

## Abstract

This study examined how journalists defended their profession as a stream of journalistic ethics breaches have spawned an onslaught of criticism online and via social media. A textual analysis of more than 500 stories about journalism ethics violations in 2014 revealed that journalists are employing a broad-based discursive strategy reflective of so-called “second-order paradigm repair.” When confronted with a major scandal such as the uproar involving the disputed *Rolling Stone* story about an alleged gang rape at the University of Virginia, journalists can still respond in a manner consistent with traditional paradigm repair, which involves more elaborate strategies such as shifting the blame to rogue journalists and emphasizing corrective action by media outlets to reaffirm core values such as objectivity. Yet in response to the more commonplace journalism scandals, journalists have employed second-order paradigm repair, which allows members of the media to advance a competing narrative that enhances and supports a sense of professional identity. This identity is one in which journalists are portrayed as defending the profession from outside threats, such as challenges to press freedoms by governments entities as well as ethical compromises by media owners pandering to advertisers and business interests. This narrative can serve to deflect criticism of journalists, as seen in stories about media coverage of racially-charged protests in Ferguson, MO, which focused on challenges to press freedoms instead of criticism about the insensitivity of reporters. At the same time, journalists have utilized a quick-strike response to ethical lapses that often shifts the blame to the disruptive forces of new technology.

*Keywords:* Journalism ethics, paradigm repair, second-order paradigm repair.

## **Journalists Taking the Offensive: Paradigm Repair and the Daily Ethics Scandal**

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The uproar involving the disputed 2014 story by *Rolling Stone* about an alleged gang rape at the University of Virginia began in a familiar way (Farhi, 2014a). As with notable journalism ethics scandals of the past, the controversy started when competing journalism outlets exposed ethical failings, in particular that *Rolling Stone* had relied on a single anonymous source for its story and declined to interview the alleged assailants connected with a campus fraternity. The *Washington Post* reported in December 2014 that the fraternity denied the story and friends of the alleged victim – identified only as “Jackie” - cast doubt on aspects of her account of the alleged sexual assault (Shapiro, 2014). The *Rolling Stone* managing editor subsequently issued an apology, saying: “In the face of new information, there now appear to be discrepancies in Jackie’s account, and we have come to the conclusion that our trust in her was misplaced.” *Rolling Stone* commissioned the Columbia Journalism School to investigate its handling of the story (Wemple, 2014a.) In April 2015, the *Columbia Journalism Review* published the journalism school’s scathing report titled: “Rolling Stone’s investigation: ‘A failure that was avoidable’ ” (Coronel, Coll, & Kravitz, 2015). The authors of the report wrote: “The story’s blowup comes as another shock to journalism’s credibility amid head-swiveling change in the media industry. The particulars of Rolling Stone’s failure make clear the need for a revitalized consensus in newsrooms old and new about what best journalistic practices entail, at an operating-manual-level of detail.”

Credibility has long been a central factor in the development of the journalism profession in the United States. The penny press newspapers that were formed in the 1830s sought the trust of

their readers by practicing a form of objective reporting immune to the political parties that had influenced so much of journalism up until that time (Cohen-Almagor, 2008). Almost a century later, in early 1920s, the American Society of Newspaper Editors drafted and adopted the first nationwide journalistic ethics code. The code advocated standards such as accuracy, impartiality, fair play, decency, and the obligation to remain independent (Flint, 1925). But that credibility has been increasingly under assault as the news industry has scrambled to revamp in the Internet age. A 2013 Gallup Poll showed that only 21 percent of respondents rated the honesty and ethical standards of newspaper reporters as high or very high, and only 20 percent rated the honesty and ethical standards of TV reporters as high or very high (Swift, 2013). In 1981, just before the emergence of cable news and the 24/7 news cycle, 30 percent of Gallup respondents ranked newspaper reporters as having high or very high ethical standards and 37 percent gave TV reporters that same ranking (Honesty/Ethics in Professions, n.d.). The past 35 years or so have also witnessed three of the major ethical scandals in U.S. journalism history, involving Janet Cooke of the *Washington Post* in 1980, Stephen Glass of the *New Republic* in 1998, and Jason Blair of the *New York Times* in 2003 (Foreman, 2010). The scandals all involved fabricated stories, internal investigations, public apologies, and the firing of the culprits. Scandals such as these and the *Rolling Stone* controversy often prompt an elaborate response by journalists, a process that scholars have defined as “paradigm repair” (Carlson, 2009).

