

**The Good, The Bad and The Morally
Grey:
The Ethics of Journalism in Film**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the portrayal of journalists in feature films and treats the films as cultural artefacts, which represent many of the prevailing attitudes and public expectations of the contemporary news media. It considers three films *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), *Lions For Lambs* (2007) and *State of Play* (2009) and uses three ethical frameworks, John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism, Immanuel Kant's Deontological ethics and the Society of Professional Journalist's Code of Ethics to closely examine the actions of the journalists. After applying these frameworks to the films, the thesis examines the ethical framework favoured by filmmakers and analyses the work of these journalists as indicative of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the contemporary news media in the popular imagination. The thesis discusses how films containing journalists as characters shape public expectations of their real life counterparts and if there are indeed any suitable recommendations that can be applied as best practice to the work of journalists in the evolving news media industries.

Statement of Original Authorship

I certify that:

- i. The work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.
- ii. The thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged.
- iii. All information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signed:

Melinda Law
October 2010

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Chapter One: Introduction

Anne Collins: My dad did warn me about politicians. Only people he hated more were...journalists.
Cal McAffrey: Smart man
State of Play (2009)

Lynda Ghiglione wrote in 1990 that “people love to hate the journalist” (in McNair 2010: 9), demonstrating a “long-standing cultural schizophrenia in public attitudes” (McNair 2010: 9) towards journalists. And yet, since the majority of people around the world have not “witness[ed] a journalist in action” (Saltzman n.d: 41), where does this “cultural schizophrenia” (McNair 2010: 9) come from? The short answer is it originates in popular representations of journalism and the specific focus of this thesis is concerned with popular cinema.

Hollywood has had a long and continuous fascination with journalists and their work and has been “one of the main sources of the representation of journalism in western popular culture” (McNair 2010: 13). Indeed, according to the *Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture* (hereafter IJPC) project from University of Southern California, between 2000 and September 2010 alone, there have been 3448 films around the world that have contained a character who works as a journalist (IJPC 2010). Indeed, McNair argues that journalists make good subjects for feature films because the occupation can generate narratives, involving dramatic plot lines that confront trouble and corruption and, as a result, “expose the truth, painful as it may be, with the full support of society” (2010: 25-26; Good 2008: 5). This category of films projects a particular *dramatis personae* image of the role of the journalist and comments on the perceived triumphs and problems with the news media in that contemporary society. It has been argued that these films “absorb [society’s]

changing moods and anxieties and reflect them back to their audiences” (McNair 2010: 4), reinforcing the society’s views of the news media, which therefore makes them a significant object of study. While these kinds of notions of naive reflection do not survive serious media studies, these films not only regale audiences with tales of courage or emphasise the flaws in the contemporary news media, but these attitudes are absorbed by the public and applied to their real life journalistic counterparts. When the reputation of the news media is “steadily declining” (Singer 2010: 119) and “trust rests largely on...reputation” (Singer 2010: 199), is it possible that journalists cannot live up to the high standards set by their filmic counterparts?

This thesis aims to examine the journalism ethics displayed in three films and determine what is deemed ethically acceptable according to the filmmakers, outline the expectations of journalists in these films and examine if these standards are appropriate to be adapted to best practice journalism. This project uses three broad ethical frameworks, John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism, Immanuel Kant’s Deontological ethics and the Society of Professional Journalist’s (hereafter referred to as SPJ) Code of Ethics to undertake an ethical-textual analysis of the chosen films, *Good Night and Good Luck* (2004), *Lions For Lambs* (2007) and *State of Play* (2009).

As a field of study, the examination of representations of journalists and their ethics in feature films is underdeveloped. There are only a few studies that focus on journalists as a cultural figure that need to be examined (McNair 2010; Good 2000; Good 1989; Ehrlich 2006; Ghiglione & Saltzman 2005; IJPC project 2010). However, these studies focus predominantly on the construction of the journalist as a

cultural phenomenon and genre trope and do not examine the ethical principles or concepts that are represented in these films. Indeed, in research for this thesis, no studies were located which solely have this focus, or use it on the scale of this thesis, which examines the ethics displayed by the filmic journalists as they go about their everyday work. Some literature on ethical theory and practical journalism ethics do use films as case studies from which they launch into an ethical discussion and inquiry, but the ethics of the journalists are not analysed in their own right.

If indeed, in these films, journalists are constructed using several populist accounts of the role of journalists in society, then by examining the ethics of the journalists in these films, we may find clues as to why the public are disillusioned with the current news media because they are not fulfilling the public's expectations, as expressed through popular culture, most particularly film. This is not to say that film audiences are easily duped and are simply blindly absorbing the messages in the films, akin to a media effects model of understanding audiences¹, but it highlights the significance of these cultural artefacts as objects of study. Moreover, and perhaps more likely, these films are microcosms representing the key problems that are most pertinent to the news media of the day.

¹ This model assumes that the audience are a passive entity "being acted upon by media" (Webster 1998: 193) and that "the power of the media...produce detrimental effects on individuals" (Webster 1998: 193). I acknowledge that the audience brings "their own interpretative skills to the texts they encounter" (Webster 1998: 194). This concept is explored further and dealt with in the methodology chapter.

Rationale for Film Selection

In order to restrict the potential limitless scope of analysis, the thesis will focus only on three films. All three films, *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), *Lions For Lambs* (2007) and *State of Play* (2009) were released in the last six years and are from a similar historical context, which provides more points of comparison and, as explained in the methodology chapter, limits the possible number of readings. Since they are very recent films, they have yet to be widely analysed in critical material. The little work that has been undertaken on journalists in films uses well recognised journalism films from the 1970s and 1980s, like *All the President's Men*, (1976) *Absence of Malice* (1981) and *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982) to support their arguments of character construction.

Furthermore, the three films chosen are all dramas. Dramas were intentionally favoured over other genres for two reasons. Firstly, the journalist characters in other film genres, like comedies and action films, are usually very brief caricatures, which represent the perceived problems and perfections of the media at that time. In the *Spiderman* trilogy, editor J. Jonah Jameson simply yells at his workers about getting stories that will sell newspapers, while Ron Burgundy in *Anchorman* (2004) is more concerned about his looks, his rating as the Number One news anchor and “staying classy” than actually doing any research or reporting.

In a drama, the journalist characters are more likely to be completing their work because their profession “generates the incidents and narratives that make a good movie” (McNair 2010: 25) and, as a “licensed exposé”, journalists can “investigate scandal, cover-ups, corruption, crime” (McNair 2010: 25) which, by

their nature, lend themselves to drama over other genres, and work in and through popular imagination.

Secondly, the journalists in comedies or action films are not usually shown working as journalists and their professional identity is secondary to the plot, merely allowing them to be in situations that other professions could not. In *How To Lose A Guy In Ten Days* (2004), the main protagonist Andy's position as a journalist simply enables her to be writing a "dating how-to in reverse" and the main focus of the story remains on the romantic relationship between Andy and Ben, not her work as a journalist. And in *The Good German* (2006), the fact that George Clooney is a journalist allows him to be in post-war Germany reporting on the Potsdam Peace Conference, even though the story turns into a murder mystery, where his character is more of a detective than a journalist.

When the professional identity of the journalist character is a primary element of the film's plot, viewers are more likely to see them *working* as a journalist. Seeing the journalists at work is a necessary element in order for a film analysis examining their standards of professional ethics to occur. However, this does not mean that these cinematic interpretations of journalists are 'true to life'. They are still fictional, with the excitement and drama heightened for story and commercial success.

Furthermore, *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), *Lions For Lambs* (2007) and *State of Play* (2009), were also chosen because the journalist characters in the films are constructed differently and are ethically emblematic of three different types

of journalists. In *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), Edward R. Murrow, Fred Friendly and the *See It Now* team are heroes, in *Lions For Lambs* (2007), Janine Roth and her editor Howard are villains and Cal McAffrey and Della Frye in *State of Play* (2009) are strongly coded as ambivalent in their ethics. In a sense, these are generalisations and to some extent, all the journalists in these films have both unethical and redeemable qualities in their characters². These will be explored in greater detail in the film analyses.

Lastly, all these films are Hollywood produced, mainstream cinema. The decision was made to keep the analysis to popular Hollywood films because expanding the film selection to those produced in other cultural centres would have widened the scope of the project so that it could not be finished within the required time frame.

Chapter Outline

This thesis will explore four main fields of literature as a base from which to start the textual analysis. Broadly, these sections are ethical philosophy, the public expectations of journalists, journalists in film and textual analysis methodologies.

The ethical philosophy section contains a brief outline of Utilitarianism and Deontological ethics and highlights the main concepts in these two theories as they relate to the textual analysis. It examines Mill and Kant's original texts as well as the work of ethical studies commentators like Crook (2010), Black (2010) and Klaidman

² McNair makes a similar point that categorising journalists on screen can be difficult because "as filmmakers know, the most interesting characters tend to combine elements of both" (McNair 2010: 48). However, McNair's focus is not on ethical constructions, but rather analyses journalists as generic tropes, which embody the "debates about the state of the news media" (McNair 2010: 5).

and Beauchamp (1987). It also includes an analysis of the SPJ Code of Ethics and an outline of the main sections and what each contains. It outlines the rationale as to why these philosophies and codes were chosen over others.

The public expectations section examines the role of mythmaking in film and the expectations that the public hold of the news media's role in society, namely as a watchdog over government activity. These roles are classified in many different ways in the literature, but Lule (2001), Christians et al. (2009) and Curran (2000) all assert similar values, each emphasising the importance of the news media as a watchdog on government power and information provider for the public. The section also explores the social responsibility theory of the press, as developed by Peterson (1963) and Rosen (1999), that arose in the early twentieth century and how the roles outlined under that theory are often those used in films.

The journalists in film section outlines how journalists are usually portrayed in films and how ethical discussions of these films usually occur. It examines how journalists are portrayed as heroes and villains in the work of Good (1989), Ehrlich (2006) and McNair (2010), and how they embody comments about the news media through their admirable qualities and flaws.

Lastly, the Literature Review contains an outline of the methodology that will be used in this thesis. De Vreese's understanding of framing (2005) is one of the main methodological concepts used in the thesis. I also use strategies explored by McKee (2003) to limit the possible number of readings of the films to ensure my aims are fulfilled within the parameters of the thesis.

The film analysis chapter will then follow, which is divided into three parts, each part referring to one of the chosen films.

Studies like this one which examine the public expectations of journalists as represented in cultural constructions will always be important. Films about journalists and the news media “allow filmmakers to engage with substantial social issues, and important public debates...through characters who resonate in the public imagination” (McNair 2010:28). By examining these populist depictions, we can continue to identify the public’s main concerns with the performance of the news media and, at the very least, attempt to identify possible solutions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Ethical Philosophy

In order to complete the proposed analysis of the films, an examination of ethical philosophy and codes of ethics and their role in journalism needs to take place. The body of literature on media ethics is so vast that it cannot all be covered in this thesis. Therefore, the following section will include a brief summary of the two chosen ethical philosophies, Utilitarianism and Deontological ethics, since they are the main tools of textual analysis in the thesis. It will also include an analysis using a representative professional code of ethics, the SPJ Code of Ethics, and the debates that surround the validity of these codes. Any other ethical issues that are particularly pertinent to the films of this thesis will be discussed as part of the textual analysis when required.

There are, as Crook notes, “three broad traditions of media ethical discourse: the deontological; the consequential; and the virtuous” (2010: 156). Due to time and space limitations, only two ethical theories from the deontological and consequentialist schools will be discussed here. For a useful overview of the key features of the main ethical philosophies, Crook’s summary (2010) is reproduced in Appendix One. This project, in discussing the application of deontological and consequential approaches to film, will draw on John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism and Kantian Deontological ethics as the main sources of analysis. These two approaches have been chosen because, as Elliott and Ozar note, while John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant are not the only influential ethical philosophers, “their primary concerns and methods resonate with the public and with the social practices of journalism” (2010: 19). My study supports this assertion and as such, only focuses

on the work of those two philosophers. These theories were also chosen because they each focus on a different stage of the decision making process: Utilitarianism focuses on the consequences of actions to validate their ethical nature, while Deontological ethics focus on the actions, or means, employed to initiate those consequences. In the thesis, I am not suggesting that these approaches are opposites, but instead conclude that they can produce different actions as a result of what they consider important.

Utilitarianism is a specific form of consequentialism (West 2006: 1) which evaluates actions by their utility: “the degree to which they have better consequences than the alternatives” (West 2006:1). For John Stuart Mill, the leading utilitarian, “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness” (2006: 68). Put simply, “the utilitarian doctrine is, that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end” (Mill 2006: 90) and actions that do not promote happiness are deemed unethical. When following Utilitarianism, “the fundamental moral principle must treat the happiness or interests of each person equally” (Postema 2006: 31) and actions are considered just “if [their] overall effect advances the happiness or general welfare of the majority of persons in society” (Crook 2010: 169), which is called the *Greatest Happiness Principle*. For Mill, this means that the utilitarian standard is “not the agent’s own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness together” (2006: 71), so that “the world in general is immensely a gainer by it” (2006: 71).

Significantly, for this thesis, the language used by Mill, Crook and Postema in describing the Greatest Happiness Principle is similar to the language used by commentators when describing journalists who act in the public interest. The term

‘public’ here has a specific connotation in discussions of journalism’s professional ethics (Elliott & Ozar 2010: 11) and usually refers to the “whole population of a society” (Elliott & Ozar 2010: 11). The term ‘public’ is a contested one and has many uses due to the different publics it can refer to. A detailed discussion of the debated nature of this term, however, is beyond the scope of this project. For purposes of simplicity, the above definition, where ‘public’ refers to the whole of a society, will be used. Accordingly, if a correlation is made between the Greatest Happiness Principle and the public interest, there is a significant consequence for the film analysis. A running theme throughout the films chosen is that journalists are motivated by a belief that their actions are in the public interest, or indeed the best interests of the majority of society, therefore adding to their happiness.

This role of providing a beneficial service to the public is also usually described as an obligation or *duty* that the news media needs to fulfil (Klaidman & Beauchamp 1987: 129) that is “foundational in the traditions of American journalism and political life” (Klaidman & Beauchamp 1987: 150). The inherent notion of duty that is bound up in a commitment to the public interest connects with Kantian Deontological ethics, the other ethical framework that will be predominantly used in this project.

