Public Relations and Journalism: Truth, Trust, Transparency and Integrity

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Summary

Truth, trust, integrity and reputation are key concepts for understanding the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners. This the paper: first, considers the current debate on the inter-relationship between journalism and public relations; second distinguishes varieties of public relations and journalism; third, analyses the Editorial Intelligence controversy; fourth, deconstructs aspects of "truth" and "trust" in the context of that debate; fifth, considers why the virtue of individuals is vitally important for both public relations and journalism.

Public Relations & Journalism: stereotypes and identity crisis

In terms of public perception of both professions perhaps stereotypes of the practitioner as fundamentally dishonest are widespread. However, those stereotypes of journalism and public relations conflate the variety of activities that come under the headings "journalism" and "public relations".

Public relations and journalism: "hard" versus "soft"

"Soft public relations" is characterised by a concern with providing publicity for a client. By delivering a good story the public relations practitioner offers the journalist a means of satisfying users of his medium. "Soft" journalism is concerned with entertainment and truth is irrelevant, it is essentially concerned with comics for adults.

"Hard" public relations and journalism are difficult to characterise simply but are characterised by a concern for truth and trust in relation to the integrity and reputation of the individual practitioner;

Public Relations and journalism: long spoon or spooning?

Although a distinction between "entertainment" ("Soft" public relations and journalism) and "what matters" ("hard" public relations and journalism) is not regarded as a significant distinction by all commentators it provide a locus for deconstructing the role of truth, trust and integrity in journalism and public relations

An important source of "soft" journalism stories is "soft" public relations. The fact is that Editorial intelligence primarily suited "soft" public relations practitioners and journalists.

Public relations and journalism: "truth" & "trust"

In the case of both public relations and journalism the related notions of trust and truth are central to their professional activities. Transparency, truth, trust and public interest are dimensions of the relationship between public relations and journalism.

A hard and soft truth distinction is not exhaustive and an important other category is artistic or emotional truth.

Audiences do not always understand what genre they are witnessing so consequently do not automatically know how to interpret what they see and hear.

Public Relations and Journalism: virtuous expediency

On the basis of an individual transparently identifiable communicator's track record audiences should decide whether or not to trust that journalists or public relations practitioner. Consequently, there is a need for publics and audiences to be informed so that they are able to make valid judgements about communicators and what they say.

Regarding the relationship between public relations and journalism, at the "hard" end, both journalist and public relations practitioner are dealing with matters of public interest and need to cooperate but at arm's length.

Conclusion

"Truth" and "trust" are both important in the practice of journalism and public relations. It is vital, therefore, that both "hard" journalists and public relations practitioners act with professional integrity. Transparency of the communicator's identity is crucial. Power needs to rest with a citizen public

exercising the right to give or withhold belief in the communicator and in determining his or her reputation for veracity and also to exercise real power as consumers and voters.

Preamble

In practice notions such as "truth", "trust", "public relations" and "journalism" are not as straightforward as at first they may appear. The interplay of these concepts is considered. The informal logical relationship between truth and trust is explored as being recursive: one where the concepts are intimately inter-bound so that both need to be understood in order to understand either one. To accept another's contention that "X" is true" entails trusting them: giving one's "trust" to another entails accepting the truth of what they say. The related concepts of truth and trust (Davies, 1998) are both central to the professional practice of public relations and journalism and in the relationship between the members of both professions.

Thus, the paper: first, considers the current debate on the inter-relationship between journalism and public relations; second distinguishes varieties of public relations and journalism; third, analyses the Editorial Intelligence controversy; fourth, deconstructs aspects of "truth" and "trust" in the context of that debate; fifth, considers why the individual virtue of public relations practitioners and journalists is of central importance to their professional practice. Public judgements about the virtues of the communicator are relevant in judging which journalists and public relations practitioners to trust as being truthful because ultimately power rests with the public or audience to give or with-hold belief in what is communicated.

1. Public Relations & Journalism: stereotypes and identity crisis

As with most stereotypes there is an element of truth in the negative image that some public relations practitioners and journalists portray of each other. The public relations practitioner is portrayed as a paid mouth and spin doctor intent on promoting his client's interests at the price of truth. The journalist is portrayed as someone who neither distinguishes between fact and opinion nor lets the facts get in the way of spinning a good story. In terms of public perception of both professions perhaps those images are widespread which may explain why both journalists and public relations practitioners tend to be rated poorly in surveys of public esteem.

There are further favourable stereotypes of journalists. In a tribute to such journalist Michael Grade commented "They were killed because they were doing what journalists ought to do – to speak truth to power. They did so and power took its revenge". (Grade, 2006).Foremost is the war or foreign correspondent risking life, limb and liberty to publish the truth; impartial political journalists who constitute the fourth estate; investigative journalists

who, in the public interest, expose significant breaches of trust. Possible candidates for this role as iconic journalist might include Charles Wheeler, Martin Bell or John Pilger, but innate modesty would prevent them claiming that title for themselves.

So far as I know, unlike journalists, no public relations practitioner has died solely for the sake of exercising his or her profession. However, some may be at personal risk from the venom dripping from their pens not to mention being briefed against by others. There seems to be no positive stereotypes for public relations, which may go some way to explain why many job advertisements now tend to advertise "communications" rather than "public relations".

So far as public relations practitioners are concerned there are some practitioners and academics who see the role as essentially to do with persuasion and selling. This is the view that public relations are essentially weak propaganda (Moloney, 2006). They identify themselves as being paid to represent the interests of their client or organisation in the most persuasive way possible but do not associate personally with the cause they promote. This may be candid but morally reprehensible. Other practitioners may see themselves more in terms of being engaged in building relationships on behalf of their clients and organisations, where the role is not concerned with persuasion.

