

THE ENTERPRISE PRESS

Breaking Point

Tensions have reached a boiling point between conservative working-class people in your area and the many gay residents who recently moved in. Conflict has been escalating and recently became violent after a gay pride parade brought hundreds of people from across the state to town. About 300 people marched in the event while other individuals and groups protested along the parade route — many of whom believe homosexuals are sexually deviant and harmful to society. The parade quickly degenerated into a mob scene with protesters shouting epithets and even throwing bottles that seriously injured some in the parade. Police are investigating the case of one gay couple who were severely beaten as they tried to leave the parade. A few days later, a story moves across the state wire about a gay soccer coach who was arrested and charged with molesting several players on his peewee soccer team. The story has real news value and under normal circumstances would run under the state briefs section but you're afraid that it might cause more hostility. Do you run this factually accurate story despite the possibility that it may incite violence?

This scenario is designed not only to provoke a discussion of ethics and decision-making, but also to help you understand the issues involved in journalism decisions. Please discuss this scenario and consider a number of solutions.



What harm could be done by running the soccer coach story? By not running it?



Does the newspaper have a responsibility to protect people by withholding news?



What information should or should not be included in the article if the story is run?

Mercury News



Through the Camera Lens

Each week your newspaper publishes a photo commentary titled Point of View. The pictures are generally offbeat, one-photograph documentaries. The goal of the feature is to run photos — without captions — that capture a moment in the lives of ordinary people. Last Sunday your publication printed a wedding photo with newlyweds feeding one another cake. The only extraordinary thing about the photo was that the couple in the picture was two men. During the next week, your newspaper is flooded with complaints and letters to the editor from readers who don't feel the photo was appropriate. The response has been so strong that you feel you should acknowledge what readers are saying. On the other hand, the couple pictured do not want to comment or respond. As far as they are concerned, they agreed to share a moment in their life, not make a political statement. In order to present fair coverage, you will need to actively seek responses from those not offended by the photograph. How do you balance these conflicting issues?

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Does the newspaper have an obligation to respond to the criticism?



How does the issue of balance affect the newspaper's response?

The State Chronicle

Disclosure

Your newspaper publishes a weekly scoop column highlighting local and state government news. During a conversation with one of her sources, a reporter discovers that a local couple donated \$50,000 to the city for youth outreach programs. Unbeknownst to the reporter, the donors asked that their contribution be kept anonymous. The name of the couple runs in the column; they are subsequently harassed with solicitation phone calls and their home is vandalized. The couple, who is not wealthy, is furious with the city and with the newspaper. After being robbed and harassed, they finally decide to withdraw their donation. The loss of funds will be a blow to many newly planned programs. What does the newspaper do?

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How do you cover the story for the newspaper?



Would you have run the original story?



When can ordinary citizens demand privacy from the newspaper ?

THE DAILY TIMES

Private Life

A female producer at one of the TV stations in your town has come forward accusing a local television host of sexual harassment. Hours after charges were filed, the local television stations and competing newspapers have jumped on the story — reporting her allegations in great detail. Your paper assigns an investigative reporter to work on the story. The reporter uncovers some interesting details about the producer's past. It turns out that while a high school athlete, she accused a teacher of having sex with her. The teacher was dismissed and although no details of the case were ever made public, some suggest that she made up her story to exact revenge upon the teacher. Close friends say it was one of the most painful experiences of her life and beg you not to make it public. What do you do?

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Is it unfair to the TV host to withhold the information about the accuser's past?



What criteria would you use to make the decision?



In such a case, what information about the producer should be considered "off limits?"

THE PRESS

Teen Scene

The use of the drug Ecstasy is growing among the teen-age population. A young education reporter is working on a story about the effectiveness of drug abuse resistance education (D.A.R.E.). The reporter got permission from a local high school to interview students about these classes. During his interviews, the reporter asked if Ecstasy was popular among local teens and what effect, if any, the classes had on its use. Several students named hangouts where they bought and used Ecstasy. The reporter checked out the story and after some further reporting, you run a story describing how extensive drug use is and how ineffectual the program seems to be. After the story runs, parents and school officials call the newspaper saying that the story is one-sided and makes the program look bad. They say the story even encourages kids to use drugs by telling them where to buy them and making it seem like everyone is doing it. They demand that you run a second story interviewing students who have not used drugs and who can be positive role models. How do you respond?

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Was it irresponsible of the newspaper to include information kids might use to locate drugs? If such information were excluded, would it undermine the story's credibility?



Does the newspaper have an obligation to portray positive role models for children to balance the coverage?

THE ENTERPRISE PRESS

Front Page Politics

Your newspaper will publish a 40-inch profile on each candidate in the upcoming state senate race. The first installment about the Republican candidate's political and private life runs this week. During the interview process, an ex-husband — who also managed her campaigns early in her career — mentions that she had an abortion in the late 1970s. He also furnishes substantial evidence, including supporting medical documentation. The candidate has been outspoken concerning her opposition to abortion, so this new information doesn't fit in with her voting record and policies. But she has refused to comment. Is this information part of her private life or does the public have a right and need to know?

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Should the newspaper include the information in the profile? Why or why not?



Is the supporting documentation a private medical record? How was it obtained?



How could running the story affect the candidate's campaign? Is this unfair?