When reporters uncover corruption in a city police department, they are upholding justice as a value of journalism. When editors plan a series aimed at inequities in availability of housing by race, they are making justice one of their goals. Whenever journalists do stories that point out unfairness in how people are treated, justice lies in the background even if it is not explicitly on the minds of reporters and editors.

A commitment to justice has a long tradition in journalism. Investigative reporting from the work of the muckrakers in the early twentieth century to contemporary investigations of individual and social problems (Protes et al., 1991; Serrin & Serrin, 2002; Tichi, 2004) has often addressed topics with justice implications. But justice is served by reporting across a variety of beats—for example, through political stories that explain candidate positions on important social issues and medical stories that help people navigate the complexities of the healthcare system.

While journalists have been pursuing stories that involve dimensions of justice, media scholars have been reflecting in recent decades on what justice means, many of them drawing on historical or current lines of thinking from philosophy, political theory, and psychology. This thinking is important to journalism students and practitioners because it offers ways to more carefully and systematically apply concepts of justice to journalism, as well as to critically evaluate how journalists think about justice and have actually applied it. Despite the attention to justice by thoughtful and caring journalists, it would be easy for this concern to be squeezed out of stories under the pressure of competition and profit.

This chapter will provide an overview of what media scholars have said about justice. It will then focus on an important aspect of the topic that has received relatively little attention: how justice as an ethical value can be used to critique and improve coverage of topics in which justice is an important dimension of the story itself. The chapter will close with suggestions for additional research on justice as a value and goal of journalism.

**LITERATURE AND CONCEPTS**

When media scholars examine justice, they are stepping into an area that has been a long-time concern of philosophers and political theorists, as well as a matter addressed by psychologists who think about how people develop in their moral reasoning. Before discussing the variety of...
thinking about justice in media scholarship, it is appropriate to offer a definition that crosses several scholarly traditions about what justice means. Beauchamp and Childress (2013), writing in the context of medical ethics, state that a variety of philosophical perspectives “interpret justice as fair, equitable, and appropriate treatment in light of what is due or owed to persons” (p. 250). Although it comes from outside the field of journalism, this definition effectively summarizes important concerns implicit in journalists’ consideration of justice as a value to guide coverage and a goal of coverage. Beyond this broad definition, though, a variety of differences in emphasis and substance are evident in the notions of justice that scholars have applied to journalism. This section will examine several strands of thinking in media scholarship that relate to justice: work based on utilitarianism, the egalitarianism of John Rawls (1971), communitarianism, and moral development theory (including discussion of feminist, care-based critiques of justice), and finally other work rooted in a variety of perspectives.

**UTILITARIAN-BASED PERSPECTIVES**

Utilitarianism, particularly the version developed by John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century, has been a prominent perspective in media ethics textbooks. This perspective’s focus on the weighing of goods and harms to maximize benefit has brought attention to the importance of considering consequences in journalistic decisions. Several books (Bivins, 2018; Christians et al., 2017; Day, 2006; Patterson, Wilkins, & Painter, 2019; Plaisance, 2014; Smith, 2008) include summaries of utilitarianism of varying lengths with application to journalism. Most of these discussions do not explicitly relate utilitarianism to justice, but Plaisance points out that Mill argued his theory of utility “would be effective in bringing about justice” (p. 13)—though Plaisance also notes that utilitarianism leaves the door open to the threat of unjust practices in service of the majority (p. 35).

Mill did make a strong connection between justice and utility. In his view, people’s rights ought to be defended because of the benefit of protecting their security—an “extraordinarily important and impressive kind of utility” (2003, p. 226). For Mill, justice based on utility is “the chief part, and incomparably the most sacred and binding part, of all morality” (p. 231). Bivins’s (2018) discussion of utilitarianism does acknowledge the linkage that Mill made between justice and utility, noting (pp. 77–78) that Mill pointed to the importance of several dimensions of justice including giving to those who are deserving and not showing partiality. Elliott, in an article titled “Getting Mill Right” (2007), said his five principles of justice are to be applied before any weighing of benefits and harms.

**PERSPECTIVES RELATED TO RAWLS**

Just as Mill’s theory was one of the most influential to grow out of the nineteenth century, John Rawls’s theory of justice—developed in the book by that name (1971)—was one of the most prominent perspectives on justice from the twentieth. Rawls regards justice fundamentally as a notion of fairness to members of society that grows out of a hypothetical “original position” in which no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like … The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance.