What the stereotypes of journalism and public relations conflate is the variety of activities that come under the heading "journalism" and "public relations". This is something which those attacking either profession tend to ignore. They tend to latch on to a particular negative view of the opposing profession and then attack all the members on a sort of "one size fits all" basis. Both journalism and public relations as professions should increase public awareness that neither profession can be summed up in a simplified simplistic slur rather than perpetuate and amplify misperceptions and stereo types.

2. Public relations and journalism: "hard" versus "soft"

The relationship between public relations and journalism is complex and it is difficult to see the wood for the trees. An approach that may help to clarify the situation is to make a somewhat crude distinction between different varieties of public relations and journalism. It is possible to distinguish what may be labelled "soft" and "hard" varieties of each (the terms "soft" and "hard" are simply classification labels). "Soft" public relations are the sort that is effectively part of the entertainment industry where the primary publics willingly suspend disbelief and scepticism in order to entertain. "Soft" journalism is also part of the entertainment industry, where columnists are short on facts and detailed analysis but full on unsubstantiated but amusing opinions. What they say may be witty and we laugh with them or they may be buffoons and we laugh at them. However, what they say is a tarradiddle of no real consequence.

"Soft public relations" is characterised by a concern with providing publicity for a client. It serves publics for whom the truth of what is said is less important than the ability of the story to entertain. The range of stories of interest is typically narrow and often centres on the activities of celebrities. Often there is a close link between the stories and products and services that a client wants promoting. By delivering a good story the public relations practitioner offers the journalist a means of satisfying users of his medium. The journalist is interested in a story where opinion tends to take precedence over fact. The journalist offers the public relations practitioner a means of providing publicity for his client. Consequently the relationship appears almost perfectly symbiotic.

At the other end of the spectrum there are the "hard" varieties. "Hard journalism" is concerned with informing its publics with "true" factually accurate independently corroborated information with careful analysis of situations and events of public concern. Upholding the public interest is central to its practice. It is this variety of journalism that has traditionally been identified as "the fourth estate" (Marsh, 2008).

"Hard" public relations are difficult to characterise simply, so what follows is yet another attempt at a definition of public relations which draws on established public relations theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). As a preliminary two terms need clarifying.

An "Issue" (A) is defined as a real or imaginary event identified as yielding actual or potential power to affect the well being of people.

An "Active constituency" (B) denotes those who evolve as a pressure group, constituency or public because:

- They share a common interest in an issue;
- Believe in their ability to influence the outcome of that issue;
- Are prepared to act on that belief.

Given A and B above "hard public relations" is defined as:-
- The art and social science of identifying and evaluating actual and potential:
    - issues affecting the well being of an organisation;
    - primary constituencies relating to that issue;
- Managing relationships with primary constituencies
    - With a view to winning and maintaining trust whilst paying due regard to organisational and public interest through fair dealing.
    - and whenever possible achieving and sharing mutual benefits with primary constituencies.

Surveys of public relations practitioners reveal that media relations are still regarded by many as an essential aspect of what they do for a living. However, there are some senior public relations practitioners who have never issued a media release or held a press conference. Again, that indicates a wide variety of public relations practice including relationships with the media.

Some public relations (in particular consumer marketing public relations) rely heavily on a relationship with the media whereas others (for example corporate diplomacy) may treat media relations as irrelevant because meeting individuals face to face is the most appropriate means of communicating with a small primary audience.

3. *Public Relations and journalism: long spoon or spooning?*

A general confusion resulting from an inability or refusal to distinguish varieties of public relations practitioner and kinds of journalists became evident in the 2006 media spat which followed Julia Hobsbawm's launch of Editorial Intelligence (Davies, 2006). If nothing else the media row revealed that neither journalism nor public relations may be regarded a homogeneous group. However, it also highlighted that the relationships between journalism and public relations needs to be understood better.

In the spat over Editorial Intelligence many journalists rushed to claim the moral high ground and proclaim their superiority over public relations practitioners. They tended to do this through implicit stipulative definitions that stereotype public relations practitioners as sleazy spin doctors and journalists as the good guys fearlessly telling it as it is. There were some journalists who were more true to their calling and reported the views of public relations practitioners about journalists. There the main indictment was made against those journalists who filled their columns with opinions and omitted any supporting facts. However, all these stereotypes and dichotomies over simplified and distorted the question of what both public relations and journalism are about.

Although Hobsbawm's Editorial Intelligence (EI) forum was labelled a "backscratchers club" by some journalists it demonstrated that some journalists and some public relations practitioners share common professional concerns and have a sort of professional symbiotic relationship. The fact is that EI suited some but not all public relations practitioners and journalists. The media is not exclusively concerned with investigative, political, war and foreign hard news stories. Increasingly the media is about providing entertainment and at the extreme provides comics for grown-ups masquerading as newspapers.

Many public relations practitioners rely on the media to provide third party endorsement for what they are selling as well as providing the means of reaching a large carefully targeted segment of a market that coincides with the users of a particular media product. Similarly there are journalists who, with worries about ever shrinking resources and increasing competition, are concerned with maximising audiences and finding stories at the least cost for the medium that employs them (Davis, 2008). An important source of such stories is public relations. For this group of journalists and public relations practitioners co-operation would appear to be a sensible approach to business. However, in some cases collusion or cooperation may be contrary to the public interest.

