum hiding an injured man in order to keep an exclusive in *Ace in the Hole*. For every Murphy Brown, a prominent and award-winning investigative journalist and anchor, there is a Zoe Barnes in *House of Cards* who has sex with sources and knowingly publishes false information. Many of the most interesting depictions, however, feature a character who has aspects of heroism and villainy. For example, Megan Carter in *Absence in Malice* attempts to be a watchdog reporter but destroys lives with her mistakes. Viewers ultimately are left with the idea that Carter will become a better journalist because of the lessons she has learned during the course of the film.

Due to the potential impact of these depictions, entertainers must hold themselves to a higher standard to fulfill their discursive role within the broader republic. Entertainment programming needs a positive ethical code because it helps inform citizens by raising questions, offering incisive observations, and voicing marginalized perspectives. The code is in its nascent stages, but it is past time for media ethicists to develop a social responsibility theory for entertainment and amusement, the dominant role of almost all media.

Keywords: journalism studies, entertainment studies, film studies, television studies, popular culture, social responsibility theory, satirical news, media studies, myth

Social Responsibility Theory and Popular Culture

There is an ethical difference between news media and entertainment; however, public discourse about politics, news, religion, education, and commerce increasingly is mediated through entertainment programming (McBeth & Clemons, 2011; Postman, 1985). All forms of political communication, including political satire, ought to be subject to normative theory (Hill, 2013), because the "boundaries between news and entertainment programming are falling fast" (Christians, Rotzell, Fackler, McKee, & Woods, 2005, p. 240). With few exceptions, media ethicists generally have ignored most entertainment programming, even though it constitutes the majority of all programming and often directly influences both the culture at large and news media more specifically.

People create political understanding through the use of diverse political content (Young & Tisinger, 2006). This content gathering is obscured by unnecessary and untenable distinctions between news and entertainment (Valdivia, 2008; Young & Tisinger, 2006). Indeed, the genres of art and entertainment serve educational purposes for society and often are all but impossible to separate from the genres of news and information (Berkowitz & Gutsche, 2012; Storey, 2003; Williams & Delli Carpini, 2000). Furthermore, the simplistic distinction of classifying programming as either news or entertainment obscures vast differences among shows within the classifications (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2008). For example, there is a wide gap between *The Today Show* and the *NBC Nightly News*, although both are "news" programs on the same network. Similarly, *The Daily Show* and *Drunk History* really are not comparable programs, even though both are part of the Comedy Central lineup.

Entertainers still have virtually no broad legal standards holding them accountable (with the notable exceptions of standards about offensive language, indecency, and obscenity); however, there are ethical standards that society expects them to follow (Peifer, 2012). For example, there is an academic tradition of criticizing dramatists for their unfavorable portrayals of journalists (Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, 2015, 2017), physicians (Chory-Assad & Tamborini, 2003), civil servants (Pautz, 2014; Pautz & Roselle, 2010), and ethnicities (Hall, 2001) because such portrayals might negatively influence viewers' perceptions of those groups. Movies about journalists—much like movies about lawyers, doctors, and

scientists—"present distorted portrayals and negative stereotypes that are at best an irritant and at worst dangerous in how they undermine professional authority and institutions" (Ehrlich, 2004, p. 2). However, there is no codified ethical standard. Entertainment programming needs a positive code of ethical conduct because it helps inform citizens by raising questions, offering incisive observations, and voicing marginalized perspectives (Peifer, 2012). Indeed, entertainers "can benefit by an articulation of aspirations, duties, and responsibilities" (Peifer, 2012, p. 270).

Media ethicists need to further explore the ethical implications of entertainment and amusement, the dominant role of almost all media content (Wilkins, 2012). Some media scholars have begun sketching out what an ethical code might look like. First, communication, whether labeled news or entertainment, ought to

> shape opportunities for understanding, deliberating about, and acting on the relationships among: (1) the conditions of one's day-to-day life; (2) the day-to day life of fellow members of the community; and (3) the norms and structures of power that shape these relationships.
>
> (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2008, p. 183)

Second, entertainment portrayals ought to serve an overriding public interest if there are foreseeable and substantial negative consequences to those portrayals (Cenite, 2009). One possible public interest is to start debates about media ethics; however, Good (2008) argued that journalism movies are much better about starting a dialogue centered on ethics than finishing it. Of course, adherence to these principles is voluntary. There are First Amendment protections that prohibit government bodies from dictating or censoring any sort of entertainment content (again, with the exception of offensive language and indecent or obscene material). News programming also has First Amendment protections, yet media ethicists often argue that journalists should hold themselves to standards of social responsibility, that, to quote Uncle Ben Parker from the *Spider-Man* comic books, "With great power comes great responsibility." The same is true for entertainment programmers; they must hold themselves to a higher standard to fulfill their discursive role within the broader republic.

Journalism as Genre

Film historian Jeanine Basinger (1986) argued that a test for whether a set of movies constitutes a genre is whether a person can generate a definitive list of characteristics found in such movies. "If you can, it's a genre. If you can't, it probably isn't" (p. 15). For example, Basinger wrote, Westerns typically have good guys in white hats and bad guys in black hats, saloon women with a crusty exterior but a heart of gold, and climactic shootouts. Ehrlich (2004) argued that journalism movies similarly have defining features: "aggressive, wisecracking reporters; tough, bellowing editors; fabulous, press-stopping exclusives" (p. 65).