Kant’s notion of ‘duty’ is a significant facet of his ethical philosophy. It should be noted that Kantian duty cannot be “enforced by external coercion” (Wood 2008: 158). Indeed, “Kant gives the name ‘duty’ to all actions we have moral reasons to do” (Wood 2008: 159). Unlike Utilitarianism, which places ethical value on consequences, Kant argued that:

a good will is not good because of what it performs or effects...for its attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition, that is, it is good in itself. (1909: 10)

As such, Kant “placed higher moral value on the internal element” (Crook 2010: 167) of the ethical decision making process. While moral actions are dependent on their outcomes in Utilitarianism, “moral obligation is absolute” (Crook 2010: 167) and is expressed through categorical imperatives, which apply to all situations (Crook 2010: 167). A “moral imperative is categorical because its function is...to command us how to act irrespective of our wants or our contingent ends” (Wood 2008: 67). As a test for the morality of actions, Kant states that we should “act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (1909: 38). Kantian ethics also require that people should “be treat[ed] as ends and never as means” (Crook 2010: 167; Kant 1909: 47).

The final analytical framework that will be applied to the films is the SPJ Code of Ethics. Using this Code as a final ethical standard allows this thesis to compare the ethics in films not only to the selected canonical ethical philosophies, but also to a contemporary practically employed code of ethics, and as such, combines both ethical theory and practice.

A code of ethics, in any profession outlines its role-based duties (Elliott & Ozar 2010: 9) and “provides a snapshot of [that] profession’s ethical norms” (Elliott & Ozar 2010: 9). However, these are usually only a snapshot “given their necessary brevity and the often political process by which they are developed” (Elliott & Ozar 2010: 9). Indeed, Black observes that these media codes of ethics in particular are a

“confusing blend of ‘ideal expectations’...and ‘minimal standards’” (2010: 105), which attempt to self-regulate the voluntary nature of ethical behaviour (2010: 105).

The SPJ’s Code of Ethics was written “to counteract the impression that journalists are unprincipled and ascribe to no professional standards” (Bukro 1985/1986: 11). The way in which codes of ethics justify and underpin the nature and actions of journalism is significant because these codes are public statements of journalists’ expectations of themselves, which are subsequently adopted by the general public. It can be argued that any ethical based discussion on representations of journalists, like those in feature films, needs to include a code of ethics as a frame of analysis. Moreover, codes of ethics provide an avenue to compare the actions of fictional journalists in films to their real world counterparts. Even though, the SPJ Code, like any ethics code, is voluntarily implemented and not legally enforceable (SPJ 1996), it is considered a “resource for ethical decision-making” (1996) and according to the SPJ, is widely used as a guide in practice (SPJ 1996).

The SPJ Code of Ethics contains four main sections with individual provisions under each section. The four sections are titled:

1. Seek Truth and Report It
2. Minimise Harm
3. Act Independently
4. Be Accountable (SPJ 1996)

The first section is the largest, containing eighteen individual provisions and it is the section referred to most frequently in the film analysis. It outlines the ethical provisions on accuracy, truth-telling and information gathering. The Minimise Harm section reflects the Kantian attitudes that people should “be treat[ed] as ends and never as means” (Crook 2010: 167) and details the ethical treatment of sources. The third section looks at conflicts of interest and outlines how to avoid them. The last section examines accountability and summarises how to remain accountable to the public and to other journalists.

On closer inspection, the SPJ Code of Ethics can also be interpreted as an amalgam of Utilitarianism, Kantian Deontological ethics and Aristotelian virtue ethics. Each provision in the code can be seen as a virtue, which “involves good motives [which] determin[e] good consequences” (Crook 2010: 157). The Preamble to the Code, which outlines the journalist’s “duty” to foster public enlightenment (SPJ 1996) and the second section of the Code, which asks journalists to treat sources “as human beings deserving of respect” (SPJ 1996) embody Kantian ideals of duty (Wood 2008: 159) and human dignity (Crook 2010: 167; Kant 1909: 47). The Preamble also asks journalists to “further those ends” (SPJ 1996) of “public enlightenment” (SPJ 1996), reflecting consequentialist notions and the Greatest Happiness Principle.

By applying these three ethical frameworks to the analysis of the chosen films, this project will be seeking to discern a multi-faceted view of the ethics portrayed in the films. The intention in using this matrix of frameworks is also to combine a mix of theory and practice. By identifying different ethical viewpoints

within the films and the judgements made on them, this project is attempting to discern and filter the possible interpretations of ethics that the public receive in watching films. I would also like to think that the project can then infer recommendations, or perhaps preferred courses of action, as to what journalists need to be doing to be considered acting ethically in their work.

Public Expectations of Journalism

A key concern of this thesis will be to examine how journalists in feature films are judged as ethical, or indeed unethical, according to their portrayal by filmmakers. In order for this project to complete this successfully, it is necessary to examine not only how journalists have been specifically portrayed in films but also how these characterisations influence the prevailing populist attitudes towards journalism. For, as Good explains, the “narrative patterns of the journalism film genre are mirrors of, and metaphors for, the relationship between the public and the press, its ruined hopes, desperate wishes, and ambiguous promises” (1989: 2). By examining these hopes, wishes and disappointments, the analysis can discover exactly what the audience expects from their news media and see if these ideals are at all achievable in real world scenarios. I intend to do this in two ways: by briefly studying the concept of the myth and how they are disseminated through film, and the origins of journalistic ideals in the social responsibility of the press theory and how they have influenced the public expectations of the news media.

The importance of studying myth may not be immediately apparent in its relation to public expectations of films. In this thesis, myth does not refer to a folk-tale or fable that is ostensibly untrue, but instead refers to a “sacred, societal story

that draws from archetypal figures and forms to offer exemplary models for human life” (Lule 2001: 15). As a business that tells stories, “movies are powerful purveyors of myth” (Ehrlich 2006: 502) and they act to “‘resolve basic oppositions at the heart of human life’ in a way that typically ‘affirms the status quo, confirms the way things are, and sustains the current social order’” (Lule in Ehrlich 2006: 502).

Typically, myths surrounding journalism promote the journalist as a hero. Howard Good likens films about journalists fighting corruption to those about cowboys fighting Indians (1989: 2), indicating the strength of this iconic representation. This image was “fixed in the public consciousness by exemplary depictions of the profession, such as the 1976 film *All the President’s Men*” (Flew 2010: 134), demonstrating the power of film as a “purveyor of myth” (Ehrlich 2006: 502) and its ability to influence the public’s expectations of the news media.

Lule outlines six archetypal roles of journalism in society in the United States. These are:

1. To watch over government
2. To manufacture consent
3. To set the public agenda
4. To inform public opinion
5. To foster public conversation
6. To enact social dramas. (Lule 2001: 35).³

³ These roles are defined and redefined throughout the literature, but always embody the same core values as Lule: Christians et al. outline four roles (2009: 30-31; 116) while Craft outlines five roles identified by Curran (2010: 41).

Indeed, these six roles hark back to the libertarian tradition in press history, which celebrated the “press’ emancipation from official control” in the late nineteenth century (Curran 2000: 35) and cemented the press’ role as “a public champion or fourth estate” (Curran 2000: 35). The press was, and still is, depicted as an institution without which a healthy democracy and political liberty cannot be maintained (Craft 2010: 40). Rosen, in his work to understand the role of journalism in society, states that journalists saw themselves “as democracy’s cultivator, as well as its chronicler” (1999: 4). As such, a strong link between the media and government was established: the news media became the ‘Fourth Estate’, holding the government accountable to the public. These ideals were immortalised in the First Amendment of the United States of America’s Constitution. Rosen argues that the First Amendment embodies independence for most journalists (1999: 186) and this independence, which is protected in the Constitution, “keeps a free people free” (Rosen 1999: 187).

These ideals, with minor changes, were adapted from the pure libertarian tradition and reinforced in the twentieth century, especially after World War Two, when the idea that the news media had a social responsibility became enshrined in public broadcasting policy (Christians et al. 2009: 10). The social responsibility theory has one major premise: that the press, “which enjoys a privileged position under...government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society” (Peterson 1963: 74). As such, the press has six roles to fulfil⁴, specifically to act as a watchdog against government, to provide entertainment and maintain its financial

⁴ These roles are again similar to those outlined in Lule (2001), Christians et al. (2009) and Craft (2010) and can be found in Peterson 1963: 74.

independence so as not to be swayed by economic pressures (Peterson 1963: 74). Even early codes of ethics contained a sense of social responsibility that the news media needed to follow. One of the earliest ethics codes for the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1923 calls for “newspapers to practice responsibility to the general welfare, sincerity, truthfulness, impartiality, fair play, decency and respect for the individual’s privacy” (Peterson 1963: 85).

It is these broad ideals that are reflected most in the heroic journalist characters that grace cinema (and other) screens. In films like *All the President’s Men* (1976), Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein act like detectives who uncover corruption at the highest level. Since the events of this film are based on actual events, the Watergate scandal celebrated “the reaffirmation of the intent of the First Amendment” (Rosen 1999: 156). Not only was the “democratic process superbly served by Watergate reporting” (Rosen 1999: 157), it cemented the heroic journalist in the public imagination.

However, when it handed down its report in 1947, the *Commission on Freedom of the Press* concluded that codes of ethics were “not enough to ensure the sort of press that society requires” (Peterson 1963: 86). According to the social responsibility theory, “the press has been deficient in performing those tasks” (Peterson 1963: 74). The main criticisms of the press in 1963 were that the press used its power for self-interested ends, was “subservient to big business” and “often paid more attention to the superficial and sensational than to the significant” (Peterson 1963: 78), demonstrating that the criticisms of the current news media are in fact not new, but longstanding.

And yet, while these criticisms are not new, they seem to be more acute in today's news media. Lule argues that the growing distrust of the news media in most Western societies is that "news lacks a defined social role" (2001: 187) because the "press is caught between conflicting demands that it provide both more diversion and entertainment and more specific, detailed, and technical information" (Christians et al. 2009: 222). Now, "news often takes second place to...advertising and entertainment" (Christians et al. 2009: 115) due to "entirely new pressures of space, time and format" (Christians et al. 2009: 115). As well as changes to format and the newsgathering routine, increasing commercial "competition generates pressures to make news and information more homogenous, as well as more digestible and entertaining for a wide audience" (Christians et al. 2009: 115). The combination of these factors means that the news media are not fulfilling its roles as outlined above. As Klaidman and Beauchamp argue, criticism of the news media is often "a result of inflated expectations" (1987: 5). These criticisms tend to fall back on:

'tradition' as the best answer to problems in the press: the traditional separation between news and opinion, the traditional caution against getting too involved, the traditional imperatives of independence and detachment, the tradition of hard-hitting investigative reporting. (Rosen 1999: 183)

And it is these traditions that are most often portrayed in the heroic journalists in films. Joe Strombel, as a "credit to the Fourth Estate", pursues the truth even after his death in *Scoop* (2006) and Lois Lane refuses to report on the return of celebrity Superman, instead choosing to follow the blackout story in *Superman Returns* (2006). These films reinforce these social responsibility traditions in the minds of the public and help to perpetuate the cycle. As Good argues, "beneath their surface realism, the films work to reconcile the turbulent present with traditional beliefs, to melt it into myth" (1989: 4).

Therefore, the archetypes of journalist characters in films both influence and are influenced by the public's expectations of the news media in society. The conclusions of the *Commission on Freedom of the Press* that the press has a social responsibility remain equally relevant today. However, criticisms of today's news media offer these traditional press views as solutions to current problems and as a result, continue a cycle of expectation that may no longer be achievable. These expectations are central to the accounts of journalists and journalism in the selected film analyses in this thesis.

Journalists in Films

Hollywood films “have been one of the main sources of the representation of journalism in western popular culture” (McNair 2010: 13) and yet, projects that use these films as an object of study are few in number. Researchers like Howard Good (1989; 2000), Brian McNair (2010), Matthew Ehrlich (1997; 2006) and Joe Saltzman (n.d.) have examined the construction of journalists in films as a crystallisation “of the prevailing cultural zeitgeist in relation to journalism” (McNair 2010: 3-4) within a particular context.

The importance of context is highlighted in Howard Good's project (1989) which initially surveys the representations of journalists in film over several decades and he notes how those representations have changed to “accommodate shifts in public opinion and the tides of history to continue to attract audiences” (Good 1989: 4). In the 1920s, silent films portrayed the journalists as heroes, “catching criminals,...exposing the decadence of high society...and breaking political machines” (Good 1989: 8). Yet, as time passed, Hollywood began to present

“reporters corrupted by cynicism, ambition, and drink, careless of others’ lives and reputations, and ever reluctant to let the truth stand in the way of a good story” (1989: 9). As the wealth and power of the press grew with the help of technological and mechanical breakthroughs, dramatically increasing the speed of production and circulation numbers (1989: 9-10), the journalist in films became “an exaggerated reflection of his creators⁵...with ambivalent feelings about what journalism had done for them and to them” (1989: 9).

The main body of Good’s study focuses on films released from the 1960s to 1980s (1989: 3) and those films, journalists were “trapped in the cold, lonely straits of their professional identities” (Good 1989: 16) and not honoured for “their absolute commitment to their profession” (Good 1989: 16). Moreover, while character moral ambiguity had been an emerging theme over several decades in the films and literature (Good 1989: 16), the journalists were now “conscious of the[ir] ambiguity” (Good 1989: 16) and were “shown locked in existential dilemmas...struggl[ing] with questions of truth and fiction, objectivity, compassion and distance” (Good 1989: 16).

Indeed, these discussions in films focus on large journalistic principles that cover not only ethics, but broader issues that are gaining coverage in the context within which they are produced. The films that will be examined in this project were all released between 2004 and 2009. There are several key issues facing the news media industry in this period. The main events of this period are the continuation of the War on Terror in response to the attacks on the United States of America on

⁵ In the 1920s and 1930s, the directors of journalism films were usually newspapermen or former newspapermen (Good 1989: 9).