### **Paradigm Repair in the Internet Age**

Paradigm repair has been defined as “the notion that when journalists perceive an event or situation as undermining journalists’ or news organizations’ credibility and authority they will go to great efforts to restore their own image and reputation” (Steiner, Guo, McCaffrey, & Hills,

2013, pp 705-706). The theory of paradigm repair derives from the work of physicist Thomas S. Kuhn, who wrote about the importance of “shared paradigms” in scientific fields (Kuhn, 1962, p 11). A commitment to common rules “and the apparent consensus it produces are prerequisites for normal science,” Kuhn wrote in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. “Acquisition of a paradigm is a sign of maturity in the development of any given scientific field.”

Journalism’s “professional paradigm,” Berkowitz (2011) wrote, “includes both a worldview of what is considered an acceptable journalistic product and a faith in the specific set of procedures that should be used to make that product” (p. 179). Journalists learn this paradigm – based on objectivity and other key ethical principles - in newsrooms and classrooms, Berkowitz (2011) wrote, and pass it on to their audiences. Believers in this system, he added, stand ready to “protect the system from outside threats and to defend it when situations violate the paradigm’s expectations” (p. 179). Paradigm repair, Berkowitz (2000) wrote, “can be viewed as a practice intended to bind together the interpretive community of journalists during times of stress,” allowing for them to reassert core values “by generating discussion among journalists” (p. 127). When the journalistic paradigm is threatened, members of the media can ignore it or seek to repair it (Steiner, Guo, McCaffrey, & Hills, 2013). This repair work can involve scapegoating, such as assessing blame on rogue journalists or non-mainstream organizations like the tabloids. This strategy could be seen following Princess Diana’s death in an automobile accident after her driver tried to evade the media - the tabloids in turn attempted to shift the blame to the paparazzi and the news audience itself (Berkowitz, 2000). Paradigm repair often includes discrediting the journalist who has committed an ethical breach while at the same time reaffirming the integrity of the journalism profession. In the Jayson Blair scandal, Hindman (2005) found that the *New York Times* “distanced itself from Blair and emphasized the value of journalistic standards,” yet

also “accepted responsibility for violations of those standards and admitted that the very structure of the news paradigm failed in this case” (p.225). When long-time White House correspondent Helen Thomas retired in 2010 after making comments perceived as anti-Semitic, journalists depicted her as senile (Hindman & Thomas, 2013).

Cecil (2002) posits that news programs that focus on the journalism industry - CNN’s *Reliable Sources* and FOX’s *Fox News Watch* are two examples – engage in a form of streamlined “discourse-extensive repair work” when considering ethics mishaps in the profession (p. 46). Looking at the coverage of the CNN/Time “Tailwind” story scandal involving faulty reporting about the use of poison gas during the Vietnam War, Cecil (2002) identified evidence of “paradigm overhaul,” which he defined as “a particular type of paradigm repair work in which the logic of journalism is reasserted in response to an outside challenge” (p. 46).

As coverage of the news industry has become increasingly part of the 24/7 news cycle, the more elaborate paradigm repair work of the past has become impractical in dealing with the steady stream of ethical scandals. Consequently, journalists now also engage in so-called “second-order paradigm repair,” Carlson (2012) wrote, in order “to improve understanding of journalism in a time of change” (p. 267). Among the ways that second-order paradigm repair is different from traditional paradigm repair, Carlson wrote (2012), is that rather than “focus on a particular threat, journalists instead engage broader ideas about the state of their field” (p. 280). Carlson (2012) also wrote that “instead of seeking resolution by separating out a threat as aberrational,” journalists “work out their response to change through metajournalistic discourse as they seek to reconsolidate a collective identity built around shared visions of their work” (p. 280).