A distinction between "entertainment" ("Soft" public relations and journalism) and "what matters" ("hard" public relations and journalism) is not regarded as a significant distinction by all commentators. It may be regarded as a distinction without a difference by Michael Grade (Grade, 2007). When interviewed about the row in 2007 over the manipulation of footage of the Queen at a photo-shoot that was used in a promotional trailer released to the media (that *The Times* headlined as a "Crisis of Trust" at the BBC), Grade related the incident to similar contemporary issues in the media, such as quiz show scandals, and blamed an influx of young talent into the media industry who do not understand the importance of not telling lies to the audience in any show, no matter whether it is the news or a quiz show.

It was an audience of University of Westminster public relations undergraduates whose vote in the *PR Week* debate of February 2007 defeated the motion "public relations has a duty to tell the truth" which perhaps supports Grade's view. He emphasises (Grade, 2007) the importance of restoring the trust of audiences and gave the clear message to the media "You do not lie under any circumstances". However, there is the problem that some entertainment, especially that relating to topical events, does rely for its success on being economical with the truth. For example, some reality television programmes are carefully crafted to enhance their entertainment appeal.

So far as the relationship between public relations and journalism are concerned Grade does have a strong point. Questions such as the following need to be addressed. Should the source of a story be stated? May the reader be assumed to know that a story was from a public relations source? Does the literal truth of the story really matter or can the media user be assumed to suspend disbelief willingly in the interests of being entertained? Does the public relations practitioner need to take into account the public as well as the paymaster's interests or is that to apply the wrong sort of judgement to what the public relations and media are about? To what extent do all journalists need to be truthful to provide a balanced perspective?

There is also a potential problem of deception where public relations practitioners use front organisations (for example, allegedly the Iraqi National Congress, whose name has been closely associated with Burson-Marsteller). A front organisation is one where a pressure group speaks on behalf of a particular interest group but hides its power or financial relationship with that group so that what it says appears to be independent third party endorsement.

In the case of astroturfing a front organisation mimics what seems to be a grass-roots movement. Since the identity of the principal source of the communication is disguised, the lie or disinformation creates a problem of misplaced trust. When the identity of the principal is uncovered the public should be prepared to punish or reward communicators (individuals and organisations) for the personal integrity indicated by their behaviour. In the case of public relations the individual is sometimes the messenger or spokesperson but more importantly is responsible for the communication

strategy and crafting of individual communications. This penalty would be especially effective if used against public relations organisation that hide behind the myth that as paid mouths they are amoral technical experts who really have no personal tie with whatever their clients communicate.

It is argued that given a differentiation between "hard" and "soft" journalism and public relations it is possible to develop a model of journalism and public relations that resolves ethical questions that centre on issues of transparency, truth and trust and recognises the potentially dominant power of the recipient of journalistic and public relations communication. In short, that truth and trust are irrelevant for "soft" journalistic and public relations but are of crucial importance for the "hard" sort.

4. *Public relations and journalism: "truth" & "trust"*

"Truth" as a concept is a necessary condition of knowledge. However, it is also many faceted. For the layperson the success of "science" may be ascribed to its concern with and discovery of the truth. In that sense natural science may be taken as a benchmark for truth. However, a still strongly held principle of scientific propositions is that they should in principle be falsifiable (Popper, 1963). In practice scientists have given up the notion that their theories reveal absolute truth in any realist sense and now prefer to talk in terms of "truthlikeness". For science the logical problem is that there is no way of proving assertions about all possible cases. For example that all swans are white, as Popper (2004) pointed out, a single counter example is sufficient to disprove a universal proposition. Universals cannot be verified but may be falsified.

The history of scientific theories has often been one in which a theory is found to be lacking in some significant way and has either been modified or replaced by another that took a fresh perspective on the problem. That is not to say that science is not concerned with truth but rather that scientists accept the brute fact that its propositions are similar to rather than identical with "the truth" in any absolute sense. Scientific knowledge no longer provides the benchmark or examples of unequivocally true propositions but its theories are subject to empirical evidence. With the yard-stick of scientific theories discarded as a paradigm the concept of truth has become hazier but the criterion of empirical evidence remains vitally important.

That natural science does not deal in absolute truth would appear to allow significant wriggle room for those who feel generally uncomfortable with the notion of "truth". The approach of social epistemology is concerned with the social dimension of what can be known. On an extreme interpretation this approach effectively does away with distinctions between knowledge and belief. Questions of truth are reduced to "who" tells it rather than "what "one believes. Applied to the media, factual news reporting would appear to have no more intrinsic currency than a columnist's opinion.

The success of an empirical approach to scientific knowledge as it developed from the European Enlightenment has been that claims to the truth of an

7

assertion have been subject not only to the tests of logic and reason but also to empirical evidence. Eric Hobsbawm observed "the rise of 'postmodernist' intellectual fashions in Western universities…..which imply that all 'facts' claiming objective existence are simply intellectual constructions. In short, that there is no clear difference between fact and fiction. But there is, and for historians, even for the most militantly anti-positivist ones among us, the ability to distinguish between the two is absolutely fundamental" (Hobsbawm, 1993).

An alternative perspective to Popper is the realist paradigm developed by Bhaskar (1997) who argues that objects of scientific knowledge are not reducible to social constructions but have an independent reality in which the real is what is causally efficacious. However, despite significant difference between Bhaskar's position and Popper's, both agree on the crucial point that empirical evidence on the way the world is places a physical and logical constraint on what is possible. That is "hard truth" is not simply a matter of interpretation and that there are clear limits as to what can be regarded as "true". As Sokel and Bricourt (1998) observe, "One does not need to be a strict Popperian to realise that any theory must be supported, at least indirectly, by empirical evidence in order to be taken seriously".