In contrast, McNair (2010) argued that journalism is not a genre; instead, journalists are featured in a variety of genre films, including dramas, comedies, satires, thrillers, biopics, action hero films, war movies, musicals, horror movies, Westerns, and documentaries. He further argued that there are two types of films featuring journalist characters. In the first type, the journalist is a primary, or instrumental, character. These films focus on representations about journalists and journalism. In the second type, journalists are featured, often as central characters, but journalism itself is only an incidental element of the story.

Journalism films have a basic structure. First, the most important elements are the reporter and the story (Ehrlich, 2004). Journalists have been common characters in popular culture, and a range of journalists and other mass communicators have been featured in movies, television, and other media. These include anonymous reporters, columnists and critics, cub reporters, editors and producers, investigative reporters, newsroom families, photojournalists, publishers and media owners, real-life journalists, sports journalists, broadcast journalists, veteran male journalists, war and foreign correspondents, and female journalists (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Second, the plot of journalism films typically involves the obstacles the reporter faces in chasing the story and the consequences of that chase. The focus heavily skews toward dilemmas faced by journalists instead of a nuanced examination of the institution of journalism (Ehrlich, 2004). Third, the tension between home and work in journalism also is addressed. This tension can be seen in even the earliest film depictions of journalists. In *The Front Page*, which opened as a play in 1928 before hitting the big screen in 1931, Hildy Johnson is leaving the newspaper business in order to get married and start working at a respectable career. Of course, he ultimately abandons both respectability and marriage because the draw of journalism is too great. Fourth, a central concern of journalism films is the conflicts between public interest and private interest and between public interest and institutional interest. These narrative patterns are "mirrors of, and metaphors for, the relationship between the public and the press, its ruined hopes, desperate wishes, and ambiguous promises" (Good, 1989, p. 2). Jason Robards, portraying Ben Bradlee in *All the President's Men* (1976), summed up this conflict near the end of the film:

> We're under a lot of pressure, you know, and you put us there. Nothing's riding on this except the First Amendment to the Constitution, freedom of the press, and maybe the future of the country. Not that any of that matters, but if you guys fuck up again, I'm going to get mad.

Finally, journalism films also address the tension between objectivity and subjectivity that arises when journalists try to remain neutral in covering the news (Ehrlich, 2004). Such tension is central to the plots of films such as *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1983), *The Killing Fields* (1984), and *The Insider* (1999).

The Importance of Popular Culture Portrayals

Popular culture portrayals of journalists are among the most celebrated works of art, and journalism films often are nominated for Oscars and other awards (McNair, 2010). Three films featuring journalists as primary characters have won the Oscar for best picture: *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), and *Spotlight* (2015). Most audience members will never be a part of, or even see, a working newsroom, so "notions of what a journalist is and does are more likely to have come from reading about journalists in novels, short stories, and comic books, and from seeing them in movies, TV programs, plays, and cartoons" (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015, p. 2).

Research into pop-culture portrayals is important; regardless of how popular culture fictionally depicts journalists, the portrayals influence public opinion about real-world journalists (Ehrlich, 1997), could influence public trust in the media (Stone & Lee, 1990), and, at times, could provide useful insights into the actual lived experiences of journalists (Brennen, 1995, 2004). Indeed, some scholars argue that public feelings about real-world journalists are colored by popular culture portrayals, which can affect the perception and clout of an institution in society at least as much as, if not more than, the work done by actual journalists (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015; McNair, 2010). The argument is not that there is a direct causal relationship between portrayals of fictional journalists and perceptions of their real-life counterparts, but that there could be a correlative influence. McNair (2010) argued that "Cinematic representations of a particular social type inevitably draw upon the prevailing models of that type which a particular society harbors, and in the process contribute to consolidating and reinforcing their prevalence" (p. 15).

Movies and television have a reach and resonance that allow researchers to better understand how audiences and societies perceive and relate to a given phenomenon (McNair, 2010). Popular culture, therefore, is a powerful tool for thinking about what journalism is and should be (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Popular culture narratives represent, reflect, and reinforce the prevalent moods and trends of their time periods, providing some degree of data on how a society views itself in a particular era (McNair, 2010). Indeed, films such as *Citizen Kane* and *Network* are important and powerful because they signal both a shift in society itself and how the members of society interact both with journalism and with other powerful institutions.

The sight of a journalist on the big or little screen, and increasingly on the computer screen, is commonplace—such an ordinary part of people's everyday experience that viewers seldom stop to think about the larger ramifications of what they are witnessing. The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture project provides valuable resources, including a database of journalists and other mass communicators depicted in films, television, books, and other forms of mass communication, as well as a peer-reviewed journal, classroom materials, and other resources. Journalism has been an attractive subject for moviemakers; newspaper dramas with rowdy and scheming editors and hard-drinking reporters were some of the first sound pictures ever made (Good, 2008). Journalists previously were a common subject of literature; journalism offered authors a variety and inten-

sity of experience virtually unmatched by any other field (Good, 1986). Indeed, journalism's prominence in popular culture in the past 150 years shows us that journalism has been and remains a subject with immense appeal to those who make, as well as those who consume, popular culture (Brennen, 1995, 1993; Good, 1986; McNair, 2010). One possible reason for the multitude of journalists in popular works is that the day-to-day activities of the job are interesting, or at least seem interesting to nonjournalists. Journalists ask important questions, hobnob with celebrities and politicians, and typically are near the center of the action. By its nature as a professional practice, journalism generates incidents and narratives necessary for good stories. Many of the stories are true, or are based on true stories, pointing toward the idea that journalism is important and exciting when compared to other professions (McNair, 2010). Watching Woodward and Bernstein help bring down a crooked president or *The Boston Globe*'s investigative reporters uncover a corrupt Catholic Church is decidedly more entertaining than watching an accountant preparing someone's taxes or someone from IT asking whether the caller has tried rebooting her computer. Onscreen, journalists sometimes literally are superheroes: Both Superman and Spider-Man spend their non-villain-fighting time trying to hit a deadline.

