

- be viewed by a deontologist such as Kant? If so, discuss how they would differ?
2. Other documentarians have had to make decisions that allowed harm to come to their subjects or decisions to not render aid to their subjects in pursuit of a truthful outcome on film. What is the “greater good” in situations such as this? Is there a universal principle for all documentaries or should it be decided on a case-by-case basis?
 3. Many believe that the decision by the city to finance a study to examine ways to prevent future suicides was motivated by the film. Does this change your opinion of the film in any way? If so, how?

CASE 2-C

NEWS AND THE TRANSPARENCY STANDARD

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By many measures, 2010 and 2011 were very bad years for the CPB and its radio arm, National Public Radio (NPR). CPB found itself under attack by members of the Tea Party and some other Republicans for what they viewed as a “liberal” media agenda. Congress threatened to cut CBP’s \$320 million funding, a move that would have placed the financial future of about 50 percent of public radio and public television stations (most of those in smaller markets) in fiscal jeopardy. At the same time, the great recession that began in 2008 also took a financial toll; audience fundraising activity—and corporate support—weakened.

Finances were not the only problem. These years included a series of significant controversies, beginning with the firing of NPR’s Juan Williams for comments he made about Muslims that were broadcast on Fox News, where he also was a commentator. Ultimately, NPR’s top news manager, Ellen Weiss, was forced to resign over the incident. Just weeks later, NPR’s top executive, Vivian Schiller, who had come to public radio after working at the *New York Times*, was forced to resign after an audio tape of one of the organization’s top fundraisers, Ron Schiller (no relation), surfaced on the internet. In that audio tape, Ron Schiller called some congressional Republicans and particularly members of the Tea Party racist, unchristian, and anti-intellectual. Schiller also said he believed that NPR and the CPB would, over the long run, be better off

without congressional funding support. Both Vivian Schiller and Ron Schiller were forced out.

All this came in the midst of professional successes, including a listening audience for NPR of more than 27 million people—much above those watching television network and cable news—and reporting that won every professional prize.

CPB had last changed its editorial and organizational standards in 2005 but, beginning in 2009, launched a multi-year project to update those standards and to apply them to all aspects of CPB efforts—from program selection to fundraising to news. The intent was a single set of standards that would inform best practices throughout the corporation. Executives hoped these consistent standards would strengthen ties with audience members and funders, including Congress. Those new standards were adopted in June 2011 and may be accessed at: <http://www.pbs.org/about/editorial-standards/>. In many ways, these standards were similar to those that had informed the organization since its inception.

Those new standards included standards for the news organization that audiences know as NPR. The standards were based on a normative framework for NPR's journalism and included an acknowledgement of the following principles: fairness, accuracy, balance, responsiveness to the public (accountability), courage and controversy, substance over technique, experiment and innovation, and exploration of significant subjects, as well as subsections on what would be considered unprofessional conduct, unacceptable production methods, and NPR's use of social media, particularly as a source for news stories. Third on the normative list was the standard of objectivity, which those who developed the updated standards linked to transparency in this way:

Beyond that, for a work to be considered objective, it should reach a certain level of transparency. In a broad sense, this spirit of transparency means the audience should be able to understand the basics of how the producers put the material together. For example, the audience generally should be able to know not only who the sources of information are, but also why they were chosen and what their potential biases might be. As another example, if producers face particularly difficult editorial decisions that they know will be controversial, they should consider explaining why choices were made so the public can understand. Producers should similarly consider explaining to the audience why certain questions could not be answered, including why, if confidential sources are relied on, the producers agreed to allow the source to remain anonymous. And the spirit of transparency suggests that if the producers have arrived at certain conclusions or a point of view, the audience should be able to see the evidence so it can understand how that point of view was arrived at. One

aspiration implicit in the idea of transparency is that an audience might appreciate and learn from content with which it also might disagree.

Opinion and commentary are different from news and analysis.

When a program, segment, digital material or other content is devoted to opinion or commentary, the principle of transparency requires that it be clearly labeled as such. Any content segment that presents only like-minded views without offering contrasting viewpoints should be considered opinion and should identify who is responsible for the views being presented.

No content distributed by PBS should permit conscious manipulation of selected facts in order to propagandize.

Individual media outlets—both television and radio—may decide whether to adopt these voluntary standards.

Micro Issues

1. Are there certain sorts of agreements between journalists and their sources that would be jeopardized by the transparency standard?
2. Are there certain sorts of activities journalists do—for example, deciding which stories to cover—that might benefit from a “transparency” standard?
3. Does being transparent about process add unproductively to a journalists’ workload?
4. Is transparency best considered a component part of objectivity?

Midrange Issues

1. Take a news story from any media source and evaluate how well it meets the CPB normative guidelines.
2. What values on the CPB list do you find internally consistent? Contradictory? Could you adopt these standards as part of your best practices?
3. Do you think labeling something news or opinion matters to most audience members? What about entertainment programming such as *The Daily Show*?

Macro Issues

1. Should the US taxpayer fund media organizations such as the CPB?
2. What definition of truth do you believe CPB is applying to news content—at least as reflected in its professional standards?