

***Dirty Politics in New Zealand: How newspaper reporters and
online bloggers constructed the professional values of journalism at a time of crisis***

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Abstract

This research explores how different facets of the New Zealand media system conceptualized journalism and their own perceived role within journalistic practice at a particular moment of crisis. This study found a recurrent reflexive protectionism displayed by journalists while bloggers readily explored the extent of journalism doxa, albeit through a politicized lens. If journalism is measured, in part, by the values on display in written text, then bloggers emerged from this controversy as professional journalists.

The goal of this paper is not to clearly define what is or what is not journalism. Rather, this research aims to explore how different facets of the broader media system conceptualized journalism and their own perceived role within journalistic practice at a particular moment of crisis when previously accepted professional norms of journalism were publically contested. This crisis occurred when revelations emerged that a right wing political blogger in New Zealand, who was being paid by a conservative public relations firm, had routine conversations with the right wing Prime Minister and other governmental cabinet members, which then informed positive stories about the government and negative stories about left wing politicians. This was revealed weeks before the elections by a left-leaning author, Nicky Hager, in a book titled *Dirty Politics: How Attack Politics is Poisoning New Zealand's Political Environment*. As the story emerged, a national discussion took place in New Zealand, which questioned what is and what is not journalism – generally pitting blogs on one side of the debate and mainstream news reporters on the other.

As Carlson (2007) has stated, “discussions of whether blogs constitute political journalism or estimations of their role in campaign coverage must be contained within the context of a broader media system marked by contestation and countervailing forces” (p. 264). Thus, this research argues that it is not just journalists who should be examined in relation to such meaning making, but also those who participate in the peripheries of journalism and newswork, particularly in the context of new media and multiculturalism. These peripheral forces work to inform the larger ideology of journalism, from both within the journalistic field and from without. This research examines these forces via content from four media outlets: the newspaper of record in New Zealand, the most popular left-leaning and right-leaning blogs in the country and *Whale Oil*, the blog at the center of this controversy.

The Case of *Dirty Politics*

Nicky Hager, the author of *Dirty Politics*, labels himself as an investigative journalist on his website (Hager, 2014). He has no training in journalism, but received a Bachelor of Science in Physics and a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Philosophy. He is a contributor to the *Sunday Star-Times* although not employed by this or any other news organization. Hager regularly speaks to journalism students in New Zealand and abroad about investigative work, based almost exclusively on six books he has written that expose various political issues in New Zealand. His first book in 1996, *Secret Power*, detailed global surveillance practices. Hager has also been the New Zealand representative for The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIG) since 2002.

Dirty Politics was published just twelve weeks out from the New Zealand general election. The book detailed repeated correspondence between the right-leaning National government and a particular right wing blogger, Cameron Slater, founder of the *Whale Oil* blog. The allegations within *Dirty Politics* suggested that Slater was given information for stories from governmental officials and then used that information to attack those on the left and support those on the right. Details from thousands of Slater's emails and private messages via Facebook came from another unnamed anonymous source and were the basis of these allegations that featured heavily in the book. These messages exposed informational, and informal, relationships between Slater and Senior Cabinet Minister Judith Collins, and between Slater and Jason Ede, then Senior Press Adviser to the Prime Minister. Hager argued that when Ede and Collins had particular political grudges against specific individuals, they would leak information to Slater who would then release strongly opinionated attacks against those people through *Whale Oil*. These hacked messages also revealed that reporters at *The New Zealand Herald* were in regular conversation with Slater and that information was readily exchanged back and forth between *Whale Oil* and the newspaper. Further, it was revealed in the book that Slater was being paid by a conservative public relations firm for his written work. When

questioned about his relationship with Slater, Prime Minister John Key stated only that he regularly checked in with Slater “to see what he’s got on his site and mind” (Fox, 2014).

The presumed anonymous source that provided Hager those digital messages became known as Rawshark and went on to slowly feed more hacked information via an anonymous Twitter account, @Whaledump. The tweets stopped on 5 September 2014 when Rawshark announced “it is time to go,” but not before a parting threat: “don’t make me come out of retirement” (Fisher, 2014). At this writing, the identity of Rawshark has not been ascertained and there has been no communication from anyone claiming to be Rawshark. There remains uncertainty about how and why these hacked messages came into Hager’s possession. After the publication of *Dirty Politics* there was also speculation as to why Hager didn’t approach named individuals in the hacked emails before publication. The general conclusion is that the book would then not have been able to be published, as those named individuals would not agree to the release of that information.

Dirty Politics, sparked a nationwide discussion regarding the values of journalism and the place of both blogging and journalism within a democratic society. Talkback radio shows incessantly discussed whether journalists and bloggers were actually the same thing; independent websites explored potential conspiracy theories amongst journalists; and magazines debated the role of bloggers in New Zealand governance. Embedded in all of these discussions was the central question of what counts as journalism and who can actually be labelled a journalist. In the midst of this controversy, Slater was legally declared a journalist by the New Zealand courts under the Evidence Act when he was asked to release the names of his sources. Justice Asher declared Slater was a journalist based on three conclusions: *Whale Oil* had “more visits than many provincial newspaper sites,” there were a “number of news breaks scored by the site” and Slater had also won a journalism award (Field & Downes, 2014). While Justice Asher came to his own conclusions, this research explores how the journalism was constructed in the media surrounding this controversy – who counted as a journalist and who didn’t.