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent that second-order paradigm repair is being employed by journalists to defend their profession amid a steady barrage of criticism in the Internet age. Consequently, this study asked: Do a wide range of stories about journalism ethics scandals reveal a broader discursive strategy by journalists to defend their profession? Moreover, this study asked: If journalists are using such a discursive strategy to defend their profession, does that discourse involve the construction or reinforcement of a professional identity involving them and their work?

### **Research Methods**

This case study involved an analysis of more than 500 stories about journalism ethics cases in 2014. A representative sample was sought by reviewing the archives of *jimromenesko.org*, a blog that has served as a leading aggregator of stories about the news industry. Overall, 512 stories were selected for analysis, with many of them produced by mainstream media outlets, such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, as well as journalism trade journals, such as the *Columbia Journalism Review*.

This study largely involved qualitative methods that included a thorough analysis of the text in an attempt to identify themes relevant to the study's research questions (Mirando, 2001). In particular, there was an effort to determine if a story depicted strategies that are generally employed in either paradigm repair or second-order paradigm repair. A story was included in the study if it involved at least one of the ethical concerns highlighted in the American Society of Newspaper Editors' Statement of Principles: Responsibility, Freedom of the Press, Independence, Truth and Accuracy, Impartiality, and Fair Play (Statement of principles, n.d.). An Excel database was constructed so that each story was categorized by the specific ASNE

ethical principle it called into question. This categorization also allowed for a more systematic way to identify broader themes in the journalistic discourse prompted by these ethical breaches.

### **Findings: Truth and Accuracy**

The ASNE ethical principle of Truth and Accuracy was the most common one addressed in the stories that were analyzed for the study. About 31 percent of the stories fell into this category, with the most prominent case involving the disputed *Rolling Stone* rape story. The reaction to that story reflected a classic case of paradigm repair. Critics focused on why *Rolling Stone* had failed to follow core journalistic principles by basing its story on a single anonymous source (Farhi, 2014a). In apologizing for the story, the *Rolling Stone* managing editor shifted the blame, making a scapegoat of the source, implying that she had violated the magazine's trust. *Rolling Stone* emphasized its efforts at accountability, with publisher Jann S. Wenner saying the magazine had "immediately" responded to criticism by posting "a note on our website, disclosing the concerns" (Wemple, 2014a).

But the concerted reaction to the *Rolling Stone* scandal proved to be somewhat of an anomaly. None of the other ethical lapses involving Truth and Accuracy prompted a wide-scale response by the journalism community that could be considered a traditional effort at paradigm repair. Rather, journalists employed more of a quick-strike approach in response to these ethical breaches, which often only generated a single story. The stories dutifully noted the offenses, along with an acknowledgement that the media organizations displayed appropriate accountability. The *Norwich Bulletin* issued an apology and announced the firing of a sports writer who fabricated the quotes of a high school coach featured in a game story (Romenesko, 2014c). CNN fired news editor Marie-Louise Gumuchian after an investigation uncovered

plagiarism in roughly 50 stories, and it also announced that it had “removed the instances of plagiarism found in her pieces. In some cases, we’ve chosen to delete an entire article” (CNN, 2014). *BuzzFeed* fired writer Benny Johnson after “Twitter users began pointing out instances in which” he “had lifted phrases and sentences from other websites,” wrote editor Ben Smith. “After carefully reviewing more than 500 of Benny’s posts, we have found 41 instances of sentences or phrases copied word for word from other sites. Benny is a friend, colleague, and, at his best, a creative force, but we had no choice other than letting him go” (Smith, 2014).

Other stories about plagiarism cases shifted the blame to technological changes in the industry. An Indiana newspaper reluctantly apologized for “cutting-and-pasting” a story from a competing website, initially maintaining that it was offended that it was being accused of plagiarism (Romenesko, 2014). *New York Times* reporter Carol Vogel was accused of plagiarizing from Wikipedia, prompting the paper’s public editor, Margaret Sullivan, to write: “Here are a few of the realities of journalism in the digital age: Cutting and pasting an encyclopedia sentence into one’s notes, and then changing a few words around for a story is simple enough. And what’s almost as simple is comparing those sentences with a digital search. There’s no cover of darkness anymore for plagiarists” (Sullivan, 2014a). Fareed Zakaria, now with CNN, had recurrent acts of plagiarism uncovered by bloggers. The *Washington Post* announced that in response to reports by *Our Bad Media*, its “editorial page has found ‘problematic’ sourcing in five columns” by Zakaria “and will likely note the lack of attribution in archived editions of the articles” (Farhi, 2014c). *Newsweek* also decided to run a disclaimer with Zakaria’s past work, advising readers “that some of his articles have been the subject of complaints claiming that they contain material that should have been attributed to others” (Hartmann, 2014).