Films cultivate legend and myth, so reproducing the myth that the media always are at the heart of things and always make a difference provides unique insight into journalism's mythology (Ehrlich, 2004). McNair (2010, p. 16) wrote,

> Movies are the central mythmaking media of our societies. Films about journalism, by extension, are the main cultural space in which societies (or their artists) articulate their agreed journalistic values, explore and interrogate them, and critique the application of these values both by the journalistic media themselves . . . and by the powerful in their relationship to news media.

Creators of popular culture have four central roles in this culture-creating process. The first is educational because they impart knowledge about the role of journalism in a democracy. The second is mythological or celebratory, and they highlight and praise the achievements of journalism at its best. The third is regulatory, watching the watchdogs with critical scrutiny. The fourth is defensive, arguing against those who try to suppress the critical dissent at the heart of journalism (McNair, 2010).

Popular culture myths of journalism often are based on normative roles. The majority of films and television shows about journalism originate in U.S. entertainment media and promote American values. The few foreign films about journalism—for example, *La Dolce Vita* (1960, Italy), *État de Siège* (1972, France), *Män som hatar kvinnor* (2009, Sweden)—still typically are set in Western societies with a strong history of an independent press. Niblock (2013) examined the crusading journalist Mikael Blomkvist in Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy, which was published as books and then was adapted into films, first in Sweden and then in the United States. Blomkvist's character challenges the dominant "crusading hero" depiction of investigative journalism; he displays vulnerability and humanity by reconsidering "his journalistic approach from one of a professionalized, objec-

tive model to a position of compassionate advocacy" (Niblock, 2013, p. 80). Even non-Western-based programs such as *Argon*, which focuses on South Korean television news, still tend to conform to Western media values such as truth telling and independence (Novoa-Jaso & Serrano-Puche, 2018). A documentary such as *Control Room* (2004), although released by an American film company, is interesting because it challenges American and Western normative values, especially advocacy, objectivity, and the showing of violence and gore. Still, the fact that so much popular culture content originates in the United States might influence journalistic norms, and viewer perceptions of such norms, worldwide.

In the Western, especially American, normative tradition, proper journalists are the watchdogs, witnesses, and sense-makers. Journalists who do not perform these roles are dysfunctional and toxic (McNair, 2010). The major media myths depicted in popular culture are that journalists can see through lies and hypocrisy, that they stick up for the common man, and that they uncover the truth and serve democracy (Ehrlich, 2004). When journalists are corrupt scoundrels who have lost their way, such as Chuck Tatum in *Ace in the Hole* or Diana Christensen in *Network*, they ultimately are punished for their sins. Such films are morality tales that highlight rules and proper professional and personal conduct instead of seriously challenging journalism's central societal role (Ehrlich, 2004).

Ehrlich (2004) argued that journalists are portrayed as two competing myths. The first is the outlaw journalist who stands for individualism and freedom. Journalistic villains tend to fall into this category. The first is the lovable rogue, the charming "bad boy" such as Cary Grant in *His Girl Friday*, whom we love but do not trust. The second is the reptile such as Chuck Tatum in *Ace in the Hole*. He—reptiles, like almost all villains, are almost always male—is wholly loathsome, with few or no redeeming qualities. The third is the repentant sinner such as Gayle Gayley in *Hero*, who knows she is violating normative principles of journalism and feels guilty about it (McNair, 2010). The most appealing or entertaining characters, McNair contended, are those who combine some degree of both heroism and villainy.

The second is the official journalist, who stands for community and progress (Ehrlich, 2004). Journalistic heroes tend to be journalists engaged in witnessing injustice, holding powerful people and institutions accountable, and defending freedom (McNair, 2010). By depicting journalists as heroes, filmmakers mythologize the normatively approved functions of journalism in a democracy and translate them into a popular culture idiom (McNair, 2010). Typically, foreign correspondents and investigative reporters are depicted as heroes. For example, Cozma and Maxwell Hamilton (2009) found foreign correspondents to be uniformly depicted as heroes, although the nature of their heroism changed between the period beginning in the 1930s and the period following the Vietnam War. In the earlier period, foreign correspondents were depicted as glamorous celebrity elites who were self-confident and independent. The angst-ridden correspondents in the latter period were depicted as less secure in their roles and less comfortable in stepping out of them. In contrast, tabloid hacks, celebrity interviewers, and paparazzi were shown as vil-

lains because filmmakers tend to equate popular with degenerate, damaging, and noteworthy (McNair, 2010).