(p. 12)
Working from this vantage point, it is expected that people will be sensitive to those who are least advantaged, allowing inequalities only if they benefit those people (pp. 14–15). Beauchamp and Childress (2013) called Rawls’s theory egalitarian, though in a qualified way in that it permits some inequalities (pp. 256–257).

As with utilitarianism, several books on media ethics (Christians et al., 2017; Day, 2006; Patterson, Wilkins, & Painter, 2019; Plaisance, 2014; Smith, 2008) discuss and apply Rawls’s perspective at least briefly. For example, Patterson, Wilkins and Painter (2019, p. 147) suggest that the veil of ignorance can be helpful when considering whether journalists should photograph or talk with survivors of an airline crash at the scene. Behind the veil of ignorance, the stakeholders—such as a reporter, a survivor, a family member, and a reader—would not know which position they would occupy when they emerged and would therefore be sensitive to considerations of need to know and right to privacy from a variety of perspectives.

Lambeth (1992) also drew on Rawls’s perspective in presenting justice as part of a framework of five principles for ethical decision-making in journalism—a framework that is of central importance in media ethics scholarship because of its systematic incorporation of both justice and other important considerations such as truth-telling and freedom. Lambeth argued that Rawls provided a strong theoretical grounding for the watchdog role of the news media. A journalist acting in the interest of justice should ask critical questions in covering the major institutions of society—questions such as: “Are agreed-upon rules and procedures followed consistently and uniformly? Are some groups or classes of persons enjoying more than their fair share of goods or bearing more than their fair share of the burdens?” (p. 29).

COMMUNITARIAN PERSPECTIVES

A third perspective on justice, communitarianism, developed in the late twentieth century. Some thinkers who have been called communitarians, such as Robert Bellah and his colleagues (Bellah et al., 1985, 1991), have reacted to what they see as a negative impact of overemphasis on individualism, particularly in American society. Others, such as Michael Sandel (1982), have argued that the very view of the person that underlies liberal political theory’s emphasis on the individual is wrong (Craig, 1996; Mulhall & Swift, 1992). Sandel argues that Rawls viewed the self incorrectly as independent of particular aims or attachments to others and to a community. This conception of self would make people unable to make more than arbitrary choices about the principles of justice (Kukathas & Pettit, 1990). Communitarianism undergirds a strong notion of justice by making people’s connection to one another central to their lives.

Christians, Ferré, and Fackler (1993) carried communitarian thought into the realm of theory about the proper role of the news media in society. They argued that justice must be a central goal of journalism:

A press nurtured by communitarian ethics requires more of itself than fair treatment of events deemed worthy of coverage. Under the notion that justice itself—and not merely haphazard public enlightenment—is a telos of the press, the news-media system stands under obligation to tell the stories that justice requires

(p. 93).

In this application, just journalism means speaking up for people who are “abused or ignored by established power” (p. 92). More specifically, Christians and his colleagues ask: “Is the press a
voice for the unemployed, food-stamp recipients, Appalachian miners, the urban poor, Hispanics in rural shacks, the elderly, women discriminated against in hiring and promotion, ethnic minorities with no future in North America’s downsizing economy?” (p. 92). This perspective provides a robust justification for why journalists should make the needs of marginalized people a priority. (For further application of communitarian ethics to journalism, see Christians, Fackler, & Ferré, 2012, pp. 1–92.)

WORKS DISCUSSING MORAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Several media scholars have examined work in moral development theory, which addresses how people develop in their thinking about ethical matters. In particular, scholars have drawn on Kohlberg’s (1981) work, which places priority on justice as a universal ethical principle. Some of them have contrasted it with the work of feminist scholar Carol Gilligan (1982), who emphasizes care and the interaction of people in relationships.