Falling victim to “Internet hoaxes” also was portrayed as more of an occupational hazard in the digital age rather than evidence of a gross failure in core journalistic fact-checking methods. When hockey star Sidney Crosby was incorrectly accused on newspaper sites and on Twitter of being “arrested while driving a rented Porsche in Ottawa, Canada,” the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* wrote: “As far back as the age of town criers, the media have made mistakes. But never has it been so easy to take a fabricated story or the faked report of a celebrity death and send the news so quickly into the Twittersphere” (Sciullo & Born, 2014). Both the Associated Press and the *Daily News* in New York were fooled by a “parody account” on Twitter that claimed responsibility for “white flags” that “mysteriously replaced American flags on top of the Brooklyn Bridge,” tweeting that it had “hoisted two white flags to signal our complete surrender of the Brooklyn Bridge bicycle path to pedestrians” (Bloomgarden-Smoke, 2014). The *New York Observer* reported that the news outlets subsequently revised the stories “to reflect that it was all a joke, although neither issued corrections or noted the updates.”

### **Findings: Fair Play**

Overall, about 22 percent of the stories dealt with ethical problems that were involved with the ASNE ethical principle of Fair Play, which pledges that journalists need to “respect the rights of people involved in the news” and “observe the common standards of decency” (Statement of principles, n.d.). In some cases, after producing offensive content, media outlets either issued terse apologies or subtly shifted the blame to new technology, in particular social media. These outlets reaffirmed the integrity of the journalistic paradigm, insisting that core values were still in place and simply needed to be incorporated into work involving these new media platforms. NPR released a memo about standards to be used with social media after “education team blogger Anya Kamenetz tweeted that ‘only the white guys get back to me’ when reaching out to

diverse sources” (Romenesko, 2014d). Kamenetz apologized, and the NPR memo began: “ ‘If you wouldn’t say it on the air, don’t say it on the Web.’ That’s been the basic guidance for quite a few years. In reality, Twitter and other social media sites allow us to show more of our personalities than we might on the air or in a blog post. BUT, though the words may be on ‘personal’ Twitter or Facebook accounts, what we say can reflect on NPR and raise questions about our ability to be objective” (Romenesko, 2014d). *Denver Post* hockey writer Adrian Dater lost his job “after repeated incidents of offensive behavior on social media,” including “inappropriate messages to Maria Camacho, a Detroit Red Wings fan who lives in Calgary” (Wyshynski, 2014). Dater posted an apology on his Facebook page: “I said a bunch of stupid things on social media once too often. It was unprofessional and I paid the price. Social media and I were always going to be a dangerous mix. I’m opinionated and have the occasional real hot temper. But my problems were deeper than that. I’ve had some pretty bad substance abuse problems” (Wyshynski, 2014).

When criticized for insensitivity with stories involving race, gender, or sexuality, media outlets often used their apologies to portray themselves as actually being advanced in their approaches to diversity. In apologizing for a story about the shower habits of Michael Sam, the first openly gay football player in the National Football League, ESPN’s apology acknowledged that it had “collectively failed to meet the standards we have set in reporting on LGBT-related topics in sports” (Boren, 2014). An ESPN-affiliated website, Grantland.com, took the same approach after even harsher criticism for its story about the inventor of a “magical” putter – before the story could be published, the inventor committed suicide after learning that the reporter had discovered that she was transgender (Limpert, 2014).