A modern historical example of where ideology rather than empirical evidence was taken as the arbiter of truth is the biological theories and career of Tromfin Lysenko. (Roll-Hansen, 2005). Stalin's ideological and political support of Lysenko's 'barefooted scientist' Lamarkian teleological biological theories (in the face of overwhelming contrary empirical evidence) resulted not only in eminent biologists who rejected Lysenko's ideas being imprisoned in the Gulag but also to the starvation of probably millions of people.

The inadequacy of Lysenko as a scientist lay not in his contention that acquired characteristics were inheritable but in his refusal to admit the possibility of any evidence that would falsify his theories. There is a vital difference between his approach and that of modern geneticists who as Darwinists believe in natural selection as the mechanism for evolution but who accept the need to respond to contradictory empirical evidence. For example: the grandchildren of children who suffered in the Dutch famine following the second world war are smaller than their grandparents; statistical evidence from Swedish records is that the grandsons of men who have suffered famine in childhood are better adapted to dealing with food shortage than their grandfathers. It seems that events have in someway affected the DNA of one generation and caused change in a subsequent generation. Genetic scientists do not deny the evidence but regard it as facts that require explanation.

 In both the Dutch and the Swedish cases the evidence appears to support the model of an acquired characteristic being inherited. However, Darwinist natural scientists do not deny the evidence out of hand because it appears contrary to their fundamental scientific beliefs. For natural science the critical debate takes place mainly through peer reviewed articles (such as Landman, 1991). The possibility that a theory is in principle falsifiable is perhaps even more the touchstone of the empirical status of a theory than its predictive

power. Natural science progresses by its reference to empirical evidence rather than by adherence to ideology however attractive.

A central problem for using empirical evidence as the arbiter of truth is that often the evidence is not immediately available. A current biological issue is the safety and actual benefits of genetically modified plants. The "naturalness" of genetic modification was an issue even when achieved through selective breeding (Shakespeare, 1982). However, modern techniques, such as the use of a virus to transfer genetic material, that speed up the selection process are treated by European publics with caution because of their unknown possible unintended side effects. The way in which science develops is not simply a question of empirical evidence but also a product of social institutions.

Whereas modern natural scientists reject teleological explanations there is a place for that approach in the social sciences concerned with explaining institutions and the behaviour of people. That distinction also requires a different use of the notion of "rule" or "law" between the physical and social scientist. For the natural scientist at its strongest a "causal relationship" means constant conformity of the physical relationship between related events that is explicable by a theory that is testable by a crucial experiment whereas in social science sense "laws", "rules" and "conventions" may be interpretations and evaluated by a wholly different criteria that are non-positivist and often teleological.

In explaining human actions the teleological language of motives and intentions is perhaps (von Wright, 1971) more appropriate than causation in its sense in the natural sciences. However, for journalism and public relations questions of truth are concerned with factual assertions that are empirically verifiable in principle if not always immediately. However unlike natural scientists those professions are concerned with individual events rather than with universals. In that sense they have a similar relationship with hard truth as does the law. In the case of the law issues raised by participants' intentions is perhaps well illustrated by the judgement in the Spanners case (Chambers, 2008). In that case the empirical facts of who did what to whom and with what effect were not in dispute and the defences' case focussed on the intentions of the participants. In this paper the primarily concern is with problems centred on the notion of empirical truth of specific events not with social interpretation. That is not to say that questions of motives and intention are never relevant to public relations, journalism or the law but they are outside the ambit of the current discussion. Here we are concerned with truth as brute facts that are at least in principle empirically verifiable.

In terms of every-day and legal discourse, "true" and "truth" still have clearly definable uses. In courts of law people routinely attempt to distinguish between what is truthful from lies and deceit in order to determine what happened. Modern science reveals that the body in the Dr. Crippen case was male and consequently Crippen's conviction was unsafe. (Graef, 2008). If we are initially wrong or confused as to whether a claim is true the later addition of evidence can often clarify our judgement. In court a witness is still required

to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. However, in court false witness may be given or empirical evidence wrongly interpreted.

The truth of the evidence is central to the uncertainty surrounding the trial of Mervin Touchet, 2nd Earl of Castlehaven, for assisting in the rape of his own wife and for committing sodomy with his servants. Herrup's (1999) verdict on his trial and execution is that "His obscurity made any accusations against him plausible, his legal acuity (however fortuitous) made his acquittal dangerous, and his obstinacy made his death inevitable". In other words, was he was convicted on the basis of a construction or interpretation of a social context rather than by reference to objective verifiable evidence? In such legal cases an absence of "hard" evidence requires the jury to trust the word of one person against that of another.

Castlehaven's trial prompts the question whether the "facts" found by the jury were really a "hard truth" justified by what really happened or were they a "soft truth" of socially constructed reality? In the latter case the evidence against him was a tissue of lies constructed by his wife and son in order to frame him and his execution judicial murder. Significantly Herrup notes that "Prosecutorial recitations are lessons of applied social theory, not speculative exercises. Whether done cynically or sincerely, the simplest way to communicate with jurors is to remind them of what they already believe".

Early modern trials were less about proving than testing – testing the character of the defendant, the impartiality of the jury and the powers of repentance (Herrup, 1999). The character or social judgement of the integrity of the accused appears to have outweighed the objective evidence. Personal reputation could literally be a matter of life or death and in some cases perhaps still is. Children are still socialised through being told fables such as Aesop's tale of the boy who cried "wolf". In our relationships with other people we make judgements about the way the social world is. In terms of personal virtues someone who demonstrates a propensity to act with "integrity" is generally valued by others through having a good reputation ascribed.

