

the story to the audience.” Evaluate this statement in light of the journalists’ actions and rationale outlined above.

2. How does your evaluation differ from the “shoot now, edit later” decision that sometimes explains how still photographers decide which images to capture?

### **Midrange Issues**

1. Less than two weeks later, Hurricane Irma pounded the state of Florida. Coverage included multiple journalists broadcasting live in the teeth of the storm while simultaneously airing government instructions to evacuate. Evaluate these actions in light of the cases outlined above. What philosophical theory supports your decision?
2. Should journalists broadcast (e.g., on personal Twitter feeds) photos or videos shot by citizens at the scene of a hurricane or other disaster despite the fact that those citizens have been encouraged to evacuate or take other measures to remain safe?

### **Macro Issues**

1. How are the actions described above distinct from stating a personal opinion in a news story?
2. These decisions by news reporters occurred during a time when the media were being called the “enemy of the people” by President Donald J. Trump. Should footage of these actions be used to promote the profession as part of a public relations campaign?

## **CASE 4-C**

### **PUBLIC/ON-AIR JOURNALIST VERSUS PRIVATE/ONLINE LIFE: CAN IT WORK?**

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On Oct. 9, 2017, viewers tuned in to ESPN’s 6 p.m. *SportsCenter* only to find that one of the hosts, Jemele Hill, had been suspended from the ESPN airwaves for two weeks for running afoul of the network’s social media policy. Almost immediately, the question of whether public figures should be able to express their private political opinions on

social media came under scrutiny in ESPN's handling of *SportsCenter* co-host Hill's series of tweets from her personal Twitter account.

Hill, who first got a chance to co-host ESPN's flagship program in February 2017, came under fire that September when she called President Trump a "white supremacist who has surrounded himself with other white supremacists" in a tweet that has since been deleted. Hill also claimed Trump was the "most ignorant, offensive president of [her] lifetime," a "bigot," and "unqualified and unfit to be president."

Despite issuing an apology for her tweets, which "painted ESPN in an unfair light," Hill found herself serving a two-week suspension after a second breach of ESPN social media conduct, when she encouraged "paying customers" to "boycott" Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones's advertisers in light of the ongoing 2017 NFL controversy concerning player conduct during the national anthem.

Following the lead of ex-San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick from the 2016 season, many NFL players had chosen to sit, kneel, or stay in the locker room during the playing of the anthem in the fall of 2017. Jones, however, had orchestrated his team's protest carefully—a well-televised knee before the anthem and respect during it. He had even participated in the pseudo-event himself. Later, Jones had been quoted as saying that any Cowboy who did not stand for the anthem would be benched. At that point, Hill took to social media.

"If they don't kneel, some will see them as sellouts," Hill said in a series of tweets on her personal account on Oct. 8, 2017.

By drawing a line in the sand, Jerry put his players under more scrutiny and threw them under the bus. . . . If the rationale behind JJ's stance is keeping the fan base happy, make him see that he underestimated how all of his fan base feels.

ESPN, which has a partnership with the NFL through 2021, told ThinkProgress that the key factor in Hill's suspension was the reference to a boycott of Cowboys' sponsors, many of which also sponsor the network (Legum, 2017). In a statement, an ESPN spokesperson said that in the aftermath of Hill's suspension, "all employees were reminded of how individual tweets may reflect negatively on ESPN and that such actions would have consequences."

ESPN and other networks have encouraged their commentators and personalities such as Hill to "build their personal 'brand' through commentary." However, ESPN public editor Jim Brady told the *Washington Post* that "media companies are simultaneously asking many of their personalities to be active and engaging on social media

but not partisan or opinionated. It's a line that is, at best, blurry and, at worst, nonexistent" (Farhi, 2017).

Through two sets of guidelines for its employees, "Social Networking" and "Political and Social Issues," ESPN (2017) encourages its employees to

avoid personal attacks and inflammatory rhetoric. . . . Think before you tweet. Understand that at all times you are representing ESPN, and Twitter (as with other social sites) offers the equivalent of a live microphone. Simple rule: If you wouldn't say it on the air or write it in a column, don't post it on any social network.

Employees of companies such as ESPN are held responsible, not only for the content they post on their personal accounts but also for the audience their posts reach and the potential effects of an improper post. ESPN's *Outside the Lines* anchor Bob Ley told *Sports Illustrated* following Hill's first breach in social media policy:

The usual standard of saying only what you would with a microphone in your hand apparently no longer applies. These are emotional, political times. There are important responsibilities that come with the many perks, and chief among those these days is realizing your words carry the weight of your platform. You speak for more than yourself. (Deitsch, 2017)

Hill left *SportsCenter* in January 2018. She now writes for *The Atlantic*.

## Micro Issues

1. Was it right for Hill to be suspended by ESPN for tweets published on her personal account? Justify your answer.
2. As an employee, do you believe you represent your employers, even when you are "off the clock"?
3. Should one be forced to sign a social media policy to gain employment?

## Midrange Issues

1. If Hill had not been previously warned about social media after her tweets about President Trump, do you believe her calling for a boycott of Jerry Jones would have been enough by itself for a suspension by the network? Justify your answer.
2. Hill is a Black woman. Do you see any hints of either sexism or racism in this case, and, if so, where? Would a popular male anchor have been treated differently?

3. If Hill had a lesser role within ESPN, do you think her punishment would have been as severe?

## Macro Issues

1. Is a sport event's integrity lost if there is no playing of the national anthem beforehand?
2. In the context of the Black Lives Matter movement and the protests in Charlottesville in 2017, do you believe minority television personalities' comments and views are met with more scrutiny than those of Caucasian commentators?

## CASE 4-D

### WHEN YOU ARE THE STORY: SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE NEWSROOM

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By the time you read this case study, this list will be longer:

Roger Ailes, Fox News  
 Matt Lauer, NBC's *Today Show*  
 Mike Oreskes, NPR  
 Charlie Rose, CBS  
 David Sweeney, NPR  
 John Hockenberry, WNYC  
 Leonard Lopate and Jonathan Schwartz, WNYC  
 Harvey Weinstein, The Weinstein Company  
 John Lasseter, Disney/Pixar  
 Glen Thrush, *New York Times*  
 Bill O'Reilly, Fox News  
 Garrison Keeler, *The Prairie Home Companion*

The names on *this* list epitomize a series of important questions. The first: How to report a story when your own organization, and specifically your own newsroom, is involved?

NBC chose to announce Matt Lauer's firing on the *Today Show* less than 12 hours after the initial complaint surfaced. *Today Show* host Savannah Guthrie fought back tears as she read the announcement,