September 11, 2001, most notably the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. There have been questions surrounding the role of the media in these circumstances and if it successfully fulfilled its duties as a check against government. These questions surround the overreliance of the media on official government sources, potential biases and the fair treatment and coverage of war (DiMaggio 2010; McChesney 2008). Furthermore, the exponential growth of social media and citizen journalism is also having an impact on journalism (Black 2010: 111), while declining newspaper circulation numbers have some heralding the death of the newspaper (Edmonds 2010: 187; Meyers 2010: 167-168). Celebrity reporters, gossip columnists and the rise of infotainment instead of hard-hitting news are also seen as problematic in the war to gain audiences (Franklin & Pilling 1998: 113). Indeed, the films discussed in this project touch on a selection of these issues, demonstrating how, in films, there is:

evidence of what journalism represents at a given moment in US society, of what its producers *assume* journalism to represent in the minds of the broad American public, of what they think journalism represents, or should represent. (McNair 2010: 17)

It is important to note however that this emphasis on context does not mean that these films act as mirrors, accurately reflecting journalistic reality, but they are a “prism, through which is refracted a society’s conception [of an issue]” (McNair 2010: 14). It is true that “journalism films reflect each other more than the realities of daily journalism” (Good 1989: 23), but as they embody broader discussions on the media, their importance should not be discounted. McNair argues that in some ways “movies and movie-makers are part of the apparatus of scrutiny which brings to bear

on journalists [because] films...draw our attention to the flaws in journalistic practice” (McNair 2010: 17).

The variety of representations of journalists in films and the overarching principles which they stand for and subvert is indicative of the “cultural schizophrenia in public attitudes” (McNair 2010: 9) towards journalism. Indeed, as a cultural icon, the journalist is “treated like a rock star at one moment, and a reptile the next” (McNair 2010: 13). McNair’s content analysis of journalism films between 1997 and 2008, which overlaps with the specific timeframe of this thesis, indicates a distinction between the journalists who are usually categorised as heroes and villains. Indeed, “foreign correspondents and investigative reporters are good; tabloid hacks, celebrity interviewers, paparazzi and other agents of gutter press are bad” (McNair 2010: 51). This distinction reflects the differentiation between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news and the long-held hierarchical attitudes held about the quality of news.

In McNair’s study, he concludes that the majority of films made in the 1997 to 2008 period portrayed journalists as heroes (McNair 2010: 48). The journalistic heroes of feature films are those “engaged in fulfilling the normatively approved functions of journalism in democracy” (McNair 2010: 48). By presenting audiences with journalists who are “witnessing injustice, holding power to account [and] defending freedom” (McNair 2010: 48), “cinema performs its mythical function of dramatising those normative ideals, and translating them into a popular cultural idiom” (McNair 2010: 48). The most famous of these films is *All The President’s Men* (1976), in which journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein follow the story of the Watergate break-in and, despite opposition from editors and fellow reporters,

expose government corruption and their findings contribute to the resignation of the President Richard Nixon. More recent depictions of heroic journalists taking on the government include *Frost/Nixon* (2008), *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), *Blood Diamond* (2006), *Green Zone* (2010) and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007), where they are both major and minor characters.

However, heroic journalists don't always have to be chasing down government secrets or corruption. In *Superman Returns* (2006), Clark Kent and Lois Lane work together to find out the source of a major blackout, against the wishes of editor Perry White, who wants them to focus on Superman's dramatic return. Also, in the *Spiderman* trilogy, Peter Parker's mild-mannered freelance photographer spouts journalistic principles about truth to his editor J. Jonah Jameson, who is antagonistic towards Spiderman, convinced he is a villain and more concerned about making money for the paper than the truth. In these films, the metaphor which compares journalists to modern day superheroes is not lost: journalists pursue what they feel is important, in a hard news sense and not what they are asked to report on by their editors, which is often to pursue stories that will be popular and create more revenue. They wield the truth as a weapon and eventually are vindicated and rewarded by their dedication to the truth. Lois Lane's pursuit of the blackout story leads to the discovery of Lex Luthor and his plan to destroy the United States. In these depictions, filmmakers seem to "desire to praise and pay respect to the principles, if not always the practice of liberal journalism" (McNair 2010: 48) and naively adhere to "the nobility of the fourth estate", which in recent times is set against "the background of a post-9/11 world where terror, torture and governmental mendacity loom large" (McNair 2010: 48-49).

Moreover, in this era of government and corporate mendacity, villainous journalists can always be found. McNair notes that there are few “out-and-out villains, devoid of redeeming features” (McNair 2010: 51), rather that they appear in a variety of guises from loveable rogue to sleazy liar (McNair 2010: 138). However, for the sake of clarity in this thesis, these journalistic depictions which are less than favourable will be categorised as villains, even if what they do in the course of the film is not completely evil.

In general, these villains are used as a device through which the filmmakers can “critique media institutions themselves” (McNair 2010: 137) and represent what they see as wrong with their contemporary news media. These journalists often work for popular tabloid media outlets (McNair 2010: 137), interfere unjustifiably in the private lives of their subjects, are blamed for the tabloidization of news and the ‘dumbing down’ of society with infotainment (McNair 2010: 138). In *27 Dresses* (2007), journalist Kevin Doyle is one such loveable rogue. Doyle writes ‘Commitments’, a wedding vows column in the style section of the *New York Journal*. He “spins romantic crap” in his column, lies to heroine Jane Nichols and, while masquerading as writing about her sister’s upcoming nuptials, writes a story about her status as a perpetual bridesmaid without her knowledge to get ahead in his career. The film also contains a commentary on Nichols who, on getting the Sunday paper, skips over the front half of the paper, which is filled with ‘death and destruction’ to the wedding vows column, demonstrating how Doyle is contributing to the ‘dumbing down’ of society. He is redeemed however by his desire to write ‘real stories’ and by the end of the film, has been promoted from Commitments and wins Nichols.

More overtly, there are journalists in these films who openly “flout professional rules and niceties” (Ehrlich 2006: 515) and are used to reinforce the myths perpetuated by their heroic counterparts. *Shattered Glass* (2003) tells the story of Stephen Glass, a journalist for the *New Republic* who fabricated sources and facts in many stories he wrote for the magazine. The film is essentially an exercise in pointing blame and celebrating *New Republic* editor Chuck Lane who investigates the claims of wrongdoing and ultimately exposes Glass’ crimes. In order to restore the social consensus and trust in journalism, the only two options for villainous journalists are “resigning and leaving the profession – or death” (Saltzman in Ehrlich 2006: 514). At the end of the film, Glass is fired and attends a hearing in which he is literally forced into silence, unable to defend himself.

This second type of characterisation of the villainous journalist is usually the focus of ethical discussions about feature films, which uses the films as case studies and a spring-board from which to launch a further analysis and ethical discussion. Howard Good’s text *Journalism Ethics Goes To The Movies* (2008) explores ethical dilemmas expressed in films in this way. The chapter on *Shattered Glass* (2003) in this work explores philosophical concepts of truth and the ethical implications for journalists alongside a discussion of the film. This project will differ from works like this, because it will examine the ethics of the journalists in the films as one would real journalists in these settings.

Therefore, having examined the research that has been conducted in this area, the importance of knowing the historical and general socio-cultural context in which these films are produced is the key to understanding the representations of journalists

because wider societal attitudes heavily influence the ways in which journalists are presented in films. While the problems and circumstances they face in the films may not be entirely consistent with reality, they demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of the contemporary news media in the eyes of the filmmakers. Indeed, these films “illuminate the current debates” (McNair 2010: 4) and seem “to recycle social anxieties again and again” (McNair 2010: 4), thus reinforcing the myths surrounding journalism discussed in the previous section.

Methodology

In order to successfully examine and filter the images of journalists and their ethics in the chosen films, a systematic methodology has been implemented to ensure that this thesis is not an exercise in which “knowledge is...reduced to mere perspectivalism” (Halloran 1998: 11).

To prevent this, I will apply three ethical frameworks to the films through which the thesis seeks to identify the filmmaker’s ideas about the ethics of the news media. The thesis draws on de Vreese’s understanding of framing, in which framing is understood as “a communication source presenting and defining an issue” (2005: 51). Conversely, the chosen films, *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), *Lions For Lambs* (2007) and *State of Play* (2009), are examined to identify primary frames through which they view journalism ethics, and which are essentially “concerned with the presentations of issues” (de Vreese 2005: 53). The issues are presented to audiences by what Gamson and Modigliani term ‘framing devices’ and are usually “metaphors, exemplars, catch-phrases, depictions and visual images” (in de Vreese 2005: 54). Therefore, the task of this thesis is to identify the “specific textual and

visual elements” (de Vreese 2005: 54) that demonstrate how filmmakers interpret and display journalism ethics in their films. Christian Metz identifies five “physical types of signifiers” (Metz 1976 586), which carry meaning in films. These are “the image, the recorded phonic sound: the ‘words’ of films, the recorded musical sound, the recorded noise and the graphic tracing of written matter: credits, titles and writing in the image” (Metz 1976: 586). This thesis will focus mainly on, to use Metz’s term, the recorded phonic sound, and narrative sequences of the films to conduct this analysis, however other visual elements will be discussed when they are appropriate.

To this end, the thesis uses three ethical frameworks, John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism, Immanuel Kant’s Deontological ethics and the SPJ Code of Ethics as touchstones for this identification process. Utilitarianism and Deontological ethics were chosen because “their [Mill’s and Kant’s] primary concerns and methods resonate with the public and with the social practices of journalism” (Elliott & Ozar 2010: 19), and are the most frequently invoked concepts in media ethics literature. The SPJ Code of Ethics was chosen as a third frame to provide a practice based point of comparison to the standards expected of best practice journalism and to discuss whether the actions of journalists in films are actually plausible, or just ‘poetic licence’ used by filmmakers to create a popularly successful box office hit. Furthermore, according to research undertaken for this thesis, applying the SPJ Code to journalistic representations in films occurs infrequently⁶. Moreover, since this particular Code was written in the United States of America and the chosen films were all produced in Hollywood, it is most likely that the filmmakers’ understanding

⁶ Chapters Three and Eleven in Good’s *Journalism Ethics Goes To The Movies* (2008) briefly discuss the SPJ Code in relation to their chosen films, however, this thesis uses the SPJ Code of Ethics as a frame for analysis on a much larger scale.

of journalism ethics would be connected with this Code. However, this is not to say that the findings of this project are only relevant in the United States. Hollywood produced films have a global impact and, since “US ethics codes are models for journalistic standards and practices throughout the world” (Wilkins & Brennen 2004: 297), the findings are also applicable to other news media in the Western world.

Indeed, this process of examining frames draws on the underlying principles of textual analysis: that texts “are thought to be significant carriers of cultural values, or that they provide important and valuable aesthetic experiences” (Larsen 2002: 120). According to Alan McKee, textual analysis is a data-gathering process in which texts are examined “using a form of ‘forensic analysis’ – treating them like clues...of how people have made sense of the world” (2003: 63). The representations left behind on film by the directors, actors and editors are evidence of the frames used to define the ethical issues explored in the films and the public’s expectations of journalism in contemporary society.

However, some kinds of textual analysis are at times derided for their lack of scientific veracity and fragmented nature as a method. This is particularly since recent post-structuralist thought suggests that “meaning [is] constructed by the reader” (Bertrand & Hughes 2005: 192) and is therefore “always and necessarily contingent and relative, never objective, fixed [or] permanent” (Bertrand & Hughes 2005: 209). By suggesting that meaning is “constructed by the reader/viewer” (Birch 1989: 21), textual analyses are expected “to find more than one reading (Birch 1989: 45) and acknowledge that the reading argued in the analysis is but one of an infinite number.

To combat these ideas and ensure this project's contribution to the study of journalism ethics in film, the thesis will not state that its findings are the only possible readings of these films. Indeed, this research is "interested in finding out likely interpretations, not in deciding which of them is the most correct one" (McKee 2003: 63). Furthermore, two safeguards will be employed to ensure that, despite the pluralistic nature of textual analysis, the analysis is "not a free-for-all, where anything goes" (Armstrong 1990: 1) and "legitimate readings can be distinguished from fallacious ones" (1990: 1). These are processual steps of identifying the key elements within the films that relate to the chosen frames for analysis and placing the films in their broader production context.

To limit the number of readings that can be extracted from a text, research can be narrowed down by the use of theoretical frames or lenses through which the analysis takes place. This way the data collected can be seen as indicative of a particular issue within a text. For example, the frames are usually indicated by the research question (McKee 2003: 71) and by framing a question and focusing the textual analysis, the chosen method for the research will limit, though not eliminate, the potential readings through their direct relevance. As I have outlined, Utilitarianism, Deontological ethics and the SPJ Code of Ethics will be used as conceptual frameworks through which the textual analysis will take place. The analysis will concentrate on how ideas about journalism ethics are represented to audiences through 'framing devices' (Gamson & Modigliani in de Vreese 2005: 54): "specific textual and visual elements" (de Vreese 2005: 54) that relate to the filmmakers' interpretations of news media ethics. While *Lions For Lambs* (2007) has three intertwining storylines which all deal with issues of war, responsibility and

apathy, the only storyline that the thesis will examine are those to do with journalist Janine Roth, her interview with Senator Irving and her subsequent reporting. The analysis will examine the issue of responsibilities in war reporting and apathy only when they relate directly to the actions of Roth and not, for example, when they are expressed in a college student's apathy. In a similar way, *State of Play* (2009) contains views on the demise of the newspaper and the legitimacy of online reporting, particularly blogging. While these issues are all valid areas of interest for contemporary media studies, they will only be explored when they relate to the ethical frames that are presented by the director Kevin Macdonald and not as issues in their own right.

Secondly, the importance of context, particularly in a project using primarily textual analysis, is noted by McKee who argues that situating a text within the historico-production context allows researchers to pinpoint the "limited numbers of reasonable interpretations available in a given culture at a given time" (2003: 70). In order to analyse the ethics of journalists in my chosen films, it is necessary to identify the context within which they were produced and the prevailing attitudes and problems that affected journalism and the public's perception of journalism at the time. As stated before, many areas of the news media in the period 2004 to 2009 have been under fire for being too close to government and for not fulfilling their jobs in questioning the United States government before going to war in Afghanistan and Iraq (DiMaggio 2010: 12-14).