Journalism in Literature

Fiction about journalists emerged in the 1890s in response to public curiosity about metropolitan newspapermen (Good, 1986), and more than 1,000 novels about news workers have been published in the United States in the past 150 years (Brennen, 1993, 1995). Novels about journalists tend to focus on one of three plots (Good, 1986) and could serve as a valuable resource for researchers studying the cultural history of media workers (Brennen, 1993, 1995). In the first type of plot, a cub reporter, typically college-educated and full of ideals and literary ambition, is pushed, pounded, and pulled into shape. After a series of humiliating setbacks, he finds a sensational scoop and saves his job, in the process learning what makes a good story and a successful newspaperman. In the second, a crusading journalist, like a gunslinger in an old-time Western, rolls into town and finds the community controlled by greedy businessmen, corrupt politicians, or gun-toting gangsters. The journalist defeats the wrongdoers, and then either disappears as mysteriously as he appeared or earns the love of a beautiful woman, fame and prosperity for his paper, or promotion out of daily journalism. In the third plot, a country newspaper office showcases the virtues and virtuousness of the placidity, tradition, and goodness of rural or small-town life.

Poems by Walt Whitman, Stephen Crane, T. S. Eliot, and others could be seen as a shadow history of how the press turns human suffering into sensationalistic news copy (Good, 1987). Prose and poetry about journalism are significant for four reasons (Good, 1986, 1987). First, they frequently are at least semi-autobiographical. Second, fictional protagonists might have served as role models for aspiring journalists. Third, fiction reflected and possibly shaped the public's image of the press. Fourth, fiction provides historians with insights into period-specific work routines and how journalists in different time periods felt about the work they were doing.

American fiction writers are more optimistic about journalists and journalism than their British counterparts. Lonsdale (2016) examined more than 150 novels, short stories, poems, plays, and films about journalism written by British authors, and she found that Edwardian novelists portrayed journalists as courageous truth-seekers. However, those heroic portrayals typically ended after World War I, when the public began to see the British press as a propaganda tool for the government. Beginning in the 1920s, fiction writers frequently implied that media sensationalism was dumbing public debate. After World War II, the portrayals of journalists devolved into stereotypical individuals who were "scruffy, cynical, shambolic, bad mannered and fond of expletives" (Lonsdale, 2016, p. 179). Contemporary fictional journalists are even worse; they often are portrayed as deranged, murderous, and vulnerable.

The heyday of fiction about journalism ended in the 1930s when films became the dominant popular art form for portraying the institution and members of the press (Good, 1986).

Journalism in Classic Films

Journalists of all stripes routinely appear in most genres of film and television. Newspaper reporters were featured in dramas such as *Absence of Malice* and *Kill the Messenger*, comedies such as *Fletch* and *The Paper*, and classics such as *Roman Holiday* and *It Happened One Night*. The inner workings of television newsrooms were played for drama in *Network* and *The Insider*, for laughs in *Anchorman* and *WKRP in Cincinnati*, and for some combination of both in *Broadcast News*. Magazine journalists took center stage in films such as *The Devil Wears Prada* and television shows such as *Just Shoot Me*, while advertisers and public relations practitioners got their star turn in *Mad Men* and *Thank You for Smoking*. There even has been a film dedicated to citizen journalists: *Nightcrawler* follows a crime-scene videographer who often scoops his professional counterparts.

Since the earliest years of the film industry, journalists and journalism have played a leading role in Hollywood (Ehrlich, 1997). *The Front Page* first hit theaters in 1931; it later reappeared as *His Girl Friday* in 1940 and as a 1974 remake starring Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau. Each version of the comedy features two journalists who will do anything while chasing a story, including hiding an accused and escaped murderer from the police in order to beat the competition for an exclusive. *The Front Page* and *His Girl Friday* are classic examples of screwball comedies, many of which feature journalists in "morality tales in which the morals are notably absent" (Ehrlich, 2004, p. 45). Journalists in screwball comedies typically were depicted as romantic heroes. Screwball comedies, especially following the success of *His Girl Friday*, also added sophisticated romance via smart and funny women, a new addition to the journalism genre. Tabloid journalism—and journalists in screwball comedies also exclusively were tabloid reporters and editors—was an equalizer that allowed men and women, as well as haves and have nots, to compete on a fairly level playing field (Ehrlich, 2004).

Orson Welles's 1941 classic, *Citizen Kane*, often considered the greatest movie of all time, centers on a titular character deeply entrenched in the newspaper business; indeed, the character Charles Foster Kane is at least partially based on real-life publishers William Randolph Hearst, Harold McCormick, and Samuel Insull (Schudson, 1992). *Citizen Kane* is notable in the evolution of journalism films because it marks the transition from the screwball comedies of the 1930s and 1940s to the journalism noir of the 1940s and 1950s (Ehrlich, 2004). The film also is ambiguous in its stance on the press. Welles reproduces myths of the journalism movie genre but also highlights the contradictions at their cores (Ehrlich, 2004). Charles Foster Kane is a media baron, and *Citizen Kane* is one of the few films made about media barons despite the potential richness of the material (McNair, 2010). Other depictions of media moguls exist—from supervillains Lex Luthor in *Superman* and Elliot Carver in the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* to more mundane

creeps such as Max Fairbanks in *What's the Worst That Could Happen* and Leona Lansing in *The Newsroom*. However, as McNair argued, other filmmakers perhaps felt that Welles said all there was to say on the subject of media barons in *Citizen Kane*.