Instead of apologizing for their long-time use of the controversial term, “Redskins,” the name of the Washington, D.C.-area NFL franchise, a number of media outlets portrayed themselves as agents of change after deciding to no longer use the term in regular coverage (Shelter, 2014). Wrote the *Charlotte Observer*: “We understand that the name is beloved by many, and we respect their affection for it. But consensus is growing that a nickname referring to the skin color of a race of people is no longer appropriate” (Persinger, 2014).

### **Findings: Freedom of the Press**

Overall, about 21 percent of the stories in this study dealt with ethical problems that involved the ASNE principle of Freedom of the Press, which calls for press freedoms to “be defended against encroachment or assault from any quarter, public or private” (Statement of principles, n.d.). This portrayal of the media as a defender of press freedoms could be seen in the coverage of cases where journalists were under fire for lapses that involved other ethical principles, such as the reporting from Ferguson, MO, after a black man was fatally shot by a white police officer (Lowery, 2014). Instead of responding to criticism that involved ethical principles such as Fair Play, Impartiality, or Truth and Accuracy, journalists instead focused on a broader consideration of their professional identity – namely as defenders of threats to press freedom in the modern age.

Ten of the 18 stories in this study about the events in Ferguson regarded Freedom of the Press. Members of the media were “tear gassed” along with protestors as police responded to shots from the crowd (Bluestone, 2014). *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* photographer David Carson tweeted that a freelance photographer for the *New York Times* had been shot with a rubber bullet while working the scene. A citizen journalist had an iPhone ripped from his hands while streaming

protests live in November (Price, 2014). *Washington Post* reporter Wesley Lowery wrote of his arrest while covering the protests (Lowery, 2014). A *St. Louis Press-Dispatch* photographer was assaulted by members of a crowd (Romenesko, 2014e).

The affronts to press freedom in Ferguson resulted in the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press sending a letter of protest on behalf of a group of 48 media organizations to city and police officials raising concerns about the treatment of journalists covering the story (Media coalition protests police treatment, 2014). The committee wrote: "Officers on the ground must understand that gathering news and recording police activities are not crimes. The actions in Ferguson demonstrate a lack of training among local law enforcement in the protections required by the First Amendment as well as the absence of respect for the role of newsgatherers. We implore police leadership to rectify this failing to ensure that these incidents do not occur again" (Media coalition protests police treatment, 2014).

The emphasis on press-freedom challenges served to overshadow questions about other ethical issues raised with the Ferguson coverage. The NPR ombudsman argued that it was inaccurate to identify the victim, 18-year-old Michael Brown, as a teenager, when he was technically an adult according to the organization's in-house style rules (As news from Ferguson continues, n.d.). A *Slate* story carried the headline: "Why the Media Is Siding With the Protesters" (Voorhees, 2014). And a *Washington Post* story questioned the impartiality of CNN's Don Lemon: "It remains unclear which came first - Don Lemon inserting his agitating personal opinion into his coverage or his bosses rewarding him with more air time for doing just that" (Holley, 2014).

Fair Play was raised in the case of a *Charleston Daily Mail* editorial writer who was fired for calling Brown an “animal” (Romenesko, 2014b). *New York Times* public editor Margaret Sullivan found fault with the fairness of her paper’s profile of Michael Brown, particularly the assertion that he was “no angel”: “That choice of words was a regrettable mistake. In saying that the 18-year-old Michael Brown was ‘no angel’ in the fifth paragraph of Monday’s front-page profile, The Times seems to suggest that this was, altogether, a bad kid” (Sullivan, 2014b),

There was just one story that dealt with a social-media offense related to the Ferguson coverage – the impartiality of the tweets of a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* police reporter who wrote that sources had told her that witnesses had backed up the police version of events. Her comments were disowned by her paper, which noted that the reporter had been on maternity leave - *Post-Dispatch* editor Gilbert Bailon released a statement saying: “Christine Byers is a police reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch who has been on FMLA leave since March. She is not involved in the Ferguson coverage while she is on leave. Her tweets are personal” (Romenesko, 2014).