This project has limited the number of readings of the films chosen by narrowing the focus of the analysis through the use of specific analytical frames and situating the films in their context. These measures do not dismiss the validity of other kinds of readings, but simply enable this project to be completed in the allotted time and allow a rigorous and systematic discussion of the representation of ethics to occur.

Chapter Three: ‘The Good, The Bad and The Morally Grey’: the Ethics of Journalists in Films

Having explored the key concepts above, the following three chapters contain the textual analysis of the three films chosen for this thesis. It is important to stress again that this project does not assert that these films reflect journalistic reality in any way because “Hollywood offers entertainment and escape, not reality; [it] seeks the biggest possible audience and profits, not truth” (Good 1989: 23). Moreover, four decades of film and media studies have roundly debunked any naive arguments about ‘reflecting reality’ and replaced them with more rigorous constructivist understandings.

However, this project will contend that the images of fictional journalists in these popular feature films affect the expectations that the public have of actual journalists and therefore cannot be discounted as ‘mere fiction’. My argument is that these films are evidence “of what its producers *assume* journalism to represent in the minds of the broad American public, of what they think journalism represents, or should represent” (McNair 2010: 17). This project explores the ethics that are promoted in these films, and makes the assumption that practitioners can ‘read off’ various discursive constructs of what their public expects from their work within society. There are however, no guarantees of concrete answers or suggestions from the discussion.

Moreover, to ensure that detailed analysis of the films can occur, the thesis will not extensively explain the plots of the films under examination in blow-by-blow descriptive accounts. For detailed plot outlines of the three main films, please

refer to Appendix Two. Only the most directly essential plot information will be included in the discussion chapters that concern the key ethical actions of the protagonists.

Lastly, it is important to reiterate the important contextual issues that are raised in all three films. All three films show a disdain towards celebrity based journalism, highlighting that stories about ‘real’ issues like politics and corruption are more important. Two of the films, *Good Night, and Good Luck (2005)* and *Lions For Lambs (2007)*, also show similar concerns about the weakness of the media as a tool to challenge democratically elected governments and hold them accountable for their actions to the public, particularly in relation to the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Good: *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004)

Edward R. Murrow: Having searched my conscience, my files, I cannot contend I have always been right or wise, but I have attempted to pursue the truth with some diligence, and to report it, even though as in this case, I had been warned in advance that I would be subjected to the attentions of Senator McCarthy.

The above quotation paints Edward R. Murrow as the typical heroic investigative journalist, who is “engaged in fulfilling the normatively approved functions of journalism in democracy: witnessing injustice, holding power to account, defending freedom” (McNair 2010: 48). This analysis will focus on Edward R. Murrow, producer Fred Friendly and their colleagues’ ethics as they research and report the story of Lieutenant Milo Radulovich and his sacking from the United States Air Force and, eventually, report on the actions of Senator Joseph McCarthy. In my analysis, I will seek to show that the ethics portrayed by the team are Kantian in origin because of the conviction with which they pursue the truth no matter what the consequences. Indeed, as it turns out, while McCarthy is eventually investigated by the Senate and Milo Radulovich is reinstated by the Air Force, Murrow’s program *See It Now* loses sponsors, is shortened and moved to a Sunday afternoon timeslot. The team also hold fast to the SPJ Code of Ethics, which applauds a commitment to the truth, both unofficial and official sources of information and acting independently. My analysis includes a brief account of the ideology of objectivity in journalism, its history, and explores why it may not always be an appropriate convention to employ in every news report.

Good Night, and Good Luck (2004) shows “the nobility of the fourth estate” (McNair 2010: 48) in a battle between individual rights and the state. The film itself was released in 2004 in the “post-9/11 world where terror, torture and governmental mendacity loom[ed] large” (McNair 2010: 48-49). These issues parallel the

government terror and torture used in 1950s America in the middle of the Cold War. At that time, the Western world was gripped with fear about communism, the Soviet Bloc and the threat of nuclear war that would wipe out humanity. This fear was exploited by the United States Government at the time, and particularly by Senator Joseph McCarthy. The “junior senator from Wisconsin” came to “prominence in 1950” (Dillon 2008: 110) and “owed much of his success to a lazy, and even wilfully manipulative, news media” (Dillon 2008: 111).

In this world, to paraphrase Edward R. Murrow from the film, dissent was confused with disloyalty and anybody who questioned government actions was accused of being a communist. These sentiments appear to substantiate DiMaggio’s assertions that dissent in the American news media is restricted “to the spectrum of agreement and disagreement expressed by America’s bipartisan political elites” (2010: 13). Considering reporters rely heavily on “government voices in constructing news stories” (DiMaggio 2010: 14), if the government is united, as it was against the threat of communism, there is no legitimate source of dissent, thus reinforcing the media’s hegemonic practices⁷. As a result of this fear, the news media were failing to function as a check on the government. Indeed, as the brief history given at the beginning of *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004) states, “few in the press were willing to stand up against McCarthy for fear they too would be targeted”. Indeed, throughout the film, the audience sees this fear in the private conversations of the characters, whispered to each other so they are not overheard and misunderstood. It

⁷ As outlined in DiMaggio, Gramsci defined hegemony “by distinguishing between the use of ‘coercion and consent’ in modern democracies. Societal elites typically exercise leadership over subordinate groups and individuals through ideological controls, rather than through coercion (2010: 14). The news media is often used to garner this consent.

was, in this context, in the years 1953 and 1954, Edward Murrow, producer Fred Friendly and the team at *See It Now* were working.

The ethics displayed by the team at *See It Now* can be best categorised as deontological due to the inherent element of duty that is bound up in their actions. Director George Clooney expresses this duty in an interview in the additional film production material on the DVD, stating that, from the point of view of playing a journalist, “our job is questioning authority. It’s your duty. It’s your patriotic duty to question authority.” Considering this view comes from the director of the film, it is a reasonable to assume that film is built on this idea and is heavily influenced by social responsibility theory that was discussed in the Literature Review (pp. 17-20). Since the *Commission on Freedom of the Press* handed down its report in 1947, only six years prior to the actual events on which the film is based, social responsibility was an influential concept circulating in the news media industries at the time. The *Commission’s* report had stated that the news media were not meeting the standards required of it (Peterson 1963: 74). Two of these criticisms are explored in the film: the practice of letting “advertisers control editorial policies and editorial content” (Peterson 1963: 78) and that the news media “often paid more attention to the superficial and sensational than to the significant” (1963: 78).

The language used by both Peterson and Clooney, with its references to obligation and duty, is consistent with Kant’s Deontological ethics. Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly’s commitment to social responsibility, holding the government accountable and uncovering the truth and reporting it, resembles a categorical imperative: a “maxim that invokes a duty that is universal” (Crook 2010:

167). Therefore, they are morally obliged to hold the government accountable and seek and report the truth no matter what the situation or consequences. At every stage of the story production process, the fictionalised *See It Now* team face pressure from different quarters who said that they should not broadcast the story and threatened them to be wary of possible personal consequences. News executive Sig Mickelson challenges Murrow and Friendly that the story on Radulovich is not neutral and says that since the major sponsor of *See It Now*, Alcoa Aluminium, have military contracts, they won't pay for their advertisements, demonstrating the impact of big business on the news media's reporting (Peterson 1963: 78). Rather than "smuggl[ing] in values conducive to the commercial aims of owners and advertisers" (McChesney 2008: 34), Friendly and Murrow split the cost of the advertisements to ensure the story goes to air. Moreover, Colonels Anderson and Jenkins from the Air Force question Friendly about the story and are concerned that they are not able to approve the story. The Colonels assume that the news media rely on official sources like the Air Force, "as the basis for legitimate news" (McChesney 2008: 31) and to maintain the professional standards of journalism (McChesney 2008: 31). The Colonels exercise their "considerable power to set the news agenda" (McChesney 2008: 31) and state that their support for Edward Murrow and CBS might be under threat if the story airs, assuming that this threat, which essentially would deny Murrow access to their official sources in future, would be sufficient to silence the story.

Yet, despite all this pressure, the story goes ahead, and as Murrow goes after Senator McCarthy himself, that pressure escalates and this is dramatised on screen by the escalating number of close-up shots of the characters, particularly Murrow

during his reports. Friendly and Murrow have to continue paying for Alcoa's advertisements, rumours start emerging that Murrow was on "the Soviet payroll in 1935", CBS Executive Bill Paley asks Murrow to stop and let the Senate deal with McCarthy when he inevitably self-destructs and McCarthy himself launches a tirade against Murrow in his response to the story. These instances are indicative of the commercial pressure felt by journalists "to shape stories to suit advertisers and owners" (McChesney 2008: 43). The persistence of Murrow and team through this onslaught shows their commitment to uncovering the truth, no matter what the consequences. Eventually, Milo Radulovich is reinstated as a Lieutenant in the Air Force and the Senate investigates McCarthy, but the consequences for the journalists were not positive. When making the film, Clooney had the assistance of Joe and Shirley Wershba, Fred Friendly's wife and son, Ruth and Andy, Edward Murrow's son, Casey, and Milo Radulovich as sources. He comments in the 'behind the scenes' DVD feature that he admired the work they had done, despite this pressure:

These people were scared and did it anyway and I [Clooney] love being around that. It's heroic and they got nothing for it... They did it because they thought it was the right thing to do.

Indeed, this concept encapsulates Kantian ethics: despite personal feelings or possible consequences, they reported the truth as a categorical imperative and, since the moral imperative is always categorical (Wood 2008: 67), the morality of their actions is definite. These attitudes show that their ethics are in stark contrast to Utilitarian ethics because they are not concerned with the consequences that they have to face themselves.

In terms of the SPJ Code of Ethics, the section that resonates most loudly throughout this film is the first, which is focused on telling the truth. Edward Murrow, Fred Friendly and team can be seen to have acted consistently with the Code, but considering the context of the film and the issue of associations in the McCarthy era, a brief discussion of conflicts of interest is also relevant. The only provision that may not have been followed concerns the separation of advocacy and news reporting, and I will explore this distinction further.

The opening clause to the SPJ Code of Ethics states that “journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information” (SPJ 1996). In the film, during the broadcast of the story on McCarthy and Murrow’s response to McCarthy’s accusations against him, Murrow is shot from a low angle, giving him an aura of authority and heroic standing, reinforcing this courage. There is no doubt that the way in which they report the news is courageous, considering the obstacles that come their way. They do tell Milo Radulovich’s story, “even when it is unpopular to do so” (SPJ 1996) and they “give a voice to the voiceless” (SPJ 1996). On the various committees he chaired, McCarthy was “judge, jury, prosecutor, castigator and press agent all in one” (Griswold in Dillon 2008: 111). People accused of being communists were essentially voiceless due to this overwhelming hegemonic influence of official sources, as outlined earlier (DiMaggio 2010: 13), and the legitimacy automatically given to stories from official sources (McChesney 2008: 31). Radulovich barely had a trial and no one had seen his charges or the evidence against him. Indeed, the press feared that if they stood up to McCarthy, they too would be targeted, making the actions of Murrow and the team even more courageous.

It seems to me that the only provision that is not followed in the first section of the Code is the one which asks for a distinction “between advocacy and news reporting” (SPJ 1996), and requires that “advocacy and commentary should be labelled and not misrepresent[ed] fact or context” (SPJ 1996). There is no doubt that the *See It Now* story on Milo Radulovich is advocacy. Murrow says in his conversation with Sig Mickelson that he feels the government side of the Radulovich story has been “represented rather well for the last couple of years”, reflecting the ‘advocating for the voiceless’ motivations behind the news story. Murrow saw an unfair act so used a story to raise awareness and hopefully change the prevailing news and political agenda. In his concluding voiceover, Murrow does expressly say that they are not defending Radulovich’s actions or judging that he is or is not a communist. Instead, what they are advocating for is his right to a fair trial, particularly viewing the charges and evidence brought against him. The film however does not articulate advocacy as a specific ethical dilemma and yet it can be argued that this advocacy is actually a vital part of the news media’s role under social responsibility theory. Considering the privileged position of the press under government, if they find something that needs to be dealt with, they advocate on behalf of the people. This notion of a “journalism that cares” (Bell 1998: 16) will be explored in greater detail.

The third section of the SPJ Code deals with conflicts of interest. This issue comes up in an interesting way in the film. CBS Executive Bill Paley says that if Murrow wants to go after McCarthy, “every one of [the] boys needs to be clean”. In this era, where even the briefest association with communism or someone accused of being a communist could be your downfall, conflict of interest took on a different

meaning. Any real or perceived encounters with communism for someone in the news media would ruin their reputation, because they would be seen as slanting the news to the left. One of the crew, Palmer Williams, admits that his ex-wife had attended some meetings before they were married and excuses himself from the McCarthy story, so that the show could not be accused of bias. Moreover, Murrow's friend Don Hollenbeck becomes so consumed with his portrayal as a "pinko" in the newspapers that he commits suicide.

The film presents Murrow and team as acting independently despite pressure from the military, government and sponsors. Alcoa, as a key sponsor of *See It Now*, refused to pay for its sponsorship when the Radulovich story went to air, as did the network. Yet the team did not bow to these pressures and continued to act independently.

The main issue that arises from the discussion of this film is the notion of objectivity and neutrality. Objectivity did not arise from journalism, but had been a guiding trend in Western scientific, mathematical and philosophical thought for around two thousand years (Ward 2004: 37). Objectivity was adopted as a "commercial imperative of nineteenth century publishing" (Richards 2005: 33) and, "just as scientists discovered facts about nature by using normatively established objective methods" (Cohen-Almagor 2008: 137), journalists decided that that they too "would use their methods to reveal social reality to the news consumer" (Cohen-Almagor 2008: 137-138). In the 1920s, objectivity became a founding media ethic (Ward 2004: 215): a goal that should be achieved in professional and ethical reporting. Objectivity eventually came to be seen as a "central pillar of social

responsibility theory” (Richards 2005: 33) in which detachment was the only way to “provide a ‘truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day’s events’” (Richards 2005: 33). CBS News Executive Sig Mickelson invokes this rhetoric when he previews the Radulovich piece. He argues that he could not call the story a “neutral piece” and is concerned that by reporting the story, they were “going to forego the standards [they’ve] stuck to for fifteen years”, which includes “both sides and no commentary”.