Bourdieu and Journalism Doxa

The renowned sociologist, Bourdieu, first focused his gaze on media in his seminal work, *On Television* (1996a). In this text, he suggested that field theory might help to explain journalism as a subfield of cultural production. Bourdieu argued that fields, such as cultural production, possess at least some autonomy from other fields, which helps to create a distinction between fields. This autonomy is forged from what Bourdieu labels doxa or the implied presuppositions that inform behaviour within a field. Journalists may be more comfortable labelling these shared doxa as professional norms or routines. Doxa are the agreed upon commonalities across an occupational community that come to define who is 'in' and who is 'out.' Such agreement does not occur without conflict or domination from power relations embedded within each area of specialization or field (Cook, 1998). The doxatic understanding of any field, including journalism, depends upon the "possibilities bequeathed by previous struggles, a space which tends to give direction to the search for solutions and, consequently, influences the present and future production" (Bourdieu, 1996b, p. 206).

Journalism participates within a circuit of culture that informs everything from economic activities (V. Zelizer, 2011) to interpersonal relationships (Oyserman & Lee, 2008) to patterns of production and consumption (Grinblatt & Keloharju, 2001). This circuit of culture is formed both inside and outside of institutional frameworks, resulting in independent and interdependent bodies of shared knowledge that are regarded collectively as providing symbolic capital. This essentialist symbolic capital forms the fundamental structure of normative behaviours within social institutions. When one considers the journalistic field as constitutive within and of a larger circuit of culture (Bourdieu, 2005), then any understanding of journalism should be informed by other fields that operate within its expansive umbrella. Thus, if on the one hand, "it is impossible to separate news from community" (Deuze, 2008, p. 850), then that journalistic community needs to be further

integrated into understanding journalism as an expansive and socially embedded part of that community.

Meaning is relational and therefore, the existence of any field can only occur in relation to other fields. The journalistic field, in particular, as a subfield of cultural production, can only exist in relation to economic and political fields. These fields are “arenas of struggle in which individuals and organizations compete, unconsciously and consciously, to valorize those forms of capital which they possess” (Benson, 2006, p. 190). For the journalistic field, economic capital is advertising revenues, ratings and circulation (labelled heteronomous forces), whereas cultural capital is expressed through professional awards or the symbolic acknowledgement of artistic or literary merit (labelled autonomous forces). The tension between these two poles can be seen between mainstream and alternative media, between institutional journalists and independent bloggers.

Bourdieu has critiqued the journalism field for losing its autonomy in relation to the economic field, as seen through the wide scale commercialization of journalistic content (2005). The relational measurement of the journalism field against the economic field/heteronomy and the political field/autonomy results in a fluid spectrum of journalistic content as well as organizational structure that has made at least some of the loss in autonomy and economics difficult to quantify (Kenix, 2011). That being said, there is an undeniable commercial pressure on mainstream newsrooms to consolidate resources and locate efficiencies in newsgathering within a conglomerated media environment. This pressure is at least partly responsible for relatively radical changes in journalism during the 21st century. Despite the changes in journalism, there has been a rather entrenched journalistic doxa surrounding the field due to the ubiquitousness of media power. Bourdieu argues that the omnipresent journalism field places structural pressure on all other fields of cultural production. This pressure is exerted en masse and “not from any one journalist or network executive” given that all involved in the field “are themselves subject to control by the field”

(Bourdieu, 1996a, p. 56). Therefore, the field of journalism (and the pressures that it is under) affect other related fields.

While fields form in relation to those around them, individuals within fields view the survival of their institutions on the continued perceived distinction between fields. Players make use of their power to impose the rules that favour them the most. Journalistic doxa is presupposed to encompass a professional rationale that is fundamentally distinctive from the fields that surround it. However, there is a certain assumptiveness in this argument on the relative size of that journalistic field and the degree of contestation to previously accepted journalistic doxa. Certainly the ubiquity of new delivery technologies and ideologically varied news centres has resulted in an “ongoing production of difference” (Benson, 2006, p. 192) within journalism. This continued cycle (and recycle) of change has been largely disregarded in light of overpowering consumer forces. Posed plainly as a question: “to what extent is the Internet a counterforce to this commodification of news culture? Not much, I would argue” (Benson, 2006, p. 196). However, fundamental doxatic changes can occur when “there is some kind of ‘external’ shock to the field” (Benson, 2006, p. 192). In New Zealand, *Dirty Politics* may have been that external shock. The journalistic field in New Zealand is relatively small and the contestation surrounding *Dirty Politics* was relatively large. The book resulted in a national discussion that both welcomed and challenged those who aimed for inclusion in the journalistic field.

Journalism Values

The doxa of journalism has historically been interconnected with the categorization of journalism as a profession. The efforts to situate journalism as a profession are intrinsically tied to the educational programs that teach journalism skills. Both inevitably justify and support the other. However, viewing journalism as an ideology rather than as a profession, allows for a clearer understanding of how it engages with other social interests and how it is informed by interconnected

hierarchies of influence (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Rather than conceptualize journalism as a profession, journalism needs to be considered as an ideology (Deuze, 2005). Viewing journalism through an ideological lens acknowledges that journalism does not operate through strict codes of conduct nor does it necessarily depend on workplace socialization or training.