Noir films about journalism tend to use either a hero or a villain archetype. Some journalists were depicted as outcasts unable or unwilling to conform to prescribed social roles (Ehrlich, 2004). Kirk Douglas's character in *Ace in the Hole* (1951) is a cynical, drunken, former big-city journalist who stumbles upon a man trapped in a cave and exploits the man's plight in order to get a major scoop. Other journalists are shown to have entered dark worlds in order to solve a mystery or right a wrong (Ehrlich, 2004). In the based-on-a-true-story *Call Northside 777* (1948), a skeptical city reporter uncovers the wrongful conviction and imprisonment of a man accused of murdering a Chicago police officer, and Gregory Peck played a journalist who went undercover to expose antisemitism in New York and Connecticut in *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947).

All The President's Men (1976), arguably the most famous and iconic film about journalists ever produced, follows the investigative reporting of *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein as they attempt to untangle the web of intrigue, corruption, power, and money surrounding the break-in at Washington's Watergate Hotel. Based on Woodward and Bernstein's book of the same name, the film upholds the ideals that serve as the foundation of journalism and "offers journalism a charter, an inspiration, a reason for being large enough to justify the constitutional protections that journalism enjoys" (Schudson, 1992, p. 124). Movies about watchdogs almost always focus on the struggle that takes place around information and the crucial role of journalists in that struggle (McNair, 2010). Like *All the President's Men*, watchdog movies often are based on real-life events, and are premised on the idea that information itself is a form of power (McNair, 2010). The film *All the President's Men*, as well as the real-life reporting, significantly and favorably influenced public opinion regarding journalism and its role in our democracy (Schudson, 1992), although myths surrounding the Woodward and Bernstein duo and their influence often overshadow reality (Campbell, 2016). This favorable influence underscores why public and academic understanding of popular depictions are important.

If *All the President's Men* is the shining light of journalism films, then *Network* (1976) is what is hiding in its darkest corner. The film centers on Howard Beale, a television anchor who regains his popularity by articulating the nation's rage with the iconic line "I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore." Beale, however, eventually loses viewers when he subsumes his rage in order to placate advertisers, and ultimately he is shot on-air. *Network*, like *All the President's Men*, addresses the nature of power, specifically the intertwining of journalism with political and economic power. In the film, Diana Christensen, the programming head at the fictional network, takes over the news division and blurs the line between news and entertainment. Postman (1985) argued that entertainment has subsumed public discourse, that important matters such as politics, religion, news, athletics, education, and commerce have become adjuncts of show business.

Network ultimately formed the same condemning conclusion about television—that television has made entertainment the natural format for the representation of all experience.

Journalism in Modern Films

Contemporary films are more complex, reproducing the same mythology expressed in films from earlier eras while also being more highly critical of the media. They raise pointed questions about journalistic responsibility and culpability while simultaneously reinforcing journalism's central place in society. These films, which typically are earnest rather than cynical, view the press as serving a vital function in society (Ehrlich, 2004).

In *Absence of Malice* (1981), Sally Field portrays Megan Carter, a rule-breaker who thinks of herself as a journalistic watchdog of the government agencies she covers (Stocking, 2008). Carter, a reporter for a major Miami newspaper, defies docile female stereotypes while attempting to break stories that officials want to keep hidden. Carter gets a scoop that a local liquor wholesaler is being investigated for murdering a local union official. She gets the story by reading a police file that a federal prosecutor leaves on his desktop when he's called away during an interview; of course, the prosecutor left the file there intentionally to plant a story that later turns out to be false. Carter, though, does not know the rules of good journalism, nor about the kind of rule-breaking that more thoughtful journalists can and do occasionally justify (Stocking, 2008).

Broadcast News (1987), like *Network* before it, tackles the battle between journalistic and business values (Peck, 2008). It also tackles conflicts such as workplace romance, news vs. entertainment, flash vs. substance, faking news, and the dumbing down of society via TV (Peck, 2008). The film also addresses a recurring theme in the post-*All the President's Men* era: reconciling a journalist's professional and personal identities (Ehrlich, 2004). The heart of the film is the professional-personal triangle between producer Jane Craig, reporter Aaron Altman, and reporter and sometimes anchor Tom Grunick. Craig is well respected and very good at her job, but her personal life is a disaster. Altman also is a professional success, although he secretly is in love with Craig. Tom Grunick is a handsome dolt who readily admits that he knows nothing about news. Craig is appalled at Grunick's lack of professional abilities, yet she is sexually attracted to him. Ultimately, Grunick becomes the network anchor, and Craig chooses flash over substance by becoming his managing editor despite ethical and other professional concerns.

In *The Paper* (1994), metro editor Henry Hackett and managing editor Alicia Clark literally come to blows about stopping the presses to correct a story they both know is false. Clark insists that stopping the print run would cost too much money, and she puts profits over good journalism. However, she sees the error of her ways when Hackett and columnist Michael McDougal argue that the newspaper has never knowingly printed a falsehood. One major subplot centers on balancing one's personal life with the fast-paced world of daily newspaper journalism. Clark constantly asks for a higher salary because she cannot live the glamorous life she wants on the wages of a managing editor, and Hackett is shown interviewing for a job at a rival paper at the behest of his pregnant wife,

having dinner (although he arrives very late and leaves early) with his wife and parents, and, ultimately, almost missing the birth of his child after his wife is rushed to the hospital for an emergency C-section.