Edward Murrow counters with this telling statement:

I’ve searched my conscience and I cannot for the life of me find any justification for this. I cannot accept that there are, on every story, two equal and logical sides to an argument.

Objectivity as a standard was “challenged almost as soon as it was espoused” (Ward 2004: 215) and now, “journalism is the last refuge of objectivity as an epistemology” (Rosen 1993). While objectivity started out as a sign of journalistic credibility and the “mark of an experienced professional” (Ward 2004: 215), now, as Rosen argues, credibility comes from journalists showing that they care and have a stake in the story they are reporting (1993). Martin Bell agrees and argues for a “journalism that cares” and “that is aware of its responsibilities” (1998: 16). This is the type of journalism that is portrayed in *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004): while it is advocacy, not neutral and provocative, it shows that Murrow and team care about what is happening in the political system and are trying to bring it to the public’s attention. Murrow turns his “professional outrage on the powerful and vindictive Sen. Joseph McCarthy and help[s] end an ugly episode in American governance” (Banaszynski 2010: 238). After the Radulovich story is broadcast, Don Hollenbeck asks Murrow if he is taking sides, Murrow replies that it is “just a little poke of the

stick to see what happens”, which demonstrates that he feels he is not taking sides, but fulfilling his journalistic role as a check on government, and thus his social responsibility as a journalist.

Intriguingly, the SPJ Code of Ethics has never had a provision that states that journalists have to be objective. The only provision that comes close is the one quoted earlier which asks journalists to be fair, among other things, in their reporting of the news (SPJ 1996). The team do not simply present Radulovich’s side of the story and leave it at that. Fred Friendly gives the Air Force a chance to comment on the story, but they refuse. This also happens with the McCarthy story. In his final voiceover, Murrow asks McCarthy that if he feels wronged by the story, an opportunity to defend himself will be given to him.

In this film’s discussion of objectivity, a new attitude towards objectivity is explored, which has been under debate with academics and journalists themselves for many years. This attitude is not that objectivity should be abandoned. The “pursuit of a disinterested truth is vitally important to any democratic political community” (Rosen 1993) because it allows constituents to debate issues thoroughly in a public forum. Rosen argues that the main purpose of journalism is to “simply make democracy work” (1993) by “re-engaging people in public life” (1993). Yet, for him “objectivity is a very bad, unworkable philosophy for that task” (Rosen 1993). By taking a side and showing passion and enthusiasm for government matters, Murrow and team try to do just this. They tried to use the power of television as a new mass broadcast medium to engage its audiences and to speak out against what Senator McCarthy and others were doing to American citizens in a time

of Cold War and fear. Appropriately, McNair argues that *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004) was made “with an eye on the performance of the media in the ‘war on terror’, which was at its height when the film was released” (2010: 28). If this is the case, then the problems raised in *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004) are equally as relevant to today’s news media and should not be discounted.

Edward R. Murrow, Fred Friendly and the team of *See It Now* demonstrate their Kantian ethics in *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004). The way in which they approach their work with an unwavering conviction is similar to the categorical imperative duty that inspires Kantian ethicists. They follow the SPJ Code of Ethics faithfully and the film offers a new conception of objectivity. The main ethical message for journalists in this film is to embrace a ‘journalism of attachment’ (Bell 1998) and fulfil the social responsibility of being an adequate check on government. Otherwise, as Edward R. Murrow says, television will be a useless medium used to “distract, delude, amuse and insulate” its audience and will simply become nothing more than “merely wires and lights in a box.”

The Bad: *Lions For Lambs* (2007)

Janine Roth: If we don't do this Howard, who's going to do it? This is the job. These politicians, these journalists, everybody who said 'well if we knew then what we know now': it's bullshit. It was all right there. We knew it, if we had bothered to connect the dots. But we didn't, did we? We just rolled over.

If the journalism in *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004) represents the high point of television as an “infant medium...with instant gravitas” (Dillon 2008: 109), then the journalism in *Lions For Lambs* (2007) is firmly located at the bottom of that downhill slope (Dillon 2008: 109) and shows the fulfilment of Edward R. Murrow’s prediction of entertainment and insulation, dominating the news media.

As discussed in the Literature Review (pp. 25-26), journalists who are villains or unethical are used by filmmakers as a device to “critique media institutions themselves” (McNair 2010: 137) and usually embody the perceived flaws of the contemporary news media. The two main criticisms of the current news media, according to *Lions For Lambs*’ director Robert Redford, are that the news media are not fulfilling their social responsibility as a check on government activities, and that they are too focused on entertainment coverage and not the important issues that directly affect citizens, the nation and the world.

Lions For Lambs (2007) contains three interlinked plot threads which together promote a message of action, imploring citizens to participate in order to improve the country rather than falling back on apathy. However, for the purpose of my thesis, the film analysis will focus more specifically on just one thread, which shows American News Exchange (ANX) journalist Janine Roth interviewing Republican Senator Jasper Irving about a new strategy being implemented in the war in Afghanistan. It will examine the ethical approaches that Roth follows through the story process, particularly her determined questioning of government policy which

leads to uneasiness regarding the information she receives. However, at the same time, it will also look at ethical expectations expressed by Senator Irving, who takes on more of a moralising role in the film, lecturing Roth about the media's failings. I briefly consider the rise of celebrity reporting and commercial pressures on the news cycle, which become integral in Roth's final undoing. It is important to note here that Roth's actions in the news cycle are not necessarily strictly *unethical*, but the actions of her ANX supervising editor Howard and the news organisation ultimately *are*, since Roth's fate is left unknown at the end of the film.

This particular plot thread demonstrates the overreliance of reporters on official government sources for information (DiMaggio 2010: 14; McChesney 2008: 31) and as such, how simple it is for those in government "to set the news agenda by what they speak about" (McChesney 2008: 31). ANX reporter Janine Roth arrives at Senator Irving's Congressional office for an interview she is conducting to gather facts for a timeline about the key moments in the war in Afghanistan. In his timber-panelled office, laden with symbols of US patriotism, it is assumed, by Senator Irving's defensive reaction to her pitch, that her story would be put together as a "larger retrospective of mistakes made". Relevantly, in his recent analysis of war coverage, DiMaggio notes that reporters were "pressured to curtail their reporting of 'bad news' in Iraq by right-wing pundits and conservative political leaders" (2010: 116), and this is exactly what Irving does. Instead, Senator Irving offers her an exclusive story about a "new plan for Afghanistan that will win the war and the hearts and minds of the people". What follows is an intriguing discussion between an ambitious politician and an experienced journalist about ethics, issues of power and independence and the downfall of the modern news media.

Like Edward R. Murrow, Cal McAffrey and Della Frye, Janine Roth expresses a commitment to the truth and uncovering dishonesty in the government in the name of the public interest, which demonstrates her Kantian-like duty to the truth, but also a utilitarian motivation as she looks to benefit the greatest number of people. However, since the film only shows the interview, it is difficult to ascertain conclusively whether Roth's personal ethics in the news process are primarily utilitarian or Kantian because other actions cannot be assessed to get an overall picture. However, it is my contention that Janine Roth follows the sections of the SPJ Code of Ethics with a Kantian-like sense of duty, treating the points in the Code as categorical imperatives in themselves.

Roth's fictionalised adherence to the relevant sections of SPJ Code is quite marked. For my analysis, the relevant sections are the first section, "Seek Truth and Report It" (SPJ 1996), which examines the requirements for reporting the truth and the third section, "Act Independently" (SPJ 1996), which looks at conflicts of interest. Roth's strong adherence to these statements, which goes so far as possibly being sacked, is strongly indicative of a Kantian sense of duty because Roth feels that these actions should be carried out, no matter what the situation or personal consequences.

McChesney notes that before foreign conflicts, "the news media [are] placed in a recurring dilemma" (2008: 99). In each case, the government pursued "aggressive propaganda campaigns to whip up popular support and a key battleground was winning favourable press coverage" (2008: 99). In his opinion, there are two possible responses: accept the government view or, as a credible

journalist, “hold the nation’s rulers to evidentiary standards” (2008: 99). Roth does attempt to get evidence. In line with the first section of the SPJ Code, Roth is determined in her method of “test[ing] the accuracy of information” (SPJ 1996) from Senator Irving by asking many questions. She asks for intricate details of his plan for establishing forward operating points in the hill country of Afghanistan, noticing small changes in rhetoric, which indicate vital information. It is suggested that Senator Irving’s use of ‘points’ rather than ‘bases’ indicates a smaller use of troops to engage Taliban forces, which Roth interprets as using soldiers as bait. Throughout the interview, Roth presses him by asking uncomfortable questions. She remarks that the rhetoric he uses about a possible nuclear-armed Iran sounds like the “same sort of fear-mongering” which lead them to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the first place. When Senator Irving asks why the media continue to ask the same questions, Roth replies “until we get an answer”, intended by the filmmakers to demonstrate her ability to see through the political jargon in the interview and her commitment to the social responsibility as a member of the news media and to finding out the truth. The film depicts Roth as being disappointed when Senator Irving says that they are not embedding press⁸ with these forward operating units: the explanation given is that it’s not necessary and she will get all required information from the Senator. She will not be able to verify the results the Senator is giving her from another source, and she tells her editor Howard that there are no “verifiable facts” in the story because they “just have to take [Irving’s] word for it”.

⁸ McChesney writes “perhaps the most striking development in press coverage of the invasion and war [in Iraq] was the policy of ‘embedding’ journalists with military units, so they could see firsthand how the war was developing” (2008: 108). It allowed journalists unprecedented access and it was now “possible for them to get stories that would be otherwise unattainable” (2008: 108).

As a result of her commitment to the truth, the other statement in the first section of the Code that the Roth character holds to firmly is that journalists should “tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so” (SPJ 1996). After completing her interview with Senator Irving, Roth returns to the ANX news room and discusses the interview with Howard. She expresses her concern that the story is simply “propaganda” for the news media to buy again and “lubricant to get [Senator Irving] into the White House”. Howard disagrees with this view, arguing that Irving gave her an exclusive story that she needs to report. Roth challenges Howard to the point when Howard says her “version of the story will never see the light of day” because it is pure speculation and threatens that if she does not write the story, she will be fired.

The third section of the Code looks at conflicts of interest and urges journalists to avoid them, even if they are “real or perceived” (SPJ 1996), refuse special treatment and “be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable” (SPJ 1996). When Roth starts the interview with Senator Irving and realises that she has a full hour alone with the Senator without a public relations representative, Irving replies that he is “returning the favour” after a complimentary article Roth wrote about him eight years ago. Roth immediately denies that this was done as a favour, saying that was her opinion at the time. While she denies that there is a conflict of interest, her editor Howard refers to Irving as “her guy”, which she denies again. While Roth herself does not believe there is a conflict of interest, it is obvious that everyone else believes there is, and as such, it should be avoided. Roth openly embraces the special treatment given to her by Irving and is excited that she has a full hour alone with the Senator. Perhaps, she is, as DiMaggio argues, “more

concerned with gaining access to officials than with questioning the legitimacy of their statements” (2010: 122). However, I believe that Roth’s endless questioning of Irving can be read as evidence of her will to hold those in power accountable.

While Roth’s actions within the film are mostly ethical, the ending subverts the ethical actions she had completed until this point of the film. The interaction between Roth and Howard provides an intriguing ethical discussion about what should be reported and why. Roth argues that since the successful implementation of Irving’s plan cannot be verified from an independent source, it could simply be more government propaganda that, as Senator Irving says, is being used to “sell the solution” to the war. In her argument against broadcast, Roth says that she left the interview “with a bad feeling” and suggests that the news media cannot continue to be a windsock, which “blows with the prevailing breeze” and that they “can’t just buy the program again”. These statements reflect her opinion, and those of scholars, that the media did not stand up and question the United States Government effectively when they first went to war in Afghanistan. For example, McChesney argues that the reporting in the lead up to the Iraq War is “one of the darkest moments in the entire history of US journalism” (2008: 106). Roth is concerned that they are headed down that path again, as they “willingly adopt propaganda” (DiMaggio 2010: 13) by simply framing US “foreign policy in accord with the views of political officials” (DiMaggio 2010: 12). Roth’s sentiments demonstrate that she believes the news media need to stand up and complete their social responsibility of seeking the truth and holding the government to account for their actions.

In response to these criticisms, Howard uses other ethical concepts in his response to convince Roth to write the story. He says that Roth isn't "being paid to investigate [her] feelings" and she needs to "just give [him] the facts", implying that she is letting "[her] politics cloud [her] reasoning" and, as such, is trying to impose her own political and cultural values on others, which is to be avoided (SPJ 1996). These attitudes again show how stifling objectivity as a news convention can be, as discussed in the *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004) analysis, since "reporters' 'objective', unquestioning transmission of official statements makes them partners in the promulgation of government propaganda" (DiMaggio 2010: 114-115). Howard argues that her duty, and the duty of the station, is to "broadcast news, and the launch of a new military move is news". By using "anything done by official sources...as the basis for legitimate news" (McChesney 2008: 31), Howard accuses Roth of being unprofessional and biased, since no official source agrees with her (McChesney 2008: 31). In contrast, these conventions are preventing Roth from doing her job effectively. As her boss, Howard threatens that if she pursues her line of inquiry and turns out to be wrong, she will be out of a job and will not be able to get another one. Roth's fate is left ambiguously at the end of the film. She drives past the White House and Arlington Cemetery and begins to cry, allowing filmmakers to demonstrate that in some way, whether she resigned or wrote the story, Roth ultimately failed to hold the government accountable, questioning the sacrifice of the soldiers who died for her country. While Roth stood up and was prepared to hold the government accountable, her bosses were not and merely went along with officialdom.