It has been suggested that understanding journalism as an ideology “primarily means understanding journalism in terms of how journalists give meaning to their newswork” (Deuze, 2005, p. 444). Depending upon journalists alone to create the parameters of what journalism means ignores the larger mediated context of journalistic work. This process of self-identification makes sense for industries that require a regulated accreditation to participate within or industries that are so removed from the general public that there is little understanding of procedural operations. Neither of these caveats are true for journalism. Indeed, these caveats are celebrated in the web 2.0 prosumer media environment, which values citizen created content and an open exchange of information over institutionalized reporting and closed networks of communication.

The hesitance to expand an ideology of journalism to those outside of mainstream news outlets comes from many mainstream news workers themselves and perhaps from media academics as well. Much of the previous academic work aiming to understand an ideology of journalism has been from the perspective of professional mainstream news journalists (Jonsson & Ornebring, 2011; Singer et al., 2011), rather than from the broader network of those who participate in creating journalistic content. Mainstream news journalists are often forced to legitimate their profession in response to external critiques (Bennett, 2001; Deuze, 2005), which generally challenge the many levels of influences on journalism. This position of perpetual self-defence has led professional journalists in New Zealand to be very self aware of what they perceive their role to be in society and their own perception of influences on their work. Their self-awareness is inextricably interconnected with external inquiry and it stands to reason that one would be much more critical of forces that are perceived to be a threat. Thus, mainstream news journalists remain actively engaged in bolstering

their journalistic authority so that the public believe they have the “necessary cultural authority” (Carlson, 2007, p. 266) to perform in that role.

While journalists are situated within communities that co-create a shared communicative narrative about what journalism can be within a society (Berkowitz, 2000), that shared communicative narrative does not always provide an obvious consensus. This lack of agreement has been attributed to the perpetual fragmentation of journalism as an occupational field and to the chasms within academia itself as it grapples, from countless methodological approaches, to understand an expansively adaptive and culturally responsive institution (Deuze, 2005). Collective narratives about journalism in New Zealand circle around particular traits or values that have been connected to journalism’s ideology. While those collective narratives might not successfully combine to a set of accredited professional skills, they do work to form an ideology of journalism – regardless of whether they are generally inconsistent, contradictory, and could be attributable to other professions or social systems as well (Deuze, 2005). Bogaerts (2011) has said that academics and professionals need to be asking “how journalists negotiate the core values of their profession despite their often problematic nature” (p. 404).

While several scholars have found interesting national and cultural differences in journalistic practice internationally (i.e. Donsbach & Klett, 1993; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; McNair, 2003), journalism has largely been regarded as a relatively unchanging system of beliefs that are similar, although not universal, around the world (Weaver, 1998). The shared thread between theoretical studies of journalistic phenomenology at both the national and the global level, is an assumption of institutionalized normative behaviours derived from shared professional training and collective knowledge of ‘how journalism is done.’ However, the assumption of collective knowledge and training is inherently problematic given the potentially exponential and fundamentally diffuse online sources of news – particularly as those online sources of news gain autonomous cultural capital within the journalistic field. Despite this, research has maintained a “universal stock of professional

beliefs” (Donsbach & Klett, 1993, p. 79) that work to shape journalism. These professional values and beliefs may “shift subtly over time; yet always serve to maintain the dominant sense of what is (and what should be) journalism” (Deuze, 2005, p. 444). This universal stock of beliefs has been called the professional ideology of journalism (B. Zelizer, 2004), which translates to an ecumenical set of everyday expectations and normative behaviours that define what it means to be a journalist (Donsbach, 2008). With the development of public journalism throughout the 1990s, researchers have suggested that global journalism, as a social institution, increasingly empowers audiences as engaged citizens of the world (Rosen, 2000) and thus inherently expands the framework of what journalism is within society and who can be a journalist. This “dominant occupational ideology of journalism” (Deuze, 2005, p. 445) is largely consistent in elective democracies, but is interpreted and applied differently around the globe and across media (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). While this may suggest a theoretically expansive and potentially inclusive conception of journalism, the definitive frameworks of what it means to be a journalist may be more exclusionary in practice.

Journalistic values have been said to include public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy and ethics (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). Values might be applied with different levels of emphasis around the globe (Shoemaker & Reese, 1990), but they are said to be integrated into an international ideology of journalism and journalistic practice (Brennen, 2000) that maintains institutional core values, such as relevance, truth, public loyalty, autonomy, engagement (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007), and professional autonomy (Singer, 2007). Each one of these values are used to justify journalist actions, explain journalistic behaviour, and also problematize any others individuals or industries that are perceived as outside of these professional values. Whereas journalists emphasize these particular values, audience members define the public service of journalism in terms of a populist civic engagement that relies on interpretation rather than objectivity. (Heider, McCombs, & Pointdexter, 2005)

It should be noted that within the institution of journalism, there are obviously several kinds of journalists. Even when one constructs an identity of journalism as closed exclusively to mainstream news outlets, there are individual variances between individual practice. However, as these values suggest, journalism is much more than simply the retelling of news as an objective reality. Journalism is a cultural resource (Meadows, 1998), a “a site where a community’s sense of self is represented and negotiated” (Bogaerts, 2011, p. 400). It is exactly because of this collaborative nature, that mediated networks outside of journalism, in particular blogs, need to be considered in the construction of what journalism means to a society.