As a moral virtue integrity is dissimilar from say "courage". To demonstrate courage one acts in a brave way in circumstances which challenge the action. Courage may for example be demonstrated by a soldier throwing his body on a grenade to protect comrades when an instinct for self-preservation may dictate putting a safe distance between oneself and the explosion. On the other hand personal integrity as a moral capacity is not demonstrated by a particular sort of act but rather by an association or group of principles brought together in a whole. A propensity to tell the truth would normally be included within this association of propensities or character traits of an individual.

Bernard Williams (Williams, 2002) observes that "Truthfulness implies a respect for the truth. This relates to both of the virtues that, I shall claim in the following chapters, are the two basic virtues of truth, which I shall call Accuracy and Sincerity: you do the best you can to acquire true beliefs, and what you say reveals what you believe". In terms of William's criteria, those

journalists and public relations practitioners who do not have a respect for the truth also lack what he identifies as virtues of accuracy and sincerity.

There may be, however, a variety of kinds of "integrity". For example a novelist or an actor may exhibit "artistic integrity" but the former does so by creating a fiction and the latter by creating a character. In both cases it is an illusion, impression or image that has been created. In neither case is what has been created "true" in its everyday empirical sense. However, both artists are concerned at least with creating a make-believe world that engages and perhaps entertains others. At their most revealing they may also realise eternal truths about the human condition. That is, their effect is in some way cathartic (Aristotle, 1996). In practice this is not a problem so long as one knows in which domain which one is operating. For example one would not challenge Jane Austen's veracity on the basis that she wrote *Mansfield Park* or Ian McKellen's because he portrayed *King Lear*.

We can cope with the fact that the characters and events Austen wrote about and McKellen portrays have meaning (intensions or connotation) but that they do not designate actual or real objects or events and so have no extension or denotation. That, what they were doing would not count as a lie or deceit to be judged by empirical criteria for truth. On the other hand someone who thought that Daniel Defoe was an eye-witness journalist rather than a novelist may be deceived by the *Journal of the Plague Year* into believing that the characters and events were fact rather than fiction; that they once had extension as well as intension and so were in principle empirically verifiable.

In his time Defoe was engaged in both journalism and public relations. It is perhaps significant that the subtle use of irony once landed Defoe in the pillory and attacked by both sides. The defence "Actually, I was only play acting" would seem rather weak for a defendant arrested for brandishing a gun in a bank and demanding that the cashier hand over money. Play-acting and irony out of context can be interpreted as deceit which may or may not be entertaining and may have lethal consequences if misinterpreted.

The problem of Defoe writing fiction in a journalistic style is similar to that of the modern documentary maker. Is the documentary simply a chronicle or a report of events or is it in some way also an artistic work which arouses the emotions and leads the viewer or listener to emotional insights? Michael Grade would appear to concur with the view that a documentary should adhere to the empirical truth (Dowell, 2007) but that would seem to distort what many acclaimed documentary makers who treat the genre as an art form are about. For documentaries, and historical accounts in a tradition stemming from Herodotus, there is an issue about the extent to which they should be regarded as an art form allowed artistic licence and the extent to which they constitute factual reporting. It is important that the audience understands the conventions of the genre in order to make sense of what they see and hear.

With the ease of digital manipulation the camera today can quite easily lie. The criterion of "hard truth" is often applied rigorously to photo-journalists but on the other hand British newspapers routinely remove body parts from

photographs of terrorist bomb outrages on the grounds of public taste and decency. The sight of disembodied heads, limbs and torsos apparently does not mix well with a full English breakfast.

For journalism there is also the issue of distinguishing fact from opinion. In practice blurring the distinction often makes for a more entertaining and therefore commercially viable story. Newspapers such as the *Sun* lay claim to telling hard news, with headlines such as "GOTCHA. Our lads sink gunboat and hole cruiser," or in the subsequent edition ""Did 1,200 Argies drown?". Rupert Murdoch was reported a saying that he didn't see the need to change the headline, which perhaps justifies *Private Eye's* spoof *Sun* headline "KILL AN ARGIE AND WIN A METRO". David Yelland (Marsh, 2008) admits that as the editor of the *Sun* "As soon as you start to look at both sides of an argument you know you are in the wrong job". That places obvious limits on a publication exercising a well founded and balanced concern for the public interest.

Often the truth is not "soft" but neither is it "hard" in Dowell's (2007) sense of empirical truth. However, the modern apparent prevalence of "soft" truth stemming from entertainment genres such as docudrama and reality television has tended to cloud the picture. Sometimes the genre is not transparent, which may add to its value as entertainment. However, fairy-stories traditionally ape the truth by beginning "once upon a time" rather than "the events in this tale are entirely fictitious". Often it is not entirely clear into which category, balanced factual account or fictitious entertainment, many docudramas and newspaper reports fall.

The naïve view that writers must be devoted to separating fact from opinion and telling the truth needs to be qualified. Fiction writers, such as poets or novelists, may be using a fabricated story to express a truth about the human condition. In that case we may concur with Coleridge's comment - "That willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith". In order to gain the intrinsic value from a piece of writing we may need to turn off our empirical or common sense critical faculties. In a similar way, we may be willing to suspend disbelief in order to be entertained by a joke. Since much of the joke is in the telling, Hoffnung's story of the wheelbarrow full of bricks would fall flat, if when he began someone interrupted by asking "but is it true?" A story may contain very little literal truth but the point of listening is not for information but to be amused or entertained by a confection and where audience trust in the journalist is irrelevant. A significant problem for readers of much of contemporary British journalism is the challenge of distinguishing "soft" entertainment from "hard" journalism.