Whether Roth refused to write the story and resigned or she buckled under the pressure and wrote the story is unclear. However, the criticisms of the news media remain the same and are given voice in the film through the character of Senator Irving. During the interview, Irving plays an interesting role which involves him both chastising Roth for the media's failings and using those failings to his best advantage. Irving is characterised as a typical patriotic Republican politician: he has two American flags in his office, wears an American flag pinned to his suit jacket, a statuette of a golden eagle swooping mid-flight, and photos adorning his office walls of him with significant Republican personalities including George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice. In the opening sequence, he is shown examining public opinion polls, which indicate lowering public confidence in the President and the possibility of winning the War on Terror. This gives audiences a clear indication of his motives in the interview: that he is trying to present a strong and positive image of himself, his plans for Afghanistan and therefore launch himself further down his path towards White House power. The other message to audiences is that Senator Irving is planning on using his interview with Roth to sell his solution to the war to the American public. By offering Roth an exclusive from an official government source with infra-red video of the missions, which are ANX's "most popular downloads", Irving provides her with "timely information" (DiMaggio 2010: 114), showing that he understands the conventions and constraints on the contemporary news media. With little time, space and commercial pressures of competition, she would have insufficient time to explore the plan in great depth, let alone find other sources which could express concerns with the plan.

While he is using, and indeed abusing, the problems with contemporary news media, at the same time Senator Irving also *identifies* them for audiences and Roth. He has two major criticisms of the news media: that the space and time allowed for important government and policy analysis has shrunk dramatically in between entertainment coverage, and that the news media are not effectively performing their role as a check on the government. In this one scene, viewers see Senator Irving standing up, while Roth remains seated. Not only does he become taller than her, he stands over her in an assertive manner and lectures her about these flaws. These techniques cast Irving as the moral force in these scenes, and he says:

Here we are having a high-minded policy debate about war and policy and it just occurred to me that you're not going to be able to fit a real story in between those 'home of the free, land of the obese' exposés and all your network's entertainment coverage.

Irving: What happened to you guys? When did you become a windsock?

Roth: A what?

Irving: A windsock: blows with the prevailing breeze. When did you start confusing majority opinion with the right opinion?

Until this point in the film, Roth's questioning of Irving's overtures was vigorous. DiMaggio observes that politicians "publicly chastise the media when they feel coverage is not sufficiently sycophantic" (2010: 114). Roth's questioning weakens at this point and Irving regains control of the interview. Irving specifically mentions the role her own network played in selling the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, offering the benefit of the doubt that the government asked for "without a blush". He then argues, with a Kantian-like allusion to duty, that the government and the media are in fact teammates in this situation and, since the news media already sold the war to the American people, they are obliged to "help [him] sell the solution". If this happens and the news media stop fulfilling their role as a challenger of government power, they "become little more than lapdogs of the state" (DiMaggio

2010: 19). While Roth does eventually admit the mistakes of her network, she refuses to accept that she should blindly help sell the solution, leading to her confrontation with Howard and the possibility that she lost her job.

Another interesting observation that the Irving character makes when he is trying to sell the idea of an original story to Roth, is when he asks if she would “like to write a real story instead of reminding the few still paying attention that we’re in a bad war”. Indeed, Good notes that “films that condemn TV news for competitiveness, sensationalism, and superficiality also condemn the mass audience that watches it as if mesmerised” (1989: 96). According to *Lions For Lambs*’ Senator Irving, there are only a few still paying attention, while the rest are more interested in entertainment and gossip.

In the film, as college student Todd Hayes contemplates his future, he watches a breaking news bulletin on ANX about the divorce of pop star Fate from rapper Bully Dog and notices Senator Irving’s new plan announced on the scroll at the bottom of the screen. His political science Professor Stephen Malley had spent the film telling him the story of two former students, who volunteered to fight in Afghanistan, so they could contribute to the biggest event of their generation. The message of this film is quite clear: the solution for the current apathy will be found in individual action, whether that action is trying to change the system, running for public office, fighting a war or simply paying attention, and checking that the news media are doing their job. The news media also need to take heed, and proactively question government instead of simply rolling over.

The Morally Grey: *State of Play* (2009)

Della Frye: Did we just break the law?

Cal McAffrey: No, that's what we call damn fine reporting.

This exchange between veteran investigator Cal McAffrey and online cub reporter Della Frye reflects the complexity of the ethics that director Kevin Macdonald presents to the audience in *State of Play* (2009). Unlike the first two films discussed, *State of Play* (2009) explores a utilitarian approach to journalism ethics through the character of Cal McAffrey. On the other hand, journalist Della Frye follows a different ethical path. She acts as the journalistic conscience of the film, questioning McAffrey on his actions throughout and revealing his misdeeds to the editor Cameron Lynne. However, Della Frye's role in the film is more complicated. Frye is also McAffrey's young protégé and the film acts as an induction for her into the world of investigative reporting. While acting as the ethical conscience, she also participates in some of the behaviours that are unethical as she becomes more experienced via her on-the-job training. Lastly, the core ethical issue of the film, conflict of interest, will be discussed in greater detail.

When applying my selected ethical frameworks to this film, it is clear that fictional journalist Cal McAffrey operates mainly through using his utilitarian perspective. His choice of actions is determined by their ability to get information for a story that he deems is in the greater public interest, or the greatest happiness for the majority. This outlook justifies many actions that most people would see as not only unethical and also, quite probably, illegal. McAffrey checks the recent call list of murder victim Deshaun Stagg's mobile phone from his personal effects in the morgue, simply telling the Medical Examiner to "close her eyes". He also gets 'a friend' to run a social security number for him to get a possible source's phone

number and threatens another source, Dominic Foy, into giving an interview. More importantly, he buys photos, without question, from a homeless drug addict named Mandi and, with the support of editor Cameron Lynne, withholds that evidence from police so they could print the story exclusively. By keeping the evidence from the police, the filmmakers infer that two further deaths, those of Vernon Sando and Mandi, could have been prevented. These actions are not only illegal, but unethical. Christians goes so far to say that “privacy is not a legal right only but a moral good” (2010: 203). These actions demonstrate how McAffrey treats people with information as purely sources to be used, not as ends in themselves, highlighting his disregard for Kantian notions of human dignity (Crook 2010: 167; Kant 1909: 47).

Despite all the risks inherent in these actions, McAffrey chooses them because he believes in the importance of the story and that, when he discovers the truth, it will be in the public interest and benefit the greatest number of people, which is consistent with Mill’s view that “the multiplication of happiness...is the object of virtue” (2006: 77). Having said this, throughout the film, McAffrey’s motives are questioned due to his close relationship with the Collinses. However, it is important to note that this pattern of choices begins before he realised that the Collinses could be affected by the story. His first unethical act, checking Deshaun Stagg’s phone, in fact revealed this connection and it is thus the conclusion of this analysis that, even if the Collinses were not involved in this story, he would have pursued the facts with similar vigour.

These unethical actions do lead McAffrey and Frye towards the truth of the conspiracy which they eventually unravel. If McAffrey had not checked the call list on Stagg's phone, he wouldn't have discovered the link between him and Sonia Baker, Congressman Collins' lead researcher. Furthermore, the photos bought from Mandi confirmed that Baker's death was not a suicide and that she was pushed in front of the train. These facts were integral in helping to untangle the story and therefore, the illegality of the actions is brushed over, demonstrating the "goal based formula" of Utilitarianism (Crook 2010: 169).

Perhaps the most pervasive ethical issue in this film is conflict of interest. Wasserman defines it as "any affiliation that a person values [which] may suffice to produce a conflict" (2010: 250) and essentially could be anything that may have a "discernible effect on the journalist's output" (2010: 250). The third section of the SPJ Code of Ethics states that journalists need to act independently and should "avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived" (SPJ 1996). When directly questioned by editor Cameron Lynne about a possible conflict of interest with the Collinses, McAffrey replies that there isn't one, lying and not disclosing the extent of his links with the Collinses. Cal McAffrey is the former college roommate of Congressman Stephen Collins and had an affair with Anne Collins, his wife. In fact, Congressman Collins actually goes to McAffrey's apartment to hide from the media when reports after Baker's death reveal that he was having an affair with her. During that evening, McAffrey argues for Congressman Collins to "fight back with our own facts" so the "bloodsuckers and bloggers" don't take another "free shot" at him. The use of 'our' in that dialogue demonstrates that McAffrey aligns himself with Congressman Collins and uses his knowledge of the media to help him regain positive coverage.

Furthermore, while Frye waits at the hospital for an interview with shooting victim Vernon Sando, McAffrey “follows another lead” and goes for a social drink with Anne Collins. Even more concerning as the links between Deshaun Stagg and Sonia Baker’s murders become more tangible, McAffrey says that he must be Stephen Collins’ friend and a reporter in order to help him. When Anne Collins confronts McAffery about his role in the story and his motivations behind asking her some questions, McAffrey states that he wants to clear Stephen Collins and protect Anne Collins. In these words, and Congressman Collins’ verbal attack on his intentions, McAffrey’s claims to be “just a truth seeker” are undone. Even editor Cameron Lynne, who tacitly supports McAffrey throughout the film, calls him corrupt. For journalists, conflicts of interest have serious consequences because they can paint them as “unworthy of public trust” (Wasserman 2010: 249), which renders the conflicted journalist powerless.

However, these crimes are in the end overlooked when in the final moments McAffrey discovers that Stephen Collins himself is involved in both murders. In his final confrontation with Collins, McAffrey emerges from the shadows on screen into the full light, which symbolically represents his redemption, and he goes on to reinforce why he is a journalist and cares so much about the truth:

You know in the middle of all this gossip and speculation that permeates people’s lives, I still think they know the difference between real news and bullshit and they’re glad that someone cares enough to get things on the record and print the truth.

As McAffrey writes the final story, the newspaper staff all watching him in support, his crimes are forgiven and the things he did wrong are glossed over as necessary to uncover the truth, reinforcing the utilitarian motivation behind his

actions. These sentiments support Ghiglione and Saltzman's argument that "reporters, editors and news broadcasters can get away with almost anything as long as the end result is *in the public interest*" (2005: 2).

The ethical outlook presented in the film becomes slightly more complicated because Cal McAffrey is not the only journalist in the film, especially when the other protagonist presents another ethical view. Della Frye is a young reporter, who works for the online section of the *Washington Globe* and her role within the film is somewhat complex. She acts not only as the young naive protégé whom McAffrey must induct into the ways of investigative journalism, but she also acts as an ethical conscience, frequently identifying McAffrey's indiscretions and trying to hold him accountable for his actions.

Frye's ethical outlook is remarkably different to McAffrey's. In fact, McAffrey looks down on Frye and sees the rest of the "bloodsuckers and bloggers" as unethical because he believes she values scandal and comment over a commitment to the truth. He insults her saying that she needs to "get a few facts in the mix before [she] up chuck[s] online again". Frye establishes her journalistic credibility with McAffrey when she discovers more information about transit safety from McAffrey's source than he thought she could.

Once this preliminary credibility is established, the first role that Frye fulfils within the plot is that of the ethical conscience to the other journalist characters. Her ethical perspective is Kantian in its application because she is concerned about how their actions affect their sources and she tries to treat her interviewees not purely as

means to a greater end (Crook 2010: 167; Kant 1909: 47). Frye questions McAffrey and Lynne's decision to hold onto Mandi's photographs, believing that the police need to see them because they are evidence. When Vernon Sando is shot at the hospital in front of her, Frye yells at McAffrey that they "can't just let people get hurt like that" and believes that if they had handed over the photos the police could have caught the perpetrator before he killed again. This attitude fits the pattern of her character's respect of the law, but also a commitment to treating people as ends themselves and not just sources (Crook 2010: 167).

Frye is also the character who eventually reveals the extent of McAffrey's conflict of interest with the Collinses. After Stephen Collins storms out of his private preview of Dominic Foy's revealing interview, Frye hears the exchange between Collins and McAffrey, which reveals McAffrey's affair with Anne Collins and reports what she hears to Lynne. Frye's actions are endorsed and supported visually through the lighting: Frye's face is completely lit, reflecting her ethical clarity while McAffrey's face lurks partially in the shadows. In this way, Della Frye acts as the ethical conscience of film and holds McAffrey accountable for his actions.

The second key ethical role that Frye plays in the film complicates this analysis. She is also the young inexperienced reporter, who, over the course of the film, is inducted into the realm of investigative journalism. When the connections between the two stories become apparent, McAffrey and Frye work together in a 'master and apprentice' relationship: McAffrey directs the team working on the story and Frye forms part of that team. As this induction progresses, elements of Frye's behaviour change so she becomes more like a seasoned reporter, particularly more

like McAffrey. This transformation also takes place visually through on screen elements. At the beginning, she is dressed rather formally in comparison to McAffrey. Viewers see that she wears a high necked blouse, skirt and heels, while McAffrey wears a daggy old jacket, his shirt is untucked and his desk is a mess with newspaper clippings, notebooks and pens. As the film goes on, Frye's wardrobe relaxes and her persistent lack of a pen, used as a recurring symbol of authority and authenticity in the film, is solved at the end when McAffrey presents her with a Nubian Princess Pen Necklace: a 'medal' signalling her completed induction into investigative journalism. However, while her ethical underpinning doesn't seem to change her research methods do. When sent off to research her side of the story, Frye makes phone calls and home visits, identifying herself as a member of the press from the *Washington Globe*. She is hung up on once and has doors slammed in her face four times by potential interviewees. In order to find out information about Rhonda Silver, Sonia Baker's former roommate, Frye agrees to go on two dates with a "sweaty guy called Vic" and, after McAffrey runs her social security number to get her phone number, Frye calls Silver's home pretending to be an old school friend in town for the day, who would like to see her at work. By doing this, the audience is shown that she has learned a few tricks from McAffrey, but she is not criticised for it by McAffrey because, in the film, lying to sources about her identity is the only way for her to get information on Baker's past from people.

Referring to the SPJ Code of Ethics, Cal McAffrey holds fast to the first section of the code, which outlines the duty of journalists to seek the truth and report it. He firmly follows the journalistic duty outlined in the Preamble which states that journalists are to further public enlightenment, justice and democracy "by seeking

the truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues” (SPJ 1996). McAffrey and Frye’s research into the two initial murders and the corruption of PointCorp are reported “boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so” (SPJ 1996).