Dramas involving war correspondents provide a first-hand point of view on the subject of war—the correspondents serve not as combatants but as observers translating viewed combat into the language and visuals of news (McNair, 2010). For example, *The Killing Fields* (1984) depicts the work and relationship of American journalist Sydney Schanberg and his Cambodian counterpart, Dith Pran, during the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. A recurring theme in films about war correspondents is the appropriate role of journalists in conflict situations: Should they be objective and detached, or subjective and committed? In *Salvador* (1986), American photojournalist Richard Boyle, while covering the Salvadoran civil war, becomes radicalized by American complicity in the bloodshed (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015), and ultimately he tries to escape with his Salvadoran girlfriend and her two children.

Shattered Glass (2003) is a fictionalized version of the story of Stephen Glass, a real-life rising star in the magazine world until a rival journalist discovered that he was fabricating and plagiarizing stories for *The New Republic*, as well as other magazines. The film tells the straight-forward tale of a sympathetic journalistic hero—*Forbes* reporter Adam Penenberg—vanquishing an unsympathetic journalistic villain (Ehrlich, 2008). The film focuses on the concept of truth, which has been the subject of films about journalism since at least the 1930s (Ehrlich, 2008). In *Shattered Glass*, plagiarist and fabricator Stephen Glass is another in a line of film portrayals of moguls promoting fakery (*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Meet John Doe*), reporters lying about their subjects (*Ace in the Hole*), photojournalists staging pictures (*Under Fire*), broadcasters faking tears and covering up murder (*Broadcast News*, *To Die For*), and television executives manipulating public opinion (*Network*, *The Insider*; Ehrlich, 2008). *Shattered Glass* is similar to *All the President's Men*, at least in some respects, because it "performed much the same role that the Woodward and Bernstein story and other journalism movies had done: It underscored the press's centrality in American life, in particular the notion that self-regulation of the press works" (Ehrlich, 2005, p. 104).

Recently, *Spotlight* (2015) depicted *The Boston Globe*'s investigative team, dubbed "Spotlight," as it investigated widespread and systematic cases of sexual abuse by Catholic priests in Boston and the subsequent cover-up by the Catholic Church. The *Globe* earned the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for the series, and the filmmakers won the 2016 Best Picture Oscar. Unlike *All the President's Men*, the film *Spotlight* did not have a wide-ranging positive impact for journalism. Currently, Americans' attitudes about the news media generally are fairly negative, although there is some division along deeply partisan lines (Barthel & Mitchell, 2017).

Journalism on Television

Television writers and producers also have used journalism extensively as a backdrop, giving viewers more content upon which to base their notions of the field (Ryan & Revah, 1996). In a content analysis exploring depictions of journalists in the 1987 prime-time television schedule, researchers found that journalists were portrayed often, but typically as something akin to a Greek chorus on cops and crime shows in order to propel the narrative forward (Stone & Lee, 1990). Fictional television journalists, both men and women, usually were depicted favorably; newspaper journalists, however, predominantly were white men depicted negatively (Stone & Lee, 1990). Reporters also play a large role on the children's television show *Sesame Street*. Major characters such as Kermit the Frog sometimes are depicted favorably as reporters, but many minor characters consistently portray negative journalistic stereotypes such as the curmudgeon or pushy reporter (Ragovin, 2010).

The Mary Tyler Moore Show (1970−1977) was "informed by and commented on the changing role of women in American society" (Dow, 1990, p. 263). On the show, Mary Richards worked as an associate producer and later producer for WJM-TV, a Minneapolis television station. Richards's character was "bright, attractive, well liked" and "generally happy," with a "good job that she perform[ed] well" (Dow, 1990, p. 268). While the character generally was seen positively, she also perpetuated many female stereotypes, including being a passive, deferent, and motherly person who typically was on the outside of the newsroom's boys' club. The spin-off show *Lou Grant* (1977−1982) depicted the fictional *Los Angeles Tribune*, which journalist Tom Brazaitis called possibly the best newspaper in America (Stepp, 1996).

The titular *Murphy Brown* (1988−1998) was a more advanced, or at least more successful, version of Moore's Richards. While Richards struggled but ultimately succeeded in furthering her career in local television, Candice Bergen's Murphy Brown began the show's run as an unqualified success: She was the award-wining network co-anchor of a prime-time news magazine (Dow, 1992). While the portrayal of Brown generally was positive, Brown was sometimes a domineering, patriarchal figure (Dow, 1992). Such a development is interesting because journalistic values tend to coincide with masculine values, and newsroom managers tend to socialize women to accept these values, so women might begin acting in masculine terms to comply with the existing social culture (Beam & DeCicco, 2010; Steiner, 2008). Brown's portrayal, therefore, might be a nod to the reality that women must adapt to, and adopt, masculine traits in order to succeed in a perceived man's world. Both characters, Richards and Brown, were groundbreaking in terms of television, especially sitcoms, for being successful, single, working women (Dow, 1990, 1992).

Other television series have been a mixed bag at best. David Simon's *The Wire* has been called the most realistic depiction of a newsroom and the news industry ever (Hanson, 2008; Sabin, 2011), although Simon's depictions of individual journalists have been criticized as being distorted for entertainment purposes or wholly inaccurate (Steiner, Guo,

McCaffrey, & Hills, 2013). The final season, which focused on a semi-fictionalized version of *The Baltimore Sun*, highlighted a morally decaying industry. The *Sun* reporters were shown to have a strained relationship with citizens and other city institutions, such as the police department and the city schools, and editors and reporters were seen to have to do more with less—or as City Editor Gus Haynes said, less with less—due to budget cutbacks that force buyouts and layoffs. Newsroom tensions erupt as reporters and even some editors cut journalistic and ethical corners in an attempt to win the awards they think they must have to move to more secure and lucrative newsrooms (Painter, 2017).