The reason for reading some journalists is for pure entertainment. We trust them to write something entertaining, regardless of its actual truth and do not judge them on their factual accuracy. In that case they are more fiction writers than news reporters. Sometimes the stories originate from public relations practitioners, as in the startling 1986 *Sun* headline "Freddy Star ate my Hamster". So far as entertainment is concerned the doings of soap opera characters provide public entertainment that spills over from the fiction of

television to news reports in the media. In the case of the big brother house, is what is shown to be read as fact or fiction? It is often difficult, perhaps impossible, with some newspaper pieces for the reader to deconstruct the genre to which a particular piece belongs.

One wonders whether the readers would be any less entertained if the soap opera characters were avatars and the reports of their "real life" doings pure fantasy. However, there is a vague or fuzzy line between the fantasy world of soap opera and the media portrayal of the lives of celebrities. Celebrities seem to have a dual function of providing entertainment as well as providing a reality check that a life style to which some aspire actually exists. In that sense disbelief is partly lifted but the expectation is that what the journalist says is empirically true so that the real possibility of the celebrity's lifestyle may be endorsed.

It is perhaps at the blurred edge where fantasy and reality are not clearly distinguished that problems of the public interest arise. For example, what makes it permissible to persuade other people that you have a spray that will engender trust in others? Or if the claim is that eating a particular food will protect one from getting cancer? What if the person being persuaded is a child or adult with reduced mental faculties? Is there a point at which there should be a declaration that a claim is not empirical truth but fiction? Is there a need for transparency in the claims made by journalists and public relations practitioners, or would that destroy the enjoyment that comes when we suspend disbelief in order to be entertained? These are apparently difficult cases but perhaps most could be dissolved given a sufficiently critical and informed audience evaluating what is said by public relations practitioners and journalists.

In his last book (Williams, 2002) Bernard Williams identifies "two currents of ideas that are very prominent in modern thought and culture". The first is a pervasive suspiciousness against being duped and looking for the underlying rationale behind the surface of what is said. The second is a pervasive suspicion of truth itself. "Whether there is such a thing; if there is, whether it can be more than relative or subjective or something of that kind". In identifying those features of contemporary society Williams has identified a significant problem for us when considering the relationship between truth, trust, journalism and public relations.

In the case of both public relations and journalism the related notions of trust and truth are central to their professional activities. At a simple level most journalists require that the reader believes their story is true; most public relations practitioners aim to gain a primary public's trust through a belief that what is said is true. It is possible to use the distinction to modify an established argument (Berkley and Chadwick, 1995) to the effect that truth telling is a constuitive end of "hard" journalism that distinguishes it as a practice from entertainment, or "soft" journalism. However, as Williams implies, a central concern of both media and public relations publics is that of protecting themselves against being duped. Winning trust, (despite promises

that a spray of oxytocin will almost magically immediately bestow it) is a complex business that engages truth.

In considering the relationship between truth and trust Hollis (Hollis, 1998) identifies personal integrity as key evidence for assessing another's trustworthiness. He remarks "Whether there is finally a difference between predictive and normative trust is not straightforward. There is clearly some difference between my predictive expectation that you will be punctual (since you always are) and my normative expectation that you will (since courtesy demands it). The one prompts me to trust you and the other entitles me to do so. They may come together when we reflect that whether you will do as courtesy demands depends on your character and circumstances, and so on your desires and beliefs".

Lehrer (1997) draws our attention to the fact that "trustworthy" is not an absolute concept. It is not the case that someone is either trustworthy or they are not. He notes "When a speaker affirms that someone is trustworthy, one understands the speaker as affirming that the person in question is trustworthy for the listener to whom the remark is made. This is important because trustworthiness is a relative notion in the sense that a person can be trustworthy for one person and not for another…" This distinction is important because it may help to explain why a ("soft") public relations practitioner who publicly boasts of lying is still able to survive in his professional role. However, that boast also conjures the memory of Tom Johnston's cartoon where the careers advisor says "Wiggins, you live in a fantasy world of lies and deceit, have you ever considered public relations?"

In different areas of ("hard") public relations an admission of being untrustworthy would probably terminate a career or a business. Trust is the basis, perhaps a precondition, for the development of a mutually beneficial relationship (Parsons, 2004). A very robust approach to truth and trust tends to be taken in some business areas such as the financial sector. The auditors and accountants Arthur Andersen lost reputation, credibility and trust in the backwash of the collapse of Enron and as a result a major firm employing thousands of people worldwide collapsed virtually overnight.

In the financial and commercial sector transparency is often given as a key prerequisite for gaining trust. In the fifteenth century merchants swearing an oath had to do so with their hands above board and in plain view so they could not cross their fingers. For a public relations practitioner engaged in investor relations compromised professional integrity could spell ruin. However, some commentators such as Anthony Hilton now cast doubt on the integrity of corporate communicators in a culture that has moved from one of personal relationships to that of corporate institutional selling.

In her Reith lectures on trust O'Neil (O'Neill, 2002) commented "Transparency certainly destroys secrecy: but it may not limit the deception and deliberate misinformation that undermine relations of trust. If we want to restore trust we need to reduce deception and lies rather than secrecy. Some sorts of secrecy indeed support deception, others do not". That is an important distinction

because sometimes transparency can blind observers to a deception. Company published accounts are communications where the information to be provided is closely specified by law. However, the apparent transparency of the information failed to safeguard an apparently informed public from the deceptions of creative accounting (Smith, 1996). Transparency is not sufficient to protect against deception. If a problem is that transparency encourages unjustified trust how far is it worthwhile achieving?