However, the two journalists’ actions differ when it comes to the rest of the Code. Cal McAffrey does not seek to minimise harm, as the second section of the Code explains. He does not treat interviewees as “human beings deserving of respect” (SPJ 1996), just as sources of information. Anne Collins identifies that McAffrey treats his friends and sources differently. When McAffrey asks her questions about the Rhonda Silver allegations that might break, she is offended by his conduct. She calmly answers the question, then adds “it’s ok. Now I’m just a source. The pressure’s off”. Furthermore, McAffrey does “recognise that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort” (SPJ 1996), but uses this discomfort to coerce Dominic Foy into an interview to get his side of the story and convince Congressman Collins to go on the record. The article that McAffrey holds onto from this section states “only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone’s privacy” (SPJ 1996) and it seems that every story has an “overriding public need” (SPJ 1996). McAffrey asks Anne Collins personal questions about their finances and accesses social security records and phone numbers all in the pursuit of this “overriding public need” (SPJ 1996). Della Frye, on the other hand, does recognise the harm that news reporting can cause others. Audiences see that she tries to get McAffrey and Lynne to hand over evidence to protect Mandi and is upset at the death of Vernon Sando, showing her high level of compassion.

The last section of the Code asks journalists to be accountable not only to their readers and media consumers, but also to each other (SPJ 1996). McAffrey does not make himself accountable to Frye or Lynne because he lies about the depth of his connection to the Collinses. He also tries to hide his unethical practices, until Frye brings him to account for his actions at the end.

My main argument is that these different ethical frameworks that are represented in the two lead characters of this film create conflicting messages as to what actions are deemed appropriate when pursuing a story. Cal McAffrey is absolved, although not entirely, for his unethical actions throughout the film because he eventually stands up to his conflict of interest, understands the entire truth of the situation and reveals it to the public. On the other hand, Della Frye acts as the ethical conscience of the film, rebuking McAffrey on his wrong actions, but at the same time, adopts some of his dubious methods because using them is the only way to get information from people. The film does however come to a vague conclusion as to which ethical values are more appropriate. In the final scene, as McAffrey writes up the last story in the report, which implicates Stephen Collins in the deaths of four people, McAffrey types Della Frye's name first on the by-line, followed by his own. In this act the filmmakers show that McAffrey accepts that he handled the situation poorly and gives Frye the credit, even though he discovered Congressman Collins' involvement and researched and delivered the main part of the story. In my opinion, this scene highlights that the filmmakers ultimately favour Frye's ethical approach to her work: that is a commitment to the truth that is unwavering and drives her, but at the same time is independent, treats sources as human beings and is still prepared to

break a few laws to get information, if it is in the public interest. Indeed,
“professional goals must be restrained by humane values” (Good 1989: 73).

Discussion

Having examined the three films, *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), *Lions For Lambs* (2007) and *State of Play* (2009), by applying John Start Mill's Utilitarianism, Immanuel Kant's Deontological ethics and the SPJ Code of Ethics as frames, the thesis has identified how these films "present and define" the ethics of journalists in the news media (de Vreese 2005: 51) through framing devices and cinematic tropes. Since all these films raise similar concerns, and because they come from a similar historico-production context, it is worth briefly summarising the most significant issues in order to see if there are any messages that can be applied to best practice journalism.

All three films construct sets of images that convey the idea that journalists are considered to be practicing acceptable standards of news media ethics if they are fulfilling the public expectations of them, particularly their social responsibilities. The ethically responsible journalist is aware that they "enjoy a privileged position under...government [and] is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society" (Peterson 1963: 74). Their main function is to act as a watchdog against activities of government and corporations for the people in society. In *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), Edward R. Murrow and the fictionalised *See It Now* news team are lauded for holding the United States government, and particularly the actions of Senator Joseph McCarthy, accountable despite pressure from CBS' owners and advertisers. In *State of Play* (2009), Cal McAffrey and Della Frye investigate a conspiracy involving private military contractor PointCorp, corruption and Congressman Collins. McAffrey eventually reports this truth, despite his personal

connections with the Collinses. In *Lions For Lambs* (2007), Janine Roth refuses to simply accept the word of Senator Irving on the success of his new plan in Afghanistan because she cannot verify the data from an independent source, and spends her interview asking tough questions to find out the truth.

Many of these ideas are also encapsulated in the SPJ Code of Ethics, which calls for journalists to enlighten the public (SPJ 1996) and ensure that “government records are open to inspection” (SPJ 1996). Since these ideas are represented in a practical Code of Ethics, I assume that these are ideals that are also desirable in ethical journalism and that journalists should strive for these goals.

The news media in these films are chastised when they fail to fulfil this duty. In *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), Edward R. Murrow’s speech to the Radio-Television News Directors’ Association and Foundation, which bookends the film, is a warning to journalists to stop insulating, entertaining and deluding its audience, but instead promotes using the power of television to educate, inform and motivate. In *Lions For Lambs* (2007), Murrow’s warning comes to fruition: the news media are entertaining and deluding its audience with entertainment coverage and gossip, instead of focussing on Senator Irving’s new military strategy, which does affect the implementation and direction of foreign policy.

Since these constructions of the news media are “what its producers *assume* journalism to represent in the minds of the broad American public” (McNair 2010: 17), it can be read that filmmakers are re-issuing a warning to the news media, asking them to fulfil their social responsibilities correctly.

Journalists today should be aware that the news media do have a critical social responsibility to the public that it broadcasts to because they must report on the government’s activities. Given the criticisms of the reporting on the wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq (see DiMaggio 2010 and McChesney 2008), the news media need to re-examine their role in “selling the war”, as Janine Roth was forced to in *Lions For Lambs* (2007) and start to question the government again more closely.

The second key theme that is identified in all three films is that ethical journalists need to have an insatiable appetite for the truth, pursue it and report it. Journalists in all three films exhibited this yearning and followed the truth, no matter how complicated, conflicted or unpopular it became. In *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), *See It Now* reported on the story of Lieutenant Milo Radulovich against the recommendations of the United States Air Force and CBS management and also unpopularly pursued stories on Senator McCarthy and his actions. In *Lions For Lambs* (2007), Roth persevered, pushing Senator Irving to answer her difficult questions and was disappointed when she could not verify his story from an independent source or embedded journalists. In *State of Play* (2009), McAffrey and Frye pursued the truth into the depths of corporate and government corruption. They continued to question the final story they were told, to the point where McAffrey realised his friend Congressman Collins was involved, and did not hesitate to report this truth. In these films, any methods used to get to the truth are justifiable because the journalists are operating in the public interest.

The SPJ Code of Ethics reinforces these kinds of sentiments. Journalists are asked to be “honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information” (SPJ 1996). Seeking the truth is the method by which they can carry out their duty to enlighten the public (SPJ 1996), which demonstrates that it is a desirable ethical trait for the news media.

However, while Klaidman and Beauchamp note that “reporting the truth is at the heart of the journalistic exercise” (1987: 31), the incredibly high standards set are “unattainable in journalism because of constraints, not the least of which are time and space” (1987: 31). Indeed, since “journalism cannot be entirely complete, always accurate, perfectly balanced, or totally objective” (Klaidman & Beauchamp 1987: 31) because of these constraints on ideal practice, it means that truth requirements “fall somewhere between the poles of full disclosure capable of promoting an in-depth understanding and a cursory account of the bare facts” (1987: 31). Such philosophical and complicated notions of truth render the simplified ‘pursue the truth, no matter what the consequences’ messages impossible to implement.

There is another application on this front from the films that cannot be adapted. The films, especially *State of Play* (2009), promote that journalists “can get away with almost anything as long as the end result is *in the public interest*” (Ghiglione & Saltzman 2005: 2). Cal McAffrey lies to sources and illegally accesses a murder victim’s mobile phone data all in the pursuit of ‘the truth’. Best practice journalism requires journalists to follow the law or otherwise journalistic trust would diminish.

Lastly, while it was only discussed in detail in the context of *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), the need to be *objective* in news reporting is also questioned. This opinion is tangible in *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), and the arguments expounded there will not be repeated again here (See pp. 42-45). However, it is also used as a criticism of Janine Roth’s reporting in *Lions For Lambs* (2007). ANX editor Howard tries to convince Roth to write the story given to her by Senator Irving because he doesn’t pay her to write about her feelings, just the facts. By

questioning Roth's motives prompted by her feelings, he tries to use objectivity as a way to restrain her exploring the possible problems with the Senator's plan, and thus preventing her from completing her job correctly and fulfilling her social responsibility. While objectivity is not really mentioned in *State of Play* (2009), Della Frye and Cal McAffrey's passion for the story is hardly objective and, only through this passion, do they uncover the truth.

Yet, it is important to note that objectivity is not completely debunked. Rosen's argument which expresses "the need for a disinterested truth" (1993) is repeated in these films because it allows the public access to all the information they need to make informed decisions. Throughout *State of Play* (2009), McAffrey pursues an interested truth: he searches for the evidence against PointCorp to protect Stephen and Anne Collins and convince Stephen Collins to go on the record. This causes many problems, reinforcing Rosen's position.

The notion of objectivity is an historically nuanced and complicated one that is questioned by academics and journalists and is constantly under review (sometimes under the alternative rhetorical guise of 'impartiality'). The portrayal of objectivity in these films contributes to those debates, and they are unlikely to be solved in the near future.

Since these constructions of the news media are "what its producers *assume* journalism to represent in the minds of the broad American public" (McNair 2010: 17), the archetypes of journalist characters in films both influence and are influenced by the public's expectations of the news media in society. Accordingly, it is imperative that these depictions of journalists in film, even if they are merely

populist constructions that don't always invite continuous serious examination, are taken into consideration and studied. My argument is that this is necessary for media researchers to fully understand the well documented declining trust in the news media, and the roles that journalists are expected to play in contemporary society.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

Returning to the opening remarks of this thesis, the three films examined have exhibited the “long-standing cultural schizophrenia in public attitudes” (McNair 2010: 9) towards journalists, presenting both encouraging and pessimistic constructions of journalists, even sometimes within the same film. This thesis has examined these films as “documents of a society’s ongoing engagement with this key cultural and political institution” (McNair 2010: 16). I used de Vreese’s definitions of framing (2005) and Gamson and Modigliani’s ‘framing devices’ (1989) to identify how the ethics of journalists are shown in the three films, *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2004), *Lions For Lambs* (2007) and *State of Play* (2009). John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism, Immanuel Kant’s Deontological ethics and the SPJ Code of Ethics were deployed as my chosen frames to determine how these films’ ethical positions are presented and which approaches, if any, are favoured.

In the first chapter, I explored the two ethical philosophies that were used in this thesis, John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarianism and Immanuel Kant’s Deontological ethics. After examining the key precepts in these philosophies, as they relate to practical journalism ethics, the SPJ Code of Ethics was also drawn on as the third analytical framework used for analysis. The thesis also examined the public’s expectations of best practice journalism and how these expectations influence and are influenced by populist arguments and portrayals of journalists, especially those in film. By outlining a brief history of the depiction of journalists in films, I sought to show how journalists are often emblematic of perceived successes and flaws in the contemporary news media. The thesis drew on news framing and film and media

studies methods to complete this analysis, focusing on de Vreese's definitions and applications of framing (2005).

As explored in the film text analysis and the subsequent discussion chapter, the 'key message' of the three chosen films are that the public are disillusioned with the state of the contemporary news media because they are not fulfilling their social responsibilities as an effective check on government power correctly. In these films, a journalist who is ethically good recognises that they have social responsibilities, accepts that traditional notions of objectivity can restrain journalistic practice, has an insatiable thirst for the truth and acknowledges, while a pursuit of this truth is paramount, "professional goals must be restrained by humane values" (Good 1989: 73). Indeed in film, reporters "can get away with almost anything as long as the end result is *in the public interest*" (Ghiglione & Saltzman 2005: 2). While this *carte blanche* is not available to actual journalists, the other main tropes explored in these analyses can be applied to best practice journalism.

This thesis contributes to a small, but steadily growing field that examines the depictions of journalism in popular culture. The work that has been done in this field, mainly by Good (1989; 2008), Ehrlich (1997; 2006), McNair (2010), Saltzman and Ghiglione (2005) and the work of the IJPC, examines how the journalists in popular cultural texts, not just films, represent "cultural zeitgeists" (McNair 2010: 4). While this thesis has used some of this research and recognised the great impact of culture and context on the production of the chosen films, it has taken this research in a different direction and has focused more specifically on the *ethical* representations of the fictional journalists, which in my research, is unique to this

project. Considering the ways in which “movies are the central myth-making media of our societies” (McNair 2010: 16), these kinds of films need to be examined so researchers can continue to understand the public’s expectations of journalists, at a populist level. While these constructions have tended not to be taken that seriously by the academy, it is clear from my thesis that there are benefits that can arise from this form of study. References to journalism in popular culture, not just films, are endless and thus further study in this area is only limited by the imagination of researchers.

The key ethical debates in journalism, including objectivity, social responsibility and the acceptable limits of journalist action to obtain information, have been around for at least half a century, and these films’ engagement with these issues opens up a new dialogic interface, allowing filmmakers and the public to weigh in on the issues. Research of this kind, particularly that which compares the public’s expectations and depictions of journalism with the standards that journalists expect from themselves, will always be beneficial to examine where the disconnect is, and perhaps help explain why distrust in journalism is on the rise.

It is through the researcher’s engagement with characters like the fictionalised Edward R Murrow, Janine Roth, Cal McAffrey and Della Frye that the public and journalists can perhaps assist in curing the “cultural schizophrenia” that is plaguing these popular culture interpretations and in that process come to a better understanding of one another.