Values of the Blogosphere

Many bloggers consider themselves to be journalists (Lenhart & Fox, 2006), while other bloggers celebrate their stance outside of mainstream journalism (Jones & Himelboim, 2010). This diversity within the blogosphere obviously problematizes definitive categorization. In an essentially relativistic statement, the difference between bloggers and journalists has been stated quite plainly: “Are bloggers journalists? (Answer: When they’re doing journalism)” (Lynch, 2007). While such a statement initially appears to unify these two areas of expertise, it also serves to drive a further wedge into an assumed dichotomy that is constructed here to be so obvious, it does not need clarification. Journalists can never be bloggers and bloggers can never be journalists because they are so diametrically opposed - unless they are engaged explicitly in the activities of the other. However, such a perceived wide disparity between blogging and journalistic writing may be perhaps ignoring some shared traits and values. On closer inspection, some research suggests that the values and norms celebrated by bloggers have much in common with their journalistic colleagues.

Political bloggers are guided by a “civically oriented set of values” (Holton, Coddington, & Gil de Zuñiga, 2013, p. 723), which largely replicate the values found in professional journalism (Hänska-Ahy & Shapour, 2013). While there is no universally accepted code of ethics for bloggers, it

appears that most bloggers attempt to inform readers and exert political influence (de Zuniga et al., 2011). Rather than present verified primary information traditionally found in news content, bloggers attempt to inform via “expression and reinforcement, not interaction and exchange” (Davis, 2005, p. 123). Thus, interpretation is privileged over objectivity (Tremayne, 2007) and opinion trumps balanced facts (Leccese, 2009). However, bloggers “recognize that a shift in power is occurring in journalism” (Jones & Himelboim, 2010, p. 274) and that the open source philosophy of blogging is central to its success as a watchdog over systemic power. Bloggers believe in the democratization of information and a populist approach to storytelling (Goode, 2009) that depends upon communal engagement and incorporation of that community into the text itself (Robinson & DeShano, 2011).

Audiences view news based user generated content as immediate and authentic (Wahl-Jorgensen, Williams, & Wardle, 2010). Citizen journalists have been viewed by audiences to play a similar role in society to professional journalists (Nah & Chung, 2012) even though audiences do appear to have distinct perceptions of both bloggers and journalists (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012; Holton et al., 2013). Bloggers maintain that they are the newest incarnation of grassroots journalism in a corporatized media environment and are performing an essentialist role as citizen journalist (Kline & Burstein, 2005). A blogger’s construction of their own identity in relation to entrenched journalistic doxa is an example of how many in the media generally traverse “their own journalistic values (objectivity, bias, accuracy, fairness, etc.)” (Hirst & Treadwell, 2011, p. 457).

These referential journalistic values have remained despite rather radical changes in the delivery of news. New media has presented many challenges to journalism, one of which is the “rethinking of the news producer-consumer relationship” (Deuze, 2005, p. 451) that bloggers have been quick to embrace. Much of this ‘rethinking’ in mainstream newsrooms has been around how journalism institutions can adapt their reporting to social media influences and web 2.0 engagement (Hirst & Treadwell, 2011), rather than exploring how citizens outside of professionalized newsrooms contribute to journalism itself. Perhaps unsurprisingly, audience perception of user-generated content

is largely dependent upon the particular platform (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007) and personal consumption patterns (Johnson & Kaye, 2009). Individuals who engage with user-generated content tend to believe that such content serves an important role in society. The role of citizen journalism, which is categorized as a type of user-generated content (Holton et al., 2013), is as a watchdog to analyse or report on the news outside of corporate media systems (Thurman & Hermida, 2010).

Bloggers have been found to value truth, authority, freshness, transparency, and community thinking (Robinson & DeShano, 2011) – some of the same values purported to be instrumental to journalistic practice. Yet, active audiences often believe that journalism is embedded with bias (Eveland & Shah, 2003) and is not worthy of public trust (Kohut, 2004) – two common assumptions from mainstream journalists about the blogosphere. Whereas journalists conceive of themselves as watchdogs over government corruption and business largesse (Beam, Weaver, & Brownlee, 2009), audiences have argued that journalism needs to provide a community forum and interpretative solutions to problems (Heider et al., 2005) – the same two qualities that can often be found in the blogosphere. While journalists, at times, appear united in their understanding of journalism norms, there appears to be an important disconnect in perceptions between them and the public (Tsfati, Meyers, & Peri, 2006). For example, audiences have argued that journalism should be “combination of news and surprise, should make use of emotions and story-telling, give the reader guidance, and, particularly in relation to female readers, focus on celebrities who are believed to interest people” (Hujanen, 2008, p. 190). This market-driven definition of journalism would not likely be suggested as normative practice in most journalism training institutions. Rather, it would be much more likely to be used as an epithet by journalists against opinion-driven bloggers. Such a countenance from journalism would be symptomatic of larger “collective narratives of professionalism to situate itself as authoritative” (Carlson, 2007, p. 265), even though those collective narratives are not codified in any formal credentialing or career path. This ‘problematic nature’ of values (Bogaerts, 2011) is

perhaps most evidenced at times of crisis when previously accepted norms are contested. The release of *Dirty Politics* was precisely that moment of crisis.