In important matters of gaining trust the deceiver is parasitic on the teller of "hard" truth. In the long run one may often with the help of additional and corroborating information be able to discern the "hard" truth despite attempts at deception and cover up. However, perhaps it is for the historian rather than the investigative journalist to unravel the "hard truth" over current mysteries such as operation copper green (Hirsh, 2004). Perhaps for the "hard" news reporter it is a largely a matter of luck in finding an individual with the integrity and courage to whistle blow (in the vein of Deep Throat or Joe Darby) that allows knowledge of some events to enter the public domain while they are still current. Through the adept use of the shredder and the delete button it is perhaps likely that much of major significance will never reach the public record either as history or through investigative journalism.

It has been argued that journalists' revelations are not necessarily in the public interest. An argument put forward by O'Neill in her Reith lectures is challenged by Peter Osborne (Osborne, 2006). He claims that "O'Neill maintains that the power of the media in the twenty-first century is a danger to society because it destroys the trust that must exist if institutions are to work". He concludes "At the heart of her argument lies an overwhelming arrogance: that voters and the users of public services are not fit to know the truth and must be content to rely on the judgement of an elite who know better than they do what is good for them". Osborne draws attention to the relationship between transparency, truth, trust and public interest which need to be dimensions in considering the relationship between public relations and journalism. An essential role for "hard" journalism is reporting and commenting on issues of public concern where revelations may destroy public complacency grounded in misplaced trust.

5. *Public Relations and Journalism: virtuous expediency*

Institutions such as newspapers, broadcasting companies and public relations consultancies are no more than legal fictions manifested through human agents. It is individuals who are trusted or not as moral agents. A suggested approach to reforming the professional behaviour of some BBC journalists is through the provision of ethical training for journalists together with a stronger regime of monitoring and enforcement. A similar regime could perhaps be adopted by public relations consultancies that wanted to be above suspicion. However, an organisation is a fiction and its actual ethics and values typically reflect those of its dominant coalition. If individuals lower in the hierarchy are seen to misbehave and are justly punished (rather than simply scape-goated for making operational the actual values of their superiors who then disown them) that sends a clear signal about organisational values.

15

For "hard" journalism and public relations transparency of the identity of the communicator is of paramount importance. That which matters from the perspective of the media user or public relations audience is the identity of the individual communicating. Audiences and publics should disregard "soft" communicators and judge the extent to which a message should be given credence from the perceived trustworthiness of the individual making the communication. This would preclude "soft" public relations practitioners hiding behind the "cleft stick" that they were simply advocates for their client's cause and so avoiding moral responsibility for what was communicated. Public relations practitioners sometimes claim a parallel with diplomacy, that one is an honest man sent abroad to lie for his country. It may be bad form to execute the herald or messenger but in a metaphorical sense to preserve the integrity of "hard" public relations it is a necessity.

An individual journalist with a by-line can be identified and may stand or fall on what (s) he says or endorses. In 1985 Hugh Trevor Roper, an eminent historian and director of *the Times,* endorsed as authentic the Hitler diaries. His obituary in *the Independent* began "LORD DACRE of Glanton, the historian who as Hugh Trevor-Roper authenticated the fake "Hitler Diaries", has died." The fake diaries were to be published in the *Sunday Times*. At a stroke, his reputation was damaged catastrophically and with it the trust by many in his professional judgment. His professional reputation was compromised severely, perhaps irreparably. It is personal reputation that both journalists and public relations practitioners should put at risk where they trade professionally on their personal integrity as individuals.

A similar situation to the fake Hitler's diaries case may occur in public relations where an individual investor relations officer makes a critical error in what is said and so forfeits trust in his or her judgment. However, there are perhaps more apparently difficult cases where transparency is absent. The identity of the public relations practitioner or the journalist responsible for a communication is not always on the public record and this lack of transparency means that normal sanctions of withdrawal of reputation or trust cannot be applied so there is at best a weak basis for the public to give credence to what is said.

It may be argued that commercial confidentiality prevents public relations practitioners from being transparent in all the work they do for clients. However, that leaves open room for the suspicion that they may, say, undertake propaganda for foreign regimes and organisations that is not really in the British public interest. However, under a precautionary principle, where the identity of the communicator is not transparent then assent by the public should be with-held. As a corollary the prudent spectator would reserve judgement on any communication where the identity of the person communicating is not certain and clear. If the message does not come from an identifiable individual who is a trusted source then it should be treated with suspicion and assumed untrue in the absence of reliable independent corroboration (and since people are sometimes mistaken even a trusted source is suspect).

At present it is possible for an individual journalist or public relations practitioner to hide behind the cloak of anonymity. Whenever communicating the individual journalist or public relations practitioner should put his or her personal reputation at risk and ideally only those with an adequate reputation would be regarded as credible. Audiences could then, on the basis of the communicator's record, decide whether or not to trust communications from individual journalists or public relations practitioners. In order to protect their personal reputations both professions would have a special interest in verifying that what they said was true.

The contention is that questions of credibility and trust only relate to "hard" public relations practitioner and journalists. Also, that the credibility of the "soft" varieties" is irrelevant. What is required is a robust approach to the professions of both journalism and public relations where the credibility and integrity of individuals is crucial for the in "hard" variety and the "soft" sort dismissed as purely entertainment not raising issues of trust.

Power lies with the public or audience who bestow their trust or belief not with the communicator who has to earn it. The present decline in public trust in broadcast media is more an opportunity than a threat. However, in order to realise the potential there is a need for those publics to distinguish a favourable impression created by a slick presentation from what is actually credible. It is therefore essential that the publics are able to make well founded judgements of what is communicated.