Aaron Sorkin long has been fascinated by the inner workings of television newsrooms. On *Sports Night* (1998−2000), he depicted a news and highlights show resembling *SportsCenter*. However, *Sports Night* was only tangentially about sports. Instead, "Sports becomes a metaphor for human accomplishment, drive, pain, loss, and disappointment" (Fahy, 2005, p. 61). Female producers ostensibly were in charge–Dana Whitaker and Natalie Hurley run *Sports Night*, and Sally Sasser produces the sister show *West Coast Update*. However, in *Sports Night*, as in much of Sorkin's work, women were there to throw viewers off the scent of sexism. The three newsroom leaders, as well as other female journalists, were depicted throughout the series as acting unprofessionally, displaying motherly qualities, choosing their personal lives over work, being deferential to men in ethical dilemmas, and showing a lack of sports knowledge compared to the male characters (Painter & Ferrucci, 2012). The women were portrayed as mediocre-to-bad journalists who were "incapable of existing without the protection, adoration, and support of the men" despite their obvious intelligence and capability (Ringelberg, 2005, p. 91).

The female journalists in Sorkin's *The Newsroom* (2012−2014), like those in *Sports Night*, overwhelmingly were depicted more negatively than the men (Painter & Ferrucci, 2015). Again, the women were ostensibly in charge–Leona Lansing owns the news channel's parent company, and MacKenzie McHale is the producer of *News Night*, the show within the show. However, media critics argued that Lansing, McHale, and reporters Maggie Jordan and Sloan Sabbith were as shallow and obvious as Sorkin's "stale, tone-deaf stereotyping" (Killoran, 2013, p. 1). The female characters were shown as unprofessional in the newsroom, inadequate at their jobs, motherly, and weak (Painter & Ferrucci, 2015), and as "supporting players to their more successful male counterparts" (Killoran, 2013, p. 1). The journalists in *The Newsroom* also practiced market-driven journalism (Ferrucci & Painter, 2016), competing for audience, sources, advertisers, and stock prices. The show depicted a news organization in crisis, where there is an ongoing internal fight throughout the series between journalists struggling to separate economics from journalism and business executives (including, at times, senior journalists such as anchor Will McAvoy) who want to continue the status quo where editorial decisions are driven by business interests. At its heart, *The Newsroom* served as a critique of contemporary journalism ethics, especially in terms of American cable news culture (Peters, 2015). Viewers, including real-world journalists, used the show to "name and shame" news outlets, to engage in political confrontation, and to employ rhetorical narratives of objectivity to define good journalism. The viewers nostalgically lamented the "golden era" of television news while

recognizing that journalism is still a public good despite the market-driven nature of the American media system (Peters, 2015).

Carrie Bradshaw, the central character in *Sex and the City* (1998−2004), is a different type of journalist. As a sex-and-relationships columnist for *The New York Star*, she focuses on soft news, as opposed to the hard news in shows such as *The Wire* or *The Newsroom*. Bradshaw and her friends are successful professionals, embracing "the intellectual and sexual freedom, and independence, that their success has given them" (Richards, 2003, p. 147). They are the embodiment of Helen Gurley Brown's "single girl" (Richards, 2003), although they are older and more successful in their chosen careers. Bradshaw's sex life, the fodder for her columns, can be seen "as a product of a longer representational history of women, feminist or not, who sought sexual freedom or freer expression of female sexuality" (Gerhard, 2005, p. 38). Seen in this postfeminist light, the show can be situated in the feminist struggles of the individual versus the collective, feminism versus femininity, and agency versus victimization (Stillion Southard, 2008). However, while Bradshaw is depicted as a successful columnist, both her personal life and her professional life are dominated by an obsessive consumerism, constant worry about her appearance, and an unceasing preoccupation with men.

Journalists were virtually absent from the six-season run of *The Sopranos* (1999−2007). However, writers used journalism as a narrative device to bring the audience up to speed about plot developments (Vanacker, 2012). *Sopranos* characters, most notably Tony Soprano, relied on newspapers and broadcast television to supply their informational needs, although Tony Soprano also heavily criticized journalists whose reports conflicted with his worldview. In the few instances where journalists were depicted, they were portrayed as inconsiderate wolves who disregarded the best interests of their subjects as long as they could get a good sound bite (Vanacker, 2012).

House of Cards released its sixth season on Netflix in November 2018, but only the first two seasons focused extensively on journalists. *House of Cards* was loosely based on a British series of the same name and many of the depictions were similar. The two major female journalists were portrayed as diametric opposites (Painter & Ferrucci, 2017). Zoe Barnes, who begins the show as a reporter for the fictitious *Washington Herald* before moving to the online publication *Slugline*, is shown as childlike, unprofessional, and unethical. She has an affair with a source, and then she publishes material that she thinks or knows is false. By contrast, *Wall Street Telegraph* reporter Ayla Sayyad is a dedicated watchdog journalist who eschews easy fluff pieces to dig into difficult but important stories. During the series, viewers also are shown a definite distinction between print and digital journalism and journalists. The latter are depicted as being less ethical and more driven by self-promotion, while the adoption of technology itself is shown to be a detriment to good journalism (Ferrucci & Painter, 2017). The series is one of the first to recognize the villainous potential of digital journalism and its accelerated, globally networked rumormongering and gossip (McNair, 2010).