- Barger (2003) used Kohlberg’s moral development theory to evaluate moral language in newspaper columns and letters to the editor. She found that most arguments did not rise to Kohlberg’s postconventional level, in which fairness and justice become central considerations.
- Wilkins and Coleman (2005) used the Defining Issues Test, which was influenced by Kohlberg’s framework, to evaluate how journalists think through ethical decisions. In relation to other professions previously studied, journalists rated relatively high in moral reasoning level via scores on the test. Plaisance’s (2015) study that included 12 moral exemplars in journalism (along with 12 in public relations) found their scores were higher than the averages for the journalists previously studied. He pointed out that this meant they showed a consistent ability to draw on postconventional reasoning. Wilkins and Coleman (2005), though, reported a disturbing finding from a study of students using a test of moral judgment: White journalism majors were significantly more likely to use lower levels of ethical reasoning when evaluating photos that showed Black rather than White people. Spurred by this finding, the authors called for a renewed emphasis on social justice in the teaching of journalism ethics. Black journalism majors (Coleman, 2011a) showed no significant differences in levels of reasoning regardless of the race of the subjects, and the same was true for Black, Asian-American, and Hispanic professional journalists (Coleman, 2011b).
- Lind (1996) evaluated the presence of justice and care orientations in viewers’ evaluation of ethically controversial television news stories. She found that considerations of justice, emphasizing issues such as objectivity, were considerably more prevalent than considerations of care, emphasizing matters such as benefits and harms—but that both were commonly used. The orientation varied depending on story topic.
- Steiner and Oktusch (2006) criticized a justice-based model for journalism built on rights—what they see as the prevailing ethical foundation for journalism in the United States—as too “thin” (p. 103) and explored the contribution of care to the strengthening of journalism ethics, urging journalists to “care toward justice” (p. 116). They suggested that public journalism has already melded the two and argued that “incorporation of some revised ethic of care would help revitalize a stronger and more philosophically and politically defensible concept of justice and (human) rights” (p. 119).
OTHER PERSPECTIVES ON JUSTICE

The ethical issue of justice has also been stated or implied in other work on journalism. Several scholars (Christians, 2007; Meyers, 2003, 2011; Patterson, Wilkins, & Painter, 2019; Plaisance, 2014) have discussed W.D. Ross’s (2002) prima facie duties, which include justice, as a framework for journalistic decision-making. Ward (2010, 2011) has argued for a global journalism ethic in which the priority is promoting the individual, social, political, and ethical goods of people across societies—making justice a central consideration. Brislin (1992) applied just war theory developed historically in Christian theology to create a model of just journalism in which issues including intention, degree of harm, and alternatives are considered in evaluating the ethics of actions that, like war, would be extreme—in a journalistic context, actions such as deception or invasion of privacy. Pippert (1989), in a book focused on truth as an ethical value, argued that reporters who seek truth will also uncover issues of justice. He said this aspect of stories will emerge in coverage of a variety of topics from civil rights to sports and business if reporters look for it. Ettema and Glasser (1998), while not explicitly focusing on justice as an ethical value, argued strongly that investigative reporters are making moral judgments throughout their work as they cover stories of wrongdoing in society.

JUSTICE AS A VALUE FOR CRITIQUING NEWS COVERAGE

As the previous discussion of concepts and literature makes clear, scholars have thought about justice and applied this principle to journalism from a variety of perspectives. Some of this work has raised questions to guide coverage or suggested topics for attention. This section will explore another framework (Craig, 1997, 1999) that uses justice and related considerations as a tool to critique and improve news coverage—particularly coverage in which justice is an important dimension of the story itself. This framework and the questions it implies will be presented, followed by discussion of the relevance of these questions to coverage of medicine and science, business, and other topics.

A Framework for Evaluating Coverage

Ethical concerns including justice are important angles in coverage of topics ranging from genetic testing to the conduct of corporate executives. Across professions, from medicine to business to law, justice is a relevant consideration for journalists in evaluating the work of practitioners in these fields and the broader institutional context in which they function. The work of Lambeth (1992) paved the way for systematic evaluation of coverage of professions by urging that journalists ask justice-based questions and report in depth on what advances or hinders excellence in specific professions. Building on this Craig (1997, 1999) proposed a framework for evaluating and improving coverage of issues in professions and society. The framework regards some—but not comprehensive—coverage of the ethical dimension as an ethical obligation of journalists covering issues with important ethical implications. Because of the limitations imposed by time and space constraints and other factors, journalists cannot be expected to write thoroughly about justice and other ethical issues in all or even most stories. However, they should pay some attention to these issues in the overall coverage of a topic that raises important ethical issues or in individual stories that are intended to examine it in depth. This argument is consistent with social responsibility (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004; Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947;
Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956) and communitarian (Christians et al., 1993) theories about what the role of the press should be, since the assumption is that journalists should make it a priority to serve society rather than simply to present information.

Evaluation of the place of justice and other ethical issues can be done more specifically under this framework by examining four criteria for evaluating the adequacy of coverage. Although the framework goes beyond considerations of justice, each component of it can help in evaluation of how well relevant issues of justice are being portrayed in stories.