Methodology

This research examines how the values of journalism are framed in content from both newspapers and blog posts. These frames are viewed as representative of implicit positions of power. Frames are the “outcome of strategic communication decisions” (Jones & Himelboim, 2010, p. 277) that imbue a person, place or thing with power or a lack thereof. A media frame is the manifestation of that positioning. In this case, both journalists and bloggers were given scope to openly speak about the other during and after the release of *Dirty Politics*, as it was a book that thoroughly examined the role of both professions in society. Given that these professions are generally placed on opposing ends of a dichotomous spectrum, their estimations of the other say much about their own profession, but in particular, this moment of time speaks to the popular perceptions of journalism in New Zealand. Examining the narratives that evolved during this contested period works to uncover expressed power of both professions relative to each other and performed boundary maintenance to protect revered professional norms.

Based on traffic, links and posts, the most popular right-wing blog in New Zealand is *Kiwiblog*, which is ranked 1st overall, and the most popular left-wing blog is *The Standard*, which is ranked 3rd overall (Tumeke!, 2014). *The New Zealand Herald*, published out of Auckland, is the only national newspaper in New Zealand and one of only four newspapers that serve the four major population centres of the country. This research examined all media content from the *New Zealand Herald*, *Kiwiblog*, *The Standard*, and *Whale Oil* that were retrieved using the search terms “Dirty Politics,” “journalism,” “journalist,” “blog,” or “blogger” during the 20 days weeks after the release of the book, *Dirty Politics*. This resulted in 115 articles and posts: 20 from *The Standard*, 36 from *Whale Oil*, 11 from *Kiwiblog*, 17 from *The Standard* and 31 from *The New Zealand Herald*. Both

opinions and news articles from *The Herald* were included, given the comparison in this research between *The Herald* and opinion-based blogs. The emphasis on this study was not on examining whether ‘hard’ news stories covered blogs differently than opinion content. Rather, this study remained focused on how a range of voices considered the other at this point of crisis.

Drawing from Bourdieu’s examination of journalism practice as well as countless other scholars exploring journalism as a profession (i.e. Deuze, 2008; Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun, & Jeong, 2007; B. Zelizer, 2004), this research examines how those within the media framed the values of bloggers and journalists at this time of crisis. The professional values of journalism have long centered around public service, independent governance, immediate response time, objective coverage, ethical standards, truthful representations of reality, open engagement with the public, reporting facts rather than interpretation, and being worthy of public trust. As the literature examining blogging also detailed, these values have often been conflated and adopted by bloggers as markers of their own professional values as well. This research examines this tension in an exploration of the following research question: How did bloggers and mainstream news reporters frame the values of the journalistic practice after the release of *Dirty Politics*?

Results

Mainstream News Reporters on The Defensive

It is not yet known, at the time of this writing, whether *Dirty Politics* posed enough of a ‘shock’ to the journalistic field to transform aspects of accepted normative values in the journalistic field. However, if one examines the *Herald* articles in the first 20 days after the release of *Dirty Politics*, it appears that any value transformation will not come easily. Journalists at the mainstream newspaper, *The New Zealand Herald*, perhaps predictably protected their ascribed doxatic values with resistive distinction – both in the tone of opinion articles and in the selection of media frames. Journalists at the centre of this controversy made use of their power as mainstream reporters to

narrate the differences between their perceived journalistic norms and the lack of those norms in other media forms.

The New Zealand Herald mentioned no connection between *Dirty Politics* and their own reporting procedures until the 25th of August – 12 days after the release of the book. In the first twelve days, the central diametric relationship constructed and repeatedly emphasised was between politicians and an “obnoxious’ blogger” (*The New Zealand Herald*, 13 August). This dichotomy was stated plainly on the 14th of August in a *Herald* article titled ‘Dirty Politics: Who are the key players?’, which was presumably intended to explain the potentially complicated nuances of the story. The article lists several bloggers, many governmental officials, one lawyer and a single lobbyist. No mention is made of internal mainstream journalists from *The Herald* that are also implicated in the book. On the next day (15 August), a *Herald* columnist wrote a scathing article that cynically addressed how serious the book’s allegations were for politics in New Zealand – but it is important to note that he did not draw the same parallel for journalism in the country.

Mainstream news journalists celebrated the book as a triumph of investigative journalism. Four days after the book release, *The Herald* quoted a politician who called the book “explosive investigative journalism” (*New Zealand Herald*, 17 August). The widely reported revelations of the book and the lexical choices of *Herald* reporters placed the relationship between bloggers and politicians on the opposing side of elevated journalistic values. The two sides were clearly delineated in content from the *Herald*: “Hager is a highly regarded investigative journalist, who has won a United States prize for journalism,” wrote Moore on the 19th of August. Winning a prize from the United States for his work as an investigative journalist elevates his position in the narrative, particularly when juxtaposed against the conclusion that *Dirty Politics* should “make people question the reliability of non-journalist bloggers.” The problematic arc of Hager’s narrative, as constructed by the *New Zealand Herald*, is that the government was feeding information to bloggers as unethical politically aligned individuals who did not have the training nor values of journalists and were in fact,

paid by other politically aligned corporations to do so – something that journalists would never entertain because of their professional values. It is important to note that there are many other, equally compelling, narratives that could have emerged from the release of *Dirty Politics*, such as the interwoven nature of information exchange across media that is largely dependent upon rapid technological innovations and perhaps political alignments. Another possible narrative could have been the nexus of ethical decision-making behind the publishing of hacked personal information without substantiation, verification, or balance in regards to those sourced. Both of these possible alternative narrative frames were not found in the weeks following *Dirty Politics*. It is important to note that both frames would have also necessitated an introspective examination of how journalistic values are implicated and negotiated in New Zealand – a process that it appears, at least initially, reporters from *The New Zealand Herald*, were not prepared to engage with.