People will not always judge others accurately. There will be false positives and false negatives of deceivers believed and truth tellers disbelieved but that is not to undermine the validity of the approach of encouraging honesty and integrity in significant communication. Some people are simply gullible and give their belief and trust too easily without evaluating and weighing the evidence. However, access to the objective evidence is not always straightforward and often the way to interpret the evidence at a specific time in not wholly clear, as is perhaps the current case with genetically modified crops and global warming. That uncertainty makes it even more important that relevant communications from public relations and journalism are reliable.

At the "hard" end, both journalist and public relations practitioner are dealing with matters of public interest. At the "soft" end then the journalists are concerned with producing comics for adults and the relationship that they have with faceless public relations practitioners is neither here nor there. It is important that individuals as sources of information are transparent so that the credibility of what is said may be assessed in relations to his or her reputation. In particular, the public needs to apply the rule, never trust a liar. In this context lies would include anything intended to deceive including weasel words. Journalists and public relations communicators need to be regarded in the same fashion. That way serious ("hard") public relations practitioners and journalists would have a keen professional reason for not misleading their audiences.

The prevailing model of the relationship between the media and publics who use it for information and entertainment is that those public are consumers. However, a useful distinction is drawn between consumers and citizens by Gabriel and Lang (1995). They note that "Choosing as a citizen leads to a very different evaluation of alternatives from choosing as a consumer". Citizens, they claim, have: to argue their views; defer to the majority; balance personal rights and duties; play and active role in the community; engage with the views of others. They conclude "As a citizen, one must confront the implications of one's choices, their meaning and their moral value". What this model does reject is the idea of the consumer fulfilling his or her role as a citizen through the exercise of choice in purchasing. At its core being a citizen is a moral function whereas being a consumer is not. A corollary of that relationship is that whereas the potential power of an individual as a consumer depends on personal wealth or spending capacity as a citizen each has an equal right.

The distinction of the media publics between consumer and citizens is a powerful analytical tool. It may be that in the cases where the communication is pure entertainment and the truth "soft" then the consumer role is perhaps appropriate for those that use the media. However, where the truth is "hard" then there is a case for arguing that role of responsible adults needs to be that of "citizen" when using the media. However, that is not to idealise the role of the citizen was as consumer also exerts the power of the purse.

There is a case for the introduction of special legal protection against deceit for the young and mentally infirm in the case of selling but in other ways they will remain vulnerable. However, for citizens at large education has role by encouraging a more rigorous and questioning attitude towards both journalism and public relations. To that extent the public will get the media and public relations it deserves. It also requires publics to reward communicators with integrity and punish individuals who lack it. In terms of the media that may be achieved by citizen readers no longer buying the newspaper or watching the programme as when the *Sun* was consumers boycotted in Liverpool after reporting on the 1998 Hillsborough disaster.

Conclusion

The relationship between public relations and journalism is worth considering for the practical reason that both professions have a significant influence on the modern world. Also, consideration of the relationship between journalism and public relations provides insights into the nature of public relations. Much of the debate on the relationship between public relations and journalism recently conducted in the media has been based on simplified stereotypes of both professions where the protagonists have constructed a man of straw to be demolished. The characterisation of the other profession has tended to be more a confirmation of the writer's past prejudices than a realistic attempt to move the debate forward.

In the debate between journalist and public relations practitioners there has been a lot of name calling but not a lot of hard analysis. There is a need to

develop analytical tools that help clarify the issues. It is also important to avoid platitudes because the problems are complex and entertainment value is not a pre-requisite of coverage. Contributions to popular current affairs programmes such as Radio 4's *Today* programmes sometimes cut short the discussion because a point is seen as too complex or difficult for the listeners to grasp, which is perhaps why they may be better treated in academic journal articles. In the popular media the emphasis is typically on instant accessibility at the expense of considered thought and analysis, although this may be partially overcome through more sustained coverage on accompanying web pages (which may herald a new style of hybrid-media) that may encourage better informed judgements by the public so long as "hard" journalists replace those who simply collate others' postings.

The "hard" "soft" distinction is important for defending the reputations of both professions. As a profession public relations' reputation stands to be damaged when the activities of a practitioner of "soft" public relations are regarded as representing all public relations and "soft" journalists label them as "P.R. Guru". A similar distortion may have occurred for journalism when Julia Hobsbawm attracted "hard" journalists to the advisory board of her editorial intelligence forum. Editorial Intelligence is suited to "soft" journalism and "soft" public relations. It is at the "hard" end of both journalism and public relations where empirical evidence and a concern for the truth as well as personal integrity are significant in determining a personal reputation for credibility.

It is vital, therefore, that both "hard" journalists and public relations practitioners act with personal professional integrity. That includes a full regard for the truth but it also includes not developing relationships with members of the other profession that compromise the professional work of the other. However, reciprocal truth, trust and transparency are necessary for them to co-operate in their arms length day to day relationships. For both journalism and public relations the personal integrity of "hard" practitioners is not an optional extra or feel good factor, it lies at the very essence of their professional practice.

Finally, the need is for an informed sophisticated public of citizens with power as consumers capable of recognising various media genres and public relations practitioners for what they are and able to interpret and evaluate them appropriately. They also need to distinguish whether their personal role in relation to what is communicated is that of consumer or citizen. Where the true source of a communication is not transparent then a default position of public mistrust is not a crisis for society but is rather a glimmer of hope that audiences and publics have recognised the need to be wary of what and in whom they believe. The effect of greater individual accountability for both public relations practitioners and journalists would be preferable to the general distrust and disregard in which both professions are held currently. To safeguard the public interest we need "hard" public relations practitioners and journalists with integrity but also an audience of vigilant citizens.

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