- Levels of analysis: ethical issues in areas such as medicine, business, and government play out in settings that involve not only the decisions of individuals but also the organizational, institutional, professional, and social contexts in which they function. Good coverage should pay attention to more than one level of analysis. In relation to justice specifically, consideration of multiple levels is important because organizations provide important constraints on the ability of individuals to act justly or receive justice. At their best, they may help to foster justice on behalf of individuals. Professional expectations and norms similarly may, on the positive side, encourage just decision-making and treatment of people, or they may leave room for unjust practices. The broader social environment may encourage or discourage just behavior, depending, for example, on whether fair treatment of minorities is becoming more or less of an expectation in the broader society.

- Relevant parties: numerous parties such as doctors and executives, institutions such as hospitals and corporations, and professional bodies may play a part in decisions that have implications for justice. In a story involving both professions and the public, it is important to include nonprofessionals such as patients as well as professionals such as doctors as sources. Good coverage should pay attention to several relevant parties and not just professionals if others are important parts of the story. Consideration of relevant parties is important in examining justice not only because a wide array of people and groups may foster or hinder justice, but also because parties that may have more power—such as physicians or insurance companies—can easily act unjustly at the expense of more vulnerable parties such as patients.

- Legal and regulatory issues: these are often important considerations in stories because they put constraints on the decisions of the relevant parties, and because they may themselves foster or limit exercise of justice. Stories should devote some attention to relevant legal and regulatory concerns. Legal and regulatory limitations may be relevant in a wide range of topics such as conduct of corporate executives and corporations, the work of scientists and doctors, and the development and exercise of policies by government agencies.

- Ethical issues, questions, and themes: coverage of topics with important ethical implications should, most centrally, provide some attention to the ethical dimension itself. This means that the story should address issues that are important in ethical theories—such as duties (including justice and, from theological ethics, sensitivity to human needs) and consequences (both benefits and harms). Where relevant, issues from other perspectives such as the feminist ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982) could be addressed. Reporters should also deal with ethical questions and themes—for example, when human life begins—that may emerge in reporting but not fit neatly into one theoretical perspective.

In relation to justice, consideration of the emphases that come from different theories can point to questions that will help journalists shed light on the ways that different aspects of justice are relevant in a story. For example, Mill (2003) linked the value of rights to utility and specifically to the protection of people’s security. Therefore, utilitarianism would suggest...
that journalists ask whether and how the security of individuals or groups is being protected or compromised, by, for example, a decision about the use of pension funds by a corporation. Mill also pointed to the importance of avoiding partiality, which suggests that journalists should ask whether parties in a story are acting in a way to treat some people better at the expense of others. Rawls (1971) related justice to a veil of ignorance behind which people would consider the least advantaged and not allow inequalities that harm them. In this light, journalists could ask whether policies under debate at the federal or state levels of government would avoid inequalities that hurt these parties, a consideration relevant, for example, in choosing how to distribute funding for public schools across a state. Communitarian perspectives on justice also place special priority on the needs of the marginalized (Christians et al., 1993). Informed by communitarianism, journalists might place even more priority on considering how government policies or corporate decisions provide or fail to provide for the needs of people who have little voice or power.

Application to Medical and Science Coverage

Consideration of justice and related issues out of this framework can help sharpen the questions used to plan or critique coverage of topics in medicine and science. Many subjects in these areas touch on issues of life and death, or the quality of life, so the justice issues they raise have profound implications for individuals and society. Therefore, these are particularly important issues for journalists to “get right” for readers and viewers.

The application of this framework will become clearer by reference to coverage of two topics with profound implications for justice: genetic testing and physician-assisted suicide.

Advances in genetic research in recent years have included the discovery of genes connected with diseases such as breast cancer and Alzheimer’s. Some of these discoveries have led to the development of tests for whether people have the genes. The ethical challenges created by development of these tests are significant (Craig, 1997, 2000b). It is usually uncertain whether people who test positive will actually develop the disease, and they may find that no treatment is available and may face difficulty getting insurance or encounter discrimination in employment. As the framework makes clear, however, consideration of the ethical challenges connected with genetic testing needs to go beyond the individual level to examine the obligations of healthcare institutions, companies developing the tests, insurance companies, and employers. Professional norms and expectations are also important to examine, as are the social expectations and stigmas attached to diseases. Sources should include a variety of parties such as doctors and patients, insurance executives, test developers, and family members of patients. It is important to explain what laws and regulations govern the development and use of genetic testing.