It was not until the 25th of August, 12 days after the first article on *Dirty Politics*, that David Fisher, a reporter at *The Herald* wrote an opinion piece called “My history with Cameron Slater.” He wrote, “looking back, Slater kept journalists like he would have kept hunting dogs – hungry, leashed and fed with morsels.” Fisher acknowledged the allegations put forth by Hager in his book and upon reflection noted, “I had been in the tent. It was a place where stories and story tips came easily – too easily.” Here, Fisher constructs journalism as necessarily hard – anything worth value does not come easy. Due to Fisher’s journalistic training, he came to realize that Slater was denigrating the values of his profession. Fisher writes that Slater attempted to “dissuade me from reporting. When that was reported, he blogged...” Thus, in this moment of reflection the demarcations remain clear and the divisions solidified. Fisher reported and Slater blogged. The two practices were separated by professional values celebrated by the *Herald* journalists – and shared with Hager, the book’s author, but not by those who blog.

The Herald did eventually acknowledge the ethical dilemma of publishing the hacked emails in *Dirty Politics* without any right of reply, but not until fifteen days after the book’s release.

However, in recognizing the dilemma *Herald* described Hager's ethical decision to release the hacked messages as his "obligation as a journalist and a citizen to make public information a hacker took from Slater's computer" (28 August). In this narrative, the *Herald* conflated journalism with citizenship, which construct the work of Hager as noble and therefore the work of politicians and bloggers as something far less. Again, the opportunity to examine the role of values of journalism and how those values are implicated in the context of other social institutions, was ignored.

It was not until the 30th that *The Herald's* Editor-in-Chief wrote about the role of the newspaper as an institution in this controversy. The editor wrote that the stories they had broke were "good journalism and in the public interest." Here, in a relatively brief paragraph, the Editor plainly equates the newspaper's activities directly to a revered value of the profession and then states unequivocally that their journalism was of a "good" professional standard. On that same day, two reporters that were named in a leaked email also responded via the pages of *The Herald*. These two reporters were responding to a particular leaked email from Slater's account, which was hacked by Hager's *Dirty Politics* anonymous source. The email read: "I am maintaining daily communications with Jared Savage at the *Herald* and he is passing information directly to me that the Herald can't run and so are feeding me to run on the blog." One other reporter was named in that leaked email. Both reporters responded with frustration and anger at a perceived lack of understanding by the public about journalistic values, which were represented as sacrosanct. Savage stated, "journalists talk to all sorts of people about all sorts of stories, much of which is nothing more than rumour or innuendo. Our job is to sort the wheat from the chaff and publish what is accurate, fair and true." Savage thus disregards any critique as emblematic of a lack of understanding from those who are not journalists – those who would work to spread "rumour or innuendo." Contrary to those forces, journalism is elevated to the practice of accuracy, fairness and truth. In this case, that dichotomy is quite clearly journalists versus all others. If there was any confusion, Savage's statement is immediately followed by the other reporter, O'Sullivan, who wrote pointedly, "the inference in Cameron Slater's email that

blogger and lawyer Cathy Odgers had any influence over (my) column is risible.” As is directly detailed in this text, the idea that bloggers could have any influence on journalism is simply ludicrous.

The distinction between bloggers and journalists continued in other aspects of reporting from *The Herald*. An in-depth lifestyle piece on Hager ran on the same day as the Editor statement with the subhead, “the journalist behind *Dirty Politics* considers it important to be thought of as a good person” (The New Zealand Herald, 30th August), which again equates journalism with a positive valence not afforded to others in the narrative. Only on 2 September, 20 days after the book’s release, does a *Herald* writer expand the storyline toward a reflection of journalism’s role in the storyline and state that “we, the media, have capitulated.” He laments that journalists – “whether actively kowtowing to executive power’s might or crushed by its well financed forces – are no longer able to see the bigger picture.” Thus, a more thematic narrative eventually does emerge after a long period of argumentation, challenge, and distancing from the *Herald*. The article thoughtfully critiques journalism as a complicated institution of power, but concludes with a bifurcating stab that reads defensively after the weeks of active distancing: “whatever it is that Slater does, it’s not journalism.”

A Blogger Celebrates Being a Journalist

On the day of *Dirty Politics*’ release, Slater immediately aligned his work with that of journalists and distanced himself (and the journalistic profession) from the work of Hager. He states that Hager “has created a free for all environment against all journalists where their emails are fair game” (*Whale Oil*, 14 August). In his narrative, Slater is one of the journalists, necessarily dealing with politicians, and Hager is, in fact, a criminal – a criminal because he did not follow the values and norms of journalism. Clearly aligning his ethics with traditional journalistic values, Slater says, “I do not discuss my sources with anyone.” The next day, he takes this further by quoting Prime Minister Key in an interview where he stated that Hager “didn’t do what a true journalist would do; he didn’t go and check out the facts, he didn’t get the other side of the story” (*Whale Oil*, 15 August).