Other prominent stories involving Freedom of the Press included the case of *New York Times* reporter James Risen and the government's effort to force him to testify about a source involved in the leaking of classified information (Associated Press, 2014). A similar theme was found in the story of Jason Rezaian, a *Washington Post* reporter being held captive by Iranian authorities (Gearan, 2014). In addition, the *Columbia Journalism Review* also would report that the Securities and Exchange Commission “has aggressively investigated leaks to the media, examining some one million emails sent by nearly 300 members of its staff, interviewing some 100 of its own employees and trolling the phone records of scores more” (Coronel, 2014).

The assault on press freedoms was extended to media outlets large and small. Parsippany, N.J. officials lost a court battle when a judge “ruled that a largely one-man news organization covering Parsippany does not have to turn over its notes and records” (Horowitz, 2014). A video journalist was “forcefully removed” by a sheriff’s deputy from a meeting of Georgia Republicans that included the state’s governor (Pritchard, 2014). A reporter was ejected from the 9/11 Museum in lower Manhattan for asking a question of a patron without going through the press office (Chung, 2014). Another reporter was tossed out of a courthouse on Election Day after trying to review court records relating to an indicted judge running for reelection (LaRoe, 2014). A *Baltimore Sun* photo editor was “forcibly escorted” by police “from the scene of a police-involved shooting” (Hamilton, 2014). A Montana editor was arrested while taking photographs at an accident scene (Brevik, 2014).

Other barriers to press freedom included court rulings curtailing the availability of public records as well as restrictions in the awarding of press credentials. A survey by the *Columbia Journalism Review* revealed that “one in five journalists has had a credential request denied” (Peters, 2014). Indeed, the *Miami Herald* refused to cover the home opener of the Florida International University football team after the school would not issue press credentials to its beat reporter (Robertson, 2014).

### **Findings: Independence**

Overall, about 17 percent of the stories dealt with ethical problems that were involved with the ASNE ethical principle of Independence, which involves avoiding “impropriety and the appearance of impropriety as well as any conflict of interest or the appearance of conflict” (Statement of principles, n.d.). Mostly, these cases involved the behavior of media ownership.

One of the biggest stories was about reverberations from the decision to have *Time* editors report to the business side of the magazine – Joe Ripp, the company’s CEO, told Bloomberg TV that he felt editors were “happier” and “more excited about it because no longer are we asking ourselves the question are we violating church and state, whatever that was ... my editors have much more freedom to think about how I can delight my consumers, how I can work with advertisers, how I can think through the problems” (Romenesko, 2014).

The *New York Times* was scrutinized when it published its first native advertisement in its print edition after the *Washington Post* had made the same move earlier in the year (Moses, 2014). Wrote Lucia Moses in *digiday.com*: “So-called native ads, which mimic the look and feel of editorial, have largely been an online phenomenon, because the Web offers more multimedia capabilities than print. The print edition has always been treated with kid gloves compared to the Web anyway, where ads have been more intrusive. This is especially true at venerated news organizations including the Times, which have been sensitive to criticism that native advertising, by its very nature, is trying to trick the reader into thinking it’s editorial content” (Moses, 2014). Press critics also raised concerns about so-called “wraparound” ads, such as one for the University of Massachusetts that enveloped the front page of the *Boston Globe* (Kennedy, 2014). *The Scene*, an alternative weekly in Cleveland, received much harsher criticism for a wraparound ad that made it appear it was endorsing a political candidate on its front page (Clark, 2014).

A variety of novel business arrangements prompted further concerns about Independence. The *Greensboro News & Record* agreed to allow a local arts nonprofit to “underwrite expanded arts coverage” in the newspaper (Romenesko, 2014a). The *Washington Times* published an advertising supplement for the National Rifle Association that included stories by news-side

reporters (Wemple, 2014b). A North Carolina newspaper agreed to accept a \$100,000 loan from a City Council (Hutchins, 2014).

### **Findings: Responsibility and Impartiality**

Overall, about seven percent of the stories dealt with ethical problems that involved Responsibility, which involves serving “the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time” and ensuring that journalists don’t “abuse the power of their professional role for selfish motives or unworthy purposes” (Statement of principles, n.d.).