The other part of the framework, consideration of the ethical dimension itself, calls for careful thought about how perspectives on justice may bring to light important journalistic questions that may be going unanswered, or may bear further development in in-depth stories. For example, Mill’s (2003) linkage of rights to utility and the protection of security suggests that journalists should ask whether and how policy makers are helping to guard against genetic discrimination. Rawls’s (1971) veil of ignorance would suggest that all parties, including test developers and insurance companies, should consider how to protect the most vulnerable parties, patients or future patients, from harm that might come from indiscriminate disclosure of test results. Communitarianism (Christians et al., 1993) would call for similar questions in the defense of vulnerable parties and would underline the need for inclusion of the voices of those parties as sources in stories on discrimination concerns.
A story in *Time* (discussed in Craig, 1997, 2000b) provides an example of inclusion of this kind of voice:

Consider the case of Vickie Reis, a 42-year-old farmer who lives in Northern California. Six years ago, Reis told an emergency-room doctor treating her for bronchitis that her sister had died of cystic fibrosis, an incurable lung ailment. The physician then tested the woman and found that she bore a single copy of the CF gene. But as any first-year genetics student knows, it takes two copies of the damaged gene for a person to develop this disease. Even so, Reis’ medical record subsequently contained the information about her cf gene, and she was repeatedly denied health insurance. “I had never had any symptoms of the disease,” she notes. “But the fact that I carried the gene was enough to leave a big shadow on my medical history.”

(Gorman et al., 1995, p. 61)

By including this anecdote, Christine Gorman et al. highlighted a justice-related problem by pointing out a situation in which insurance was denied, apparently without strong medical evidence.

As with genetic testing, the framework points to important justice-related concerns about physician-assisted suicide. Physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia have come to public attention in American society in recent years through events such as the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling rejecting the existence of a fundamental constitutional right to assisted suicide (*Vacco v. Quill*, 1997; *Washington v. Glucksberg*, 1997), the state of Oregon’s approval of a law permitting assisted suicide, and Dr. Jack Kevorkian’s assisted suicides and finally a trial stemming from his killing of a man on television. The framework would suggest that thorough coverage of assisted suicide consider the needs and views of individuals such as terminally ill patients, their families, and doctors, but also the priorities and practices of institutions such as hospitals and hospices. At the professional level, consideration of traditional and current ethical standards for medical practice is important. For this issue, society’s views of death, dying, and pain are also important. Few stories will deal with all of these issues in depth, but the best coverage, in stories on this topic as a whole, should address all of these levels.

The framework further points to the need for a range of parties as sources that would include physicians, professional leaders in medical ethics, policy makers, and especially older or more medically vulnerable people—those who might be most directly affected by laws allowing assisted suicide and be most susceptible to abuse. In this topic, the need to understand and explain their legal and regulatory constraints is particularly evident. Finally, consideration of the ethical dimension itself again sheds light on relevant issues of justice. Mill’s (2003) recognition of impartiality as a dimension of justice suggests that journalists should, in covering policy debates related to assisted suicide, ask how policies provide for fair distribution of end-of-life care so that people with or without insurance can receive good palliative care to manage severe pain. Rawls’s (1971) theory of justice would suggest that any inequalities in care for the terminally ill should benefit the least advantaged—again pointing to important policy questions that lie in the background of consideration of the ethics of assisted suicide. A communitarian (Christians et al., 1993) view of justice would ask how a community bound together by mutual concern would want to care for individuals gravely ill at the end of life. This perspective, for example, would support stories of people who volunteer to spend time with patients in cancer wards or hospices.

Journalistic language that draws attention to justice is evident in an analytical piece by Mary Rourke that ran in the *Los Angeles Times* “Southern California Living” section (discussed
in Craig, 2000a, 2002) after Kevorkian went beyond assisted suicide and gave a man a lethal injection on a videotape shown on CBS News’ “60 Minutes.” In one paragraph, Rourke wrote:

By his very public acts, Kevorkian has forced urgent health-care problems to the center of attention. Most of them have to do with how we treat the dying. Lack of adequate pain medication and lack of support for good nursing homes, spiritual care and hospices—in which the dying are allowed to end life naturally, with pain control—are key concerns.