Hager's work is placed outside of the journalistic norms of verification and balance – two values that Slater supports.

Slater defines the parameters of his work clearly and, rather interestingly, also with derision: “it's called Journalism, and there is a reason journalists end up near the bottom of the ‘most trusted profession’ scale together with? Yes...politicians” (*Whale Oil*, 15 August). He sees himself sharing the professional values of journalism with the recognition that those values are not universally revered or celebrated. Even though, in this recasting, the journalism profession faces disdain, Slater does not include Hager into the untrusted professional field. He sees a central difference between the two: “nothing I have done is illegal. Hager can't say the same” (in reference to Hager using hacked emails for the book). *Whale Oil* asks whether Hager “has maintained ethical standards?” Whether Hager “has brought News of the World spy tactics to New Zealand journalism?” (*Whale Oil*, 16 August). As an “investigative journalist” (*Whale Oil*, 24 August) himself, he is arguing to preserve the journalistic values he presumably holds dear. He views the emails hacked from his personal email account as “journalistically privileged material” (*Whale Oil*, 19 August) and that the book is a “criminal act. This isn't a ‘leak.’ This wasn't an inside ‘whistle blower’. This has been, and continues to be, one of the largest organised attempts to obtain computer information and other intel by a group of people that made a clear decision to break the law for political gain.”

Thus, for Slater, the ethical dilemma is not sorting through the relationship between bloggers and politicians, as Hager and *The New Zealand Herald* have suggested. Rather, it is examining how the actions of a criminal (Hager) will impact upon the sacred values that journalists, which includes Slater, revere. The profession of journalism is fundamentally flawed – but, as Slater readily recognizes, so is he. The ethical dilemma for journalists, according to Slater, is understanding that he is one of them – and that journalism as an institution matters, holding an important place in democracy. He tackles this directly by stating that “*Dirty Politics* isn't journalism. It's political activism, enabled by crime...The problem a lot of journos are having is that by looking at me, they

see part of themselves. Sorry people. You aren't really much better than I am, if at all" (*Whale Oil*, 21 August). In Slater's framing, he is a journalist who is "well connected" and adhering to the values of a complicated, yet fundamentally important, profession, whereas Hager is a "weasel who makes a living off of stolen emails and hacked data" (*Whale Oil*, 14 August).

Political Alignments and Journalistic Practice

Kiwiblog, the right wing blog sampled for this study, and *The Standard*, the left wing blog that was included, divided their estimations of what constituted journalism across political lines. According to both of these blogs, it was primarily because of that political alignment that differences in journalistic practice occurred. The emphasis on journalistic values as a predictor of practice was secondary. One writer from *The Standard* drew a direct point of comparison between that blog and *Whale Oil* and stated plainly that the point of difference in Slater's lack of journalistic integrity was implicitly due to his conservative politics: "(*The Standard*) is not used to smear and attack the way that Cameron Slater's site is used. The discussions get robust but this is because there is often aggressive comments made by right wingers and some of the left commenters respond in kind" (*The Standard*, 30 August). Thus, any non-journalistic values on display arise because right-wingers provoke that level of discourse and not because of any obvious lack of journalistic integrity.

In contrast, an unnamed journalist sourced for a *Kiwiblog* post said, "I expect the 'left' will dismiss this column as just part of the broad campaign to destroy Hager's credibility." (14 August). The dismissal would be due to an obfuscation of facts attributed to political blindness and not a recognition of journalistic values. Whereas *The Standard* maintains that "left blogs like *The Standard*, have never been involved in that kind of extensively orchestrated black ops" (2 September), they come to that conclusion not because of an adherence to standardized norms of behaviour, but because "anyone who spends the time looking at the content of *Standard* posts over time, and comparing them with *Whale Oil*" would know that stories from the left are simply not "picked up by the

mainstream media.” So, again, avoiding relationships that may bias news content occurs not because of adherence to professional norms or institutionalized practice but because the left is simply ignored by mainstream media due to their political affiliation. Political affiliations determine practice.

Kiwiblog sees the same issue differently again from the other side of the political spectrum, but based on political allegiances. Farrar, the founder of *Kiwiblog*, argues that Hager has “selectively only shown the sharing of information between people on the ‘right’ with Cameron Slater, to make it look like a conspiracy” (*Kiwiblog*, 31 August). Thus, according to Farrar, Hager made his selections of content because of his political alliances and not because of any allegiance to professional values.

Introspection of Journalistic Values from the Blogosphere

While the depth of this crisis went largely unnoticed by *The New Zealand Herald*, all of the blogs sampled for this study including *Whale Oil*, considered the ramifications of allegations exposed in *Dirty Politics* to be potentially destructive for journalism in New Zealand and considered these eventualities through their blogs. The charges found in the book were “devastating” and “mind blowing,” according to *The Standard* (31 August). The left-leaning *Standard* recognized that *The Herald* was “deeply compromised” and saw this as an “opportunity to take stock, recognise such tactics for what they are, and reject them. An opportunity to clean up both politics and the media’s coverage of it” (*The Standard*, 31 August). Similarly, the right wing blogger, Farrar, took the moment to reprint a lengthy email from an unnamed “current journalist who has worked in radio and print for over seven years.” That individual stated plainly: “*Dirty Politics* is not journalism...Hager did not seek comment on the accusations. He did not give his targets a chance to defend themselves” (*Kiwiblog*, 21 August). In this post, Farrar and the anonymous journalist examine the institution of journalism and question what constitutes journalistic work and what values should be included into the professional doxa. Farrar challenged Hager’s standing as a journalist based on the norms and routines of journalistic practice: “I would have thought an investigative journalist, would follow up

the e-mails, and ask if any of the stuff talked about actually happened” (Kiwiblog, 14 August). He further challenges Hager by questioning the methodology and routines of Hager in comparison to ‘quality’ journalistic inquiry that actually occurs across “all media.”