There were cases involving individual reporters, such as when Dr. Nancy Snyderman was forced to apologize for violating a voluntary quarantine after her return from reporting on the Ebola outbreak for NBC in Liberia (CNN, 2014). But, once again, there were also stories that focused on ethical failings involving newsroom management. Fox News was criticized for failing “cultural conservatives” with its saturation coverage of Kim Kardashian (Friedersdorf, 2014). Conor Friedersdorf of the *Atlantic* wrote: “All over America, creative professionals released more books, films, and music tracks than a news organization could even begin to comprehensively cover. But Fox 411, the network's entertainment vertical, focused on the same story that captivated much of the mainstream media: a photo of Kim Kardashian's butt. You'd have thought it was as compulsory to cover as the moon landing” (Friedersdorf, 2014).

Overall, about three percent of the stories dealt with ethical problems that involved Impartiality. Once again, the blame was shifted in part to new technology and social media. One of the most prominent cases involved Diana Magnay, a CNN correspondent who, in a tweet, labeled some Israelis who cheered a Gaza missile strike as “Scum” (Farhi, 2014b). CNN issued

an apology and Magnay was reassigned. In writing about the case, *Washington Post* writer Paul Fahri neatly summed up the challenges that social media posed to journalists: “Among its many virtues and drawbacks, social media may be one of the most effective tools ever invented to assist journalists in harming their careers. Since the advent of Twitter, Facebook and other instantaneous digital platforms, reporters have lost their jobs, been suspended or been reassigned after posting things deemed inappropriate by readers, viewers and — most importantly — their bosses. The objectionable posts have usually called into question the journalists’ ability to remain neutral and fair to both sides of any story” (Farhi, 2014b).

### **Conclusion: Second Order Paradigm Repair in the Internet Age**

This study asked whether a wide range of stories about journalism ethics scandals might reveal a broader discursive strategy by journalists to defend their profession. The study also asked if such a discourse might involve the construction or reinforcement of a professional identity involving them and their work.

An analysis of stories about journalism ethics violations in 2014 revealed that journalists are employing a broad-based discursive strategy reflective of so-called “second-order paradigm repair.” When confronted with a major scandal such as that involving *Rolling Stone*’s disputed 2014 rape story, journalists still responded in a matter consistent with traditional paradigm repair, banding together to single out the incident, then employing elaborate strategies such as shifting the blame to rogue journalists and detailing corrective action by media outlets to reaffirm core values such as objectivity. Yet in response to the commonplace, almost daily journalism scandals, journalists utilized more of a quick-strike response. This response involved the greater journalistic community largely ignoring the threat, leaving a single pundit or media outlet to

identify the core ethical principle raised by the given case, highlight corrective action, and sometimes shift the blame to the disruptive forces of new technology.

Moreover, when the stories in this study were viewed collectively – including cases touching upon the full gamut of ethical principles in the ASNE code – it could be seen that many of them were about paradigmatic threats from outside forces. That meant that for every story about plagiarism or lapses in fairness and impartiality by journalists, there were almost as many stories about threats to press freedoms from government entities or incursions of business interests into the newsroom. Thus, rather than linger on the stream of stories about ethical breaches in the profession, journalists offered a competing narrative that reinforced a sense of professional identity – a hallmark of second-order paradigm repair.

This identity is one in which working journalists are portrayed as defending the profession from outside threats, such as challenges to press freedoms by governments and other entities as well as ethical compromises by media owners pandering to advertisers and other business interests in an attempt to cope with the economic upheaval spawned by the Internet. In particular, journalists have distanced themselves from incursions involving native advertising, placing the blame on newsroom management. Similarly, efforts to tear down the traditional firewall between the editorial operation and the business side have been treated as threats from without rather than threats from within.

This competing narrative can be established by shifting attention from disparate cases involving, say, derelict reporting practices to instances where reporters were combatting forces against press freedom. As seen with the stories involving the coverage of the Ferguson protests, sometimes the competing narrative can be employed in the same case. In other words, if the story

of the *Rolling Stone* scandal indisputably was about shoddy journalistic methods, the dominant narrative about the coverage about the Ferguson protests was about press-freedom challenges, not the perceived insensitivity or impartiality of journalists. In this sense, journalists have embraced a persistent maxim commonly used in the world of sports: that the best defense is often a good offense.

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