(Rourke, 1998, p. E1)

The concerns the writer raises about insufficient end-of-life care and pain control imply that an injustice is being done when this kind of care is lacking.

In coverage of both genetic testing and physician-assisted suicide, justice issues can emerge when journalists ask critical questions about ethical implications beyond merely the level of the individual, get to a broad range of sources, set the topic in legal and regulatory context, and consider issues that theories of justice would raise. This kind of analysis can inform scholarly evaluation of coverage as well as the planning of coverage in these topics and others in science and medicine.

APPLICATION TO BUSINESS COVERAGE

Business coverage, which sometimes overlaps with medical and science coverage, is another area in which considering multiple levels of analysis, breadth of sourcing, legal backdrop, and issues from ethical theory can shed light on strengths and weaknesses of stories and point to ways that justice issues can be portrayed more effectively. Individual business owners, executives, and employees make decisions themselves, but they do so as part of organizations that must provide goods or services and care for the needs of their own people. Professional expectations for ethical practice in business in turn influence the organizational culture, and the priorities of society related to money and its appropriate uses put a larger frame around the ethical choices that business people make. Stories that profile businesses or explain their decisions need to take into account these multiple levels and use a variety of sources within them—both people within the organization and customers as well as critical observers outside. In addition, laws and regulations provide at least a minimum standard for ethical conduct. Perspectives on justice from ethical theory may again, as in the case of medical coverage, raise important questions about the treatment of more vulnerable parties—such as employees and families facing layoffs or loss of pension plans, and community members living near environmentally hazardous plants or mines.

Coverage of scandals involving corporations and executives in the opening years of the twenty-first century provides an example of a topic related to business in which the framework sheds light on justice-related implications. Several companies including Enron, WorldCom, and Tyco made headlines over the conduct of their executives and the fallout it had for employees and their families.

In-depth coverage of these scandals should include a range of sources including not only executives, employees, and families but also observers such as business ethicists who are able to make informed, critical evaluations of executives’ conduct and of the corporate and professional cultures. Clearly in this case, since legal action was brought against numerous executives, the legal system’s effort to bring justice—at least ideally—in these cases is important to consider as well. As for considerations from theories of justice, the issues are similar to those raised in the discussion of medicine and science coverage—particularly consideration of the security and well-being of the parties most vulnerable in these situations, especially employees and families who have considerably less ability to recover financially than the highly paid executives at the top.
Particularly important for business stories, the coverage should include these individuals as sources and subjects but should also carefully scrutinize the corporate culture they lived in or were affected by—and the professional and social climates as broader context. Decisions that were made harming employees’ pensions and financial futures represent unjust treatment that cannot be fully understood without this broader background.

Magazine pieces about the string of scandals in 2001 and 2002 (discussed in Craig & Turner, 2003) included cover stories and other investigative articles that were built on substantial reporting but also included strong commentary that drives home the ethical implications of corporate conduct. These pieces went beyond the individual to explore the organizational, professional, and even social levels. For example, a piece in *BusinessWeek* (Byrne, France, & Zellner, 2002) said many academics who had presented Enron as a model in the late 1990s are now scurrying to distill the cultural and leadership lessons from the debacle. Their conclusion so far: Enron didn’t fail just because of improper accounting or alleged corruption at the top. It also failed because of its entrepreneurial culture—the very reason Enron attracted so much attention and acclaim. The unrelenting emphasis on earnings growth and individual initiative, coupled with a shocking absence of the usual corporate checks and balances, tipped the culture from one that rewarded aggressive strategy to one that increasingly relied on unethical corner-cutting. (Byrne et al., 2002, p. 118)

Enron’s problems are thus presented as being issues of organizational culture—a point developed throughout the story. Although justice is not discussed directly, the focus on the culture as one dependent on unethical practices shows how the foundation was laid for unjust conduct.

A cover story in *Fortune* (Gimein et al., 2002) addresses ethics at the broader level of the profession. After pointing to the “ever-lengthening parade of corporate villains,” the article criticizes the ethics of the business world:

> These people and a handful of others are the poster children for the “infectious greed” that Fed chairman Alan Greenspan described recently to Congress. But by now, with the feverish flush of the new economy recognizable as a symptom not of a passion but of an illness, it has also become clear that the mores and practices that characterize this greed suffused the business world far beyond Enron and Tyco, Adelphia and WorldCom. (Gimein et al., 2002, p. 64)

The story establishes evidence for this statement using an analysis of stock sales by executives and directors for more than 1,035 companies that were losing money. The study found that “a total haul of $23 billion went to 466 insiders at the 25 corporations where the executives cashed out the most” (Gimein et al., 2002). By setting the corporate scandals in broad professional context, through in-depth reporting, the story sets a broader backdrop for consideration of the justice of practices by many at the top of the corporate world—though again justice is not directly mentioned.