Slater also explores the expansion of journalistic values to media outlets outside of conglomerated newsrooms in his reference to his own “media colleagues” (*Whale Oil*, 23 August) who also value “confidences,” “respect” and “professionalism.” He laments the loss of this in journalism by saying that “we’re seeing a lot more door stepping, a lot more gotcha journalism, and an erosion of privacy...this isn’t journalism the way I know it.” He ends by saying that “the media are lowering standards that I’m not happy to breach” (*Whale Oil*, 23 August). Thus, he unites his own work with journalism, but recognizes that it is a fracturing field due to a lack of adherence to fundamental professional values – values held by himself and ignored by Hager as well as *The Herald*. While Slater’s conclusions are certainly contestable, his exploration of the expanses and limitations of journalistic values was not replicated in *The New Zealand Herald*. Rather, this level of journalistic inquiry was principally found only in the blogosphere – particularly in the days immediately following the book’s release.

Conclusion

Slater maintained that the public held the values of journalism in disdain. All of the blogs sampled in this study attempted to align themselves with the profession’s widely accepted values even though the institution of journalism was recognized with disdain. This was in stark contrast with the mainstream news reporters at *The New Zealand Herald* who were focused on elevating the values of journalism and rebuffing any critiques in the days immediately following the book’s release. Those ‘inside’ the accepted normative structure of journalism, otherwise known as mainstream news reporters at conglomerated news outlets, were engaged in boundary maintenance of those professional values and quite selective about who they let ‘in’ and who they kept ‘out.’

In the midst of this controversy, during the 2014 Journalism Education Association of New Zealand conference, leaders from many of the major news outlets in the country (including Radio New Zealand, Fairfax Media Group, *The New Zealand Herald*, and TV3) were asked on a panel if they considered Nicky Hager a journalist. All on the panel responded with a resounding yes. Asked why, the Deputy Director of News and Current Affairs at TV3, Richard Sutherland, stated simply that Hager “uncovered information and delivered it to an audience” (2014). Such a categorization would presumably include Slater as well, but when asked the same question about him, the panel laughed uncomfortably and moved on. This dogmatic defence of journalism practice – with exemplars selected by those within that journalism practice – was again on display by former 3 News Political Editor Duncan Garner, when he wrote “(bloggers) have the political views, and when our stories and interviews don’t fit their biased narrative they lash out and label us. They are biased. I am not. They pick sides. I do not.” (Garner, 2014). Such a statement makes sense for an individual who began his career as a reporter for Television New Zealand. However, at the time he made the statement about bloggers, he was a political current affairs host on television and radio whereby he provides his opinion on a range of topics. Garner can make such a declarative statement, presumably because as a former reporter he won several awards for his journalistic work. However, with Slater having the same history of award-winning journalism, the demarcation between the two becomes increasingly problematic – and vitriolic on both sides of debate.

This study suggested that contrasting self-perceptions and recusatory counter-admonitions appear replete within the field of newsgathering and the mutually constructed shared audiences that engage with those texts. Some fundamental questions that could have been explored by mainstream news journalists were simply not entertained in this sample: Are the motives for publishing content important? If so, how does that implicate the nexus of relationships that presently exist between public relations, journalism, individual media producers (particularly bloggers) and governmental officials? Is autonomy between government and all of the information providers in the contemporary

technology-infused media system important to maintain? What responsibilities do those in the media have to journalistic values, such as substantiation, verification, or balance? Mainstream journalists were struggling to ensure that bloggers had no place in their professional doxa while readily accepting that one particular individual had journalistic status, even though he did not necessarily display fundamental components of that same professional doxa. This is not to say that Slater and other bloggers like him should be accepted as journalists - far from it. This study simply highlights the reflexive protectionism displayed by journalists and questions whether this protectionism furthered the cultural status or professional expectations of journalism in New Zealand - particularly when viewed concurrently alongside bloggers who were readily exploring the extent of journalism doxa (albeit through a politicized lens) across media. In an industry that has been so decimated by budget cuts, corporatization, and a general devaluation of content, this was a collective national moment that could have thoughtfully explored the very values that journalism portends to espouse. If journalism is measured, in part, by the values on display in written text, then bloggers emerged from this controversy as journalists, admittedly quite complicated and politically influenced, but journalists nonetheless.

An obvious limitation to this work is the small sample size, both in number and in the breadth of outlets sourced. Future work could expand upon this sample and perhaps conduct longitudinal quantitative methodological research examining frames across a broader range of New Zealand media. Further research could also explore similar moments of crisis in other international contexts to see how journalists and bloggers responded. It may be that other countries respond differently, perhaps according to their own unique professional values informed by cultural norms.

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