As demonstrated, these depictions matter. Journalists, much like cops, doctors, and lawyers, are popular subjects in both television and film. Popular culture depictions, both positive and negative, could have a socializing effect both on audiences and on young people thinking about entering the mass communication field. Audience members could think that real journalists think and act like their fictional counterparts, who often are inaccurately depicted or whose actions are distorted in order to be more entertaining. For example, female journalists do not routinely have sex with their sources, although that is the impression viewers of *House of Cards*, *Thank You for Smoking*, *Crazy Heart*, and *Adaptation* (among many, many other films and television shows) would be led to believe. Film and entertainment programming also, at times, has had an agenda-setting or framing influence on news content. Such an influence was shown for conflict diamonds after the film *Blood Diamond* (Sharma, 2012) and for organ donation after several television shows featured it as a central or tangential storyline (Morgan, King, Smith, & Ivic, 2010).

Journalism in Satirical News

Viewers get a different representation of journalists during daily and weekly airings of "mock" news programs such as *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. The shows are not "real" news. Both Jon Stewart, who proceeded Noah as host of *The Daily Show*, and John Oliver assert that they are comedians, not journalists. However, the shows highlight that all, or at least most, news is now entertainment, no longer bearing much, if any, relation to what's "real" (Postman, 1985; Tally, 2011). Indeed, scholars argue that Stewart and his ilk provide a needed counterbalance "in a public culture where one has to wonder if real news is fake, and where one often wished that were so" (Hariman, 2007, p. 275).

Cable television comedians—from Jon Stewart, Trevor Noah, and Stephen Colbert to Samantha Bee and John Oliver—also have influenced how viewers perceive "real" news in four important ways. First, they have altered the recognizable boundaries of the journalistic community (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2009). The comedians blend healthy doses of explanatory journalism, news analysis, and editorials with laugh-out-loud humor. Each conducts interviews with newsmakers such as elected representatives and political candidates, journalists, and celebrities. Second, they have altered mainstream coverage by breaking through false shells such as objectivity; they often blend comic, political, and partisan discourse; they have reframed policy debate; and they have helped to set the political agenda (Jones & Baym, 2010; McBeth & Clemons, 2011; Meddaugh, 2010). Stewart at least once directly influenced cable news programming–the CNN show *Crossfire* was canceled shortly after Stewart critiqued the show on-air while being interviewed by its hosts, Tucker Carlson and Paul Begala. Third, Stewart and his colleagues routinely have held traditional broadcast news outlets accountable to the public by pointing out falsehoods, pointing out inconsistencies, pointing out when inconsequential news is blown out of proportion, and critiquing the very nature of broadcast news (Painter & Hodges, 2010). The "mock" news hosts point toward the misinformation, biases, and inadequacies of their "real" news counterparts (Ross & York, 2007; Wisniewski, 2011), interrogating con-

tent that is "arguably failing its democratic function" (Baym, 2005, p. 268). Finally, the comedians counterbalance traditional news reporters through the use of jokes and exaggerated faces and vocal inflections. Indeed, by playing the role of real reporters, and by playing that role so well as to often be indistinguishable from their traditional counterparts, mock journalists suggest that real journalists also are simply playing a role (Baym, 2005).

Popular Culture Research Is Incomplete

The majority of work about the portrayal of journalists in popular culture has centered on film depictions. While there has been some research into television portrayals, there needs to be a lot more, especially because television reaches more people than movies do, and, therefore, television representations could have an even greater influence on popular perceptions of journalists (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015). Research has focused even less on radio, plays, novels, and other types of media. Future scholarship needs to focus on representations of journalists in popular culture mediums other than film; a particular focus should be detailed analyses of radio and television programs, plays, cartoons, comics, commercials, and online and interactive stories and games. Furthermore, the analyses should concentrate on the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which the texts were produced and consumed (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015).

Researchers also need to focus more on the depiction of a wider range of media professionals. For example, public relations practitioners are underrepresented in popular culture research. Public relations, which like film largely evolved in the 20th century, has been the subject of many movies, but fascination with public relations does not equal fascination with journalism, even though there are more public relations practitioners than journalists, they are better paid, and they live lifestyles that often are just as glamorous as those of journalists if not more so (McNair, 2010). In film, public relations professionals typically are depicted as villains, although the portrayals often combine glamour and grit, as well as both positive and negative images (McNair, 2010).

There also is a need for more quantitative scholarship in the fields of popular culture and entertainment studies. Specifically, scholars need a better understanding of the effects that popular culture may or may not have on public perceptions of journalists, as well as how mass communicators and the public interpret the depictions presented in popular culture. Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015, p. 151) proposed a set of questions for beginning such research:

> Do popular culture depictions affect attitudes or beliefs regarding press credibility? Is there a "Mean Journalist" syndrome whereby popular culture cultivates the impression that journalists are sleazier than they are in real life? Are people able to "see through" such depictions? Do those depictions actually make journalism seem more intriguing, much as *The Front Page* captivated many prospective young reporters?

These questions, and many more, are unanswered because they have not yet been addressed. Answers will not begin to emerge until quantitative research is conducted with well-designed surveys, experiments, and audience ethnographic studies.

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