**OTHER TOPICS FOR APPLICATION**

Beyond coverage of medicine, science, and business, coverage of a variety of other topics could benefit from systematic evaluation with an eye to how justice is addressed. Here are four areas in which these considerations are relevant:

- Conduct of public officials (Craig, 1999). In the context of election coverage or ongoing evaluation of officials’ work, journalists can consider questions such as: is there evidence...
of favoritism toward better-funded or more powerful interests in the decisions and priorities of a member of Congress? In dealing with the development or implementation of social services policies, is an agency head pushing for careful consideration of the interests of those who might be hurt because they are economically vulnerable? These questions echo one raised by Lambeth (1992) in his discussion of justice building on Rawls (1971): “Are some groups or classes of persons enjoying more than their fair share of goods or bearing more than their fair share of the burdens?” (Lambeth, 1992, p. 29). This kind of reporting calls for use of a broad array of sources—including people with a variety of views inside government and others outside.

- Debates over government policy. Stories on policy topics may work either during election season when candidates are debating policy positions or at other times when Congress or state governments are considering legislation. It is particularly important to evaluate the potential impact of policy choices on individuals, affected organizations, and the residents of the state or nation as a whole. Clearly the legal and regulatory background is important to report. In order to carefully evaluate the possible harm to more vulnerable stakeholders, it is important to listen to the evaluations of lawmakers with a variety of views, as well as policy analysts and academics with expertise, and individuals who may be affected. But because of the potentially complex and far-reaching impact of policy decisions, it is important for journalists not to rely too heavily on anecdotal accounts of hurting individuals, even though a communitarian perspective on justice (Christians et al., 1993) would call for some of these voices to be included. Consideration of justice at the social level demands that sources include people with knowledge to evaluate potential long-term and less obvious consequences, thereby helping to ensure that the interests of the least advantaged that are so important in both communitarian and Rawlsian ethics are served.

- Decisions about war and the conduct of war. Covering this topic means writing about policy debates and public discussion during times when a nation is considering military action, as well as war itself and its impact. This coverage poses particular challenges with choice of sources and representation of impact from the individual to social levels, but there may be no other topic with greater justice implications.

- The practices of journalists themselves. Writers who evaluate the work of journalists can help shed light on whether reporters are actually doing a good job covering topics with justice-related implications. These critical analysts may be media writers for large news organizations, public editors or ombudsmen who write independent evaluations of an organization’s work, other commentators for print and broadcast media, or bloggers who evaluate the work of journalists online. These writers can provide a form of accountability for journalists through critical evaluation of the depth and breadth of coverage of a topic, particularly the ways in which justice issues were discussed.

For all these topics, systematic evaluation of sources, levels, legal backdrop, and facets of justice can lead to both better coverage and more thorough scholarly assessment.

**AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

In order to advance both scholarly understanding and professional practice, it is important for researchers to do additional critical evaluation of how justice and related issues are addressed in news coverage, to strengthen the conceptual foundation for application of justice to journalistic practice, to explore journalists’ own views of justice as a value and goal, and to extend the analysis beyond journalism to persuasion and entertainment.
As the discussion above shows, some explicit scholarly attention has been given to how justice as a value has been stated or implied in coverage, as well as to the context of sourcing, levels at which justice issues played out, and legal considerations that may promote justice or limit it. However, much of this attention has been focused on coverage of medicine and science (e.g., Craig, 2000b, 2002) or business (Craig & Turner, 2003). As already suggested, important justice-related questions can be raised about the work of government officials, the development of public policy, and the work of journalists themselves. Beyond these, a variety of other topics have justice implications—for example, the decisions and practices of religious institutions and the priorities of professional and college sports. The door is wide open for in-depth qualitative evaluations of coverage or broad-scale quantitative analyses. In particular, given Wilkins and Coleman’s (2005) findings about a lowering of moral reasoning level related to race among White journalism students, it is important to evaluate how racial issues are being covered across a variety of beats.