Appendix One: Crook’s Table of Ethical Philosophies

There are, as Crook notes, “three broad traditions of media ethicological discourse: the deontological; the consequential; and the virtuous” (2010: 156). He provides a summary table of the key features of these ethical frameworks which is included below:

<i>Deontological (duty-based)</i>	<i>Consequential (utilitarian and teleological)</i>	<i>Virtue (human flourishing)</i>
<p>Christian Ethics</p> <p>Duties apply regardless of the consequences. Influence of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments). Absolute duties. Word of God sets absolute values of right and wrong. Essentially a system of dos and don’ts; similar to other monotheistic religions such as Islam and Judaism. Whilst “thou shalt not kill” is supposed to be universalisable, complex variations of the Christian doctrinal tradition can justify killing in the context of a ‘just war’, an exceptional circumstance. The Christian moral code is an objective and infallible guide to correct behaviour because the code is regarded as an expression of God’s will.</p>	<p>Utilitarianism</p> <p>The right and wrong of human speech and actions are determined not by intentions but by consequences. Leading advocates included Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-73). The doctrine sought to establish a secular morality by calculating probable consequences in terms of human happiness. It is hedonistic in nature because the ends are articulated in terms of ‘pleasure’. Bentham saw happiness as a blissful mental state and the absence of pain. He coined the term ‘felicific calculus’ as an objective method of applying his moral formula. Mill sought to categorise higher and lower forms of happiness, the former being intellectual and idealistic; the latter being sensorial and materialistic.</p>	<p>Neo-Aristotelianism</p> <p>Virtue ethics are inspired by Aristotle’s ethical theory set out in Nicomachean ethics. These ethicists stress the importance of character and conduct over the course of a person’s life. The moral question is dependent not on the rights and wrongs of motives, actions and consequences, but rather on virtues that guide the way an entire life is lived. Human flourishing rather than happiness was encapsulated in the ancient Greek word <i>eudaimonia</i>. Human virtue was the pattern of behaviour and feeling of an individual’s life and includes emotions as well as an intelligent judgment in responding to situations.</p>

<p>Kantian Ethics</p> <p>Actions are motivated by internal moral duty rather than purpose or goal. Essential obligation, over being obliged. Emotional feelings are not good enough in terms of moral motivation. There has to be a sense of moral duty, not the self-interest of personal feelings or the gratification of an objective or goal. Intentions are defined by maxims. Morality is a system of categorical imperatives, or commands. The first and basic maxim is ‘Act only on maxims which you can at the same time will it be universal laws’; similar to a Golden Rule of Christianity: ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’. Everybody should be treated as ends in themselves rather than a means to an end. Hence the maxim ‘Treat other people as ends in themselves, never as means to an end’ represents an important categorical imperative.</p>	<p>Negative and rule utilitarianism</p> <p>Negative utilitarianism determines that the best speech/action in any set of circumstances is not the one producing more happiness than unhappiness for the greatest number of people. It would be the speech that produces the least overall happiness. Rule utilitarianism avoids the unhappy consequences of act utilitarianism, where an evil motive and action produces aggregate happiness for the greatest number of people. It adopts rules and principles that tend generally to produce happiness for the greatest number. It is a method of combining the deontological with consequential ethics. It is regarded as altruistic rather than hedonistic utilitarianism.</p>	<p>The Golden Mean</p> <p>Virtue ethics guide people not to always take the middle ground, but rather to make the right decisions in any set of circumstances. In terms of communicating, the virtue ethicist speaks appropriately in relation to the context. This involves good motives, and determining good actions to achieve good consequences. Aristotle saw the virtuous individual harmonising all his/her virtues in order to live a worthwhile life. Virtues are to be distinguished between intellectual and moral. Moral virtues are acquired through training and are habit forming. Intellectual virtues are conscious decisions. It is the difference between the emotional and the rational. They fall between to extremes, i.e. ‘The Golden Mean’, but <i>phronimos</i>, or practical wisdom, is expressed according to the shifting extreme polarities or any situation</p>
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(Crook 2010: 156-157)

Appendix Two: Film Plot Summaries

Good Night, and Good Luck, 2004. Film. Directed by Clooney, George.

In the United States of America in the 1950s, fear of communism is rife and Senator Joseph McCarthy is in charge of investigating and uncovering communists in the US public service. Employees at CBS are even expected to sign loyalty oaths or they will be fired. CBS's *See It Now* anchor Edward R Murrow (David Strathairn) and producer Fred Friendly (George Clooney) discuss story ideas and Murrow reads an article about Lieutenant Milo Radulovich, who was kicked out of the US Air Force for refusing to denounce his father as a communist. *See It Now* interviews him and broadcasts the story, despite pressure from news executives and the Air Force. CBS news executive Sig Mickelson (Jeff Daniels) condemns the piece, since it is not neutral and takes Radulovich's side. Murrow defends this accusation by saying the official government voice has been overrepresented for far too long.

After the broadcast, CBS employees are targeted and accused of being communists. Reporter Joe Wershba (Robert Downey Jr) is presented with information that allegedly proves Murrow was associated with Soviet organisations in the 1930s and news anchor Don Hollenbeck (Ray Wise) is directly accused of being a communist.

Despite veiled accusations about their loyalty to the United States and pressure from CBS executive William Paley (Frank Langella) to leave Senator McCarthy alone, Murrow, Friendly and team decide to go straight at McCarthy, but using his own words. During the broadcast, Murrow offers Senator McCarthy right

of reply to the story if he feels wronged by its content. Bill Paley offers his support for Murrow saying that the network supports him today and tomorrow. After the broadcast, the reviews in the press are surprisingly positive, except one by a journalist named O'Brian, who accuses the program directly of being under the influence of communist propaganda that is supported by both Murrow and Hollenbeck. *See It Now* continues reporting on the Senator's activities and McCarthy eventually asks for a spot on the program to reply to their accusations.

In his reply, Senator McCarthy directly accuses Murrow and the team at *See It Now* as being communists. In reply, Murrow observes that McCarthy made no reference to the facts presented in the report and, therefore, assumes that the report had no mistakes. He also makes references to distinction between dissent and disloyalty and argues that the distinction needs to remain.

In the aftermath of the report, an announcement is made that the Senate is investigating McCarthy for misconduct. However, this celebration is short-lived when Hollenbeck, consumed with the overwhelming pressure of being accused of communism, commits suicide. Murrow reads a short obituary for the reporter on air.

These events are followed by an interview between Murrow, Friendly and Paley. Paley cuts the length and number of episodes they have to produce is reduced. The program is also moved to a Sunday afternoon. Paley argues that when audiences turn on television they want entertainment and not a civics lesson. Friendly is also told the program's budget is being cut. Murrow and Friendly vow to go down swinging, starting with a report on the downfall of television.

The film starts and ends with Edward R. Murrow giving a speech to Radio-Television News Directors' Association and Foundation in 1958. His speech is essentially a call for journalists to do their jobs diligently and properly: to seek and report the truth even when it is unpopular. He believes in the power of television as a tool to educate and inform its audience but believes that current entertainment programming and news are undermining its potential and lulling the audience into complacency. He argues that sponsors and corporations need to be ignored when it comes to news and compels editors and executives to try and give the people a civics lesson because they might be surprised at the results.

Lions For Lambs, 2007. Film. Directed by Redford, Robert.

At a university in California, Professor Stephen Malley (Robert Redford) has a meeting with one of his students Todd Hayes (Andrew Garfield), who has become apathetic and disinterested with his studies and the current political system. Professor Malley offers Hayes a solid B grade for doing no work for the rest of the semester or, if he wants to do better, he must attend every class for the rest of the semester and participate. Professor Malley tries to inspire Hayes to do more with his life by telling him the story of two former students Ernest Rodriguez and Arian Finch who volunteered to go fight in Afghanistan. While Professor Malley doesn't agree with them enlisting, he agrees with the principles as to why they did.

In Afghanistan, Arian Finch and Ernest Rodriguez, along with the rest of their unit, are deployed by Colonel Falco in a new tactic being launched, which involves capturing the high ground before the winter snow has thawed to gain the advantage over the Taliban. Before they can parachute down, the helicopter they are

in is attacked and, in the following firefight, Rodriguez falls out of the plane. Finch jumps out to be with him. Rodriguez is hurt and cannot walk and the two lay in the snow shooting at enemy forces, who are closing in. Colonel Falco launches a rescue mission to recover them. The pair run out of ammunition and decide that instead of lying down and allowing themselves to be captured, they stand up and get shot by the Taliban, just before the rescue plane arrives.

In Washington, at the office of Senator Jasper Irving (Tom Cruise), journalist Janine Roth (Meryl Streep) arrives for an interview with the Senator for a retrospective piece she is writing on the war in Afghanistan. Senator Irving offers her an exclusive story: the launch of a new plan in Afghanistan that launches during the interview. The plan is to use small units of soldiers to create forward operating points on high ground that has to be seized before the winter snow thaws. During the course of the interview, Roth questions the plan in great detail because she believes that it is flawed. Irving lectures Roth about the weaknesses of the news media, highlighting an overemphasis on celebrity and entertainment coverage and a tendency for news coverage to follow majority opinion, like a windsock. He tells her how the news media helped the US government sell the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to the American public and it is now their job to help him sell the solution.

After the interview, Roth goes back to her network, American News Exchange (ANX) and discusses the story with Howard, her editor. Roth expresses a concern that Irving is just trying to sell them the 'whole package' again and expects them to accept the facts blindly without questioning or independently corroborating them. Howard dismisses her hunches as feelings and asks her for the facts to put on

the news scroll on the bottom of the screen. Roth says she that she cannot do that. Howard says that her version of the story, one that questions Senator Irving's plan, will never see the light of day and she needs to write the story he gave her or she will be fired. Roth leaves the meeting, the fate of her job left ambiguously.

After his meeting with Professor Malley, Hayes returns to his fraternity house and watches television. In a breaking news segment, the focus group created news anchor Summer Hernandez-Kowalski announces that pop star Fate has filed for divorce from her husband Bully Dog. On the news scroll under the news bulletin, Senator Irving's plan is announced. Hayes sees the announcement and ponders Professor Malley's challenge to try and do something to change the situation.

State of Play, 2009. Film. Directed by Macdonald, Kevin.

Veteran reporter Cal McAffrey (Russell Crowe) is investigating the murder of Deshaun Stagg and the attempted murder of a witness, Vernon Sando. On the other side of town, Sonia Baker, lead researcher for Congressman Stephen Collins (Ben Affleck), who is looking into the possible corrupt dealings of private military contractor PointCorp, apparently commits suicide. In the process of reporting the story, it is revealed that Collins had an affair with Baker.

In the media fallout, Collins turns to McAffrey, his former college roommate for comfort. Collins believes, despite the majority of media coverage, that Baker did not kill herself. McAffrey starts giving Congressman Collins advice about how to combat the tide of negative media attention against him, including articles by the *Washington Globe's* Della Frye (Rachel McAdams).

McAffrey calls Frye in the middle of the night and tells her to go to an off-the-record preview of the security camera footage from the subway station, which unfortunately, yields no new information. McAffrey is surprised by the amount of information Frye finds out. McAffrey heads to the morgue where he checks the recent call log on Deshaun Stagg's phone. On the way back to the paper, he realises that Stagg had called Baker before he died.

While at lunch, McAffrey's press bag is stolen by Mandi. Mandi was Stagg's friend and together, they ran a scam where they stole people's bags and sold them back to them. Before they sold it back to their last mark, Mandi took some photos and bullets from the bag, which she then sells to McAffrey.

McAffrey returns to the paper with a theory that Baker's work into PointCorp may have gotten her killed. Editor Cameron Lynne (Helen Mirren) and McAffrey decide to withhold the photos from police for forty-eight hours, despite Frye's concerns. Due to the size of the story, Lynne takes Frye off the story, but, with McAffrey's support, the two team up to research the story. McAffrey sends Frye to the hospital to monitor the condition of Vernon Sando who is in a coma, while McAffrey goes to have a social drink with Anne Collins, where it is revealed McAffrey and Anne Collins had an affair years earlier. While at the hospital, Frye unknowingly sees the killer before he kills Sando and Frye witnesses it. In the aftermath, Frye says McAffrey was wrong to hold onto the photos because they could've stopped the murder. They turn them over to the police and are reprimanded for not turning over the evidence.

Now that they have been open with the police, Lynne is concerned that they will not get an exclusive. Now that the story involves Congressman Collins more directly, Lynne asks McAffrey if he has a conflict of interest. He says no. With the help of two extra researchers, Frye and McAffrey start uncovering the extent of PointCorp's corruption. Frye realises that a man in the security footage at the subway station was at the hospital the night Sando was murdered and McAffrey approaches an anonymous PointCorp insider to see if the mystery man can be identified.

While working on the Sonia Baker side of the story, Frye finds Rhonda Silver, Baker's former roommate, who claims the two of them had a sexual tryst with Stephen Collins. McAffrey argues that she is most likely lying. McAffrey approaches Congressman Collins with the new information about PointCorp and Collins says if McAffrey can find evidence linking PointCorp to Baker's death, he will go on the record.

Anne Collins come to visit McAffrey to discuss possibly leaving Stephen Collins for him. McAffrey starts questioning her about the story, which makes her angry and she leaves. The PointCorp insider identifies the man Frye saw as someone who did work for a man named Fred Summers. McAffrey goes to question Summers and ends up the meeting the killer. After a shootout and back at the office, McAffrey and Lynne are informed that Mandi was found dead the night before and Rhonda Silver appears on the news with her allegations. Lynne is furious they decided not to go with the Rhonda Silver story and give them the rest of the day to publish the story.

Being forced into publishing, McAffrey decides that they need to interview Dominic Foy, a man who was referred to by many sources in their research. McAffrey goes to see Foy and blackmails him into talking with them. Foy reveals that Baker was a spy planted by PointCorp to report on Congressman Collins' research and that she had stopped reporting back to PointCorp because she fell in love with Collins and was pregnant with his child. McAffrey confronts Collins with this information in order to compel him to go on the record, to Frye's objections. Collins refuses, accusing McAffrey of being inhumane and a hypocrite. He walks out.

At the office, Lynne is furious, having heard about McAffrey's affair with Anne Collins from Frye and calls him corrupt. McAffrey continues to push the story, but Lynne declares it is dead, since no major player is on the record. At that moment, Stephen and Anne Collins arrive and he goes on the record with an interview for the story. They leave the office and Frye and McAffrey start writing up the different parts of the story. They are about to celebrate when McAffrey remembers something Anne Collins said in the interview that she shouldn't have known. McAffrey asks for them to hold the story one last time and goes to confront Congressman Collins. Collins hired Robert Bingham, a former army buddy whose life he had saved, to follow Sonia Baker, when he became suspicious of her activities. Bingham had killed Baker, Stagg, Sando and Mandi to protect Stephen Collins and cover up the truth. McAffrey tells him that his career is finished and leaves. Bingham confronts him outside and is about to shoot McAffrey when the police arrive. In the final scene, McAffrey finishes off the last piece for the paper and he and Frye walk out of the office.

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