In addition to extending the analyses to a wide array of topics, researchers should consider how justice issues are or should be addressed across a range of journalistic genres. An obvious area of focus would be investigative reporting because of the powerful moral implications of journalistic examinations of wrongdoing (Ettema & Glasser, 1998). Researchers could examine how investigative reporters have thought through and written about dimensions of justice in coverage of, for example, police corruption. Narrative journalism is another journalistic form in which compelling writing can draw attention to social needs or simply to the plight of individuals (Craig, 2006). Journalists who do in-depth narrative features sometimes use the storytelling devices of the novelist to drive home to readers or viewers the ways that injustices affect people in their daily lives. Through content analyses (qualitative or quantitative) and interviews with writers, researchers could shed light on how and why justice issues were portrayed.

In addition, the development of online journalism raises distinctive questions in which justice could be an important consideration. Multimedia projects making the most of powerful video, audio, and still photography have the potential to highlight stories of injustice in compelling ways. Content analyses could explore whether projects addressing social concerns such as homelessness are making the most of the narrative power of multiple media forms. Blogs, another important component of online journalism, also have interesting justice implications. By inviting comments from the audience, bloggers can foster debate over the practices of government, medical, and business institutions and the conduct of individuals. Those bloggers who include their own opinions in their postings may also help to spur discussion. Content analyses of blogs could evaluate the quality and nature of the analysis and discussion that they bring to the public. More generally, the interactivity and feedback capability of the Internet open the potential for interaction of a wide array of voices, whether through blogs, social media, discussion forums, or audio or video segments. But the extent to which this potential is being realized should be closely evaluated through research on the content of this communication—as well as network analyses on the patterns of interaction.

Another important area for further research is additional systematic thinking about the conceptual foundations for justice in ethical theory and what different perspectives distinctively contribute to evaluation of justice in coverage—as well as the nature of justice as a goal of journalism. As the review of concepts and literature in this chapter shows, media scholars have brought a variety of perspectives on justice to the table for application or critique, including perspectives based on utilitarianism, Rawls’s egalitarianism, communitarianism, and moral development theory. However, greater conceptual clarity and more precise application are still needed. For example:

- If both Rawls’s (1971) and Christians et al.’s (1993) notions of justice place priority on the needs of the disadvantaged, what differences in priority for journalistic practice do their conceptual distinctives suggest? The particular focus in communitarian media ethics on
giving voice to individuals might call for a priority on stories highlighting these narratives, but if Rawls also gives priority to the least advantaged, would his perspective call for anything different?

- What are the distinctives and similarities between the notions of care growing out of feminist ethics and the conception of justice in communitarian ethics? Unlike rights-based notions of justice growing out of the liberal tradition or built on Kohlberg’s moral development theory, communitarian justice focuses on people in relationship with others—as do feminist ethics of care. Even though these other conceptions of justice have been set against notions of care (e.g., Steiner & Okrusch, 2006), justice in communitarianism has much common ground with care-based ethics. How would these two perspectives inform the work of journalism differently?

Finally, it is important to evaluate journalists’ own perspectives on justice as a value and goal of their work. Journalists across a variety of beats and genres could be interviewed to shed further light on the importance they place on justice as a value, how they define it, and how they view it in relation to other journalistic values.

Beyond exploring implications for journalism, researchers could extend their evaluation of justice-related concerns to other media areas that have gotten less attention from ethics scholars. Persuasive communication by public relations and advertising practitioners is filled with justice implications. For example, advocacy for a particular public policy or business decision may advance or hinder the fair treatment of vulnerable parties in a community. Advertising for an expensive product may raise questions of social justice if it explicitly targets people with little ability to pay. Some previous scholarly work such as Baker and Martinson’s development of the TARES Test (2001) has already explored justice-related concerns as they apply to persuasion. However, consideration of justice in public relations and advertising with additional attention to analysis at the levels of individual, organization, profession, and society might further sharpen discussion of what constitutes ethical practice. In the entertainment world, justice-based analysis could shed light on a variety of issues such as the fairness of portrayal of older people and minorities; the casting and treatment of reality show participants for the sake of humor; and broader considerations of the responsibility of movie, television, and music producers to society. While critics have made much of the need for responsible practice in entertainment media, the scholarly field of entertainment ethics is in its infancy. Careful consideration of justice in the development of entertainment ethics research would help ensure that entertainment products and processes are evaluated at a variety of levels and from multiple theoretical perspectives.

REFERENCES


