Computer aids instruction in photojournalism ethics

By PAUL LESTER

I don't think it is possible to learn from this lesson because of the lack of feedback. I also don't think it is possible to answer the questions without knowing the situation completely as different situations warrant different behavior as a photographer.

–Paper Version Comment

I feel this lesson was good because it made you stop and really think. Situations are sticky. Photojournalists have a tough job in deciding to risk your own life for the sake of a picture. This is a very good program for students.

—Computer Version Comment

Ethical issues are hot topics in today's media conscious society.[1] Questions currently debated include: Is insider trading a result of greedy individuals, or does it foretell a problem with the entire system of business? Are the temptations from profit motives too great for government employees and their defense contractors to manage independently? Should doctors use the organs from aborted fetuses for medical purposes? Do the media concentrate too much on scandals and miss the issues that may be ultimately more important? Regardless of the field of study, without a firm knowledge of the ethical guidelines that shape a person's values, principles, and loyalties, decisions will always be called into question by others.

Just as discussions of professional ethics in various fields have received an abundance of media treatment, photojournalism has also received recent widespread attention in magazines and books and from experts in the field. *Life* magazine published an anniversary issue that included a discussion on photojournalism titled, "150 Years of Photog-raphy Pictures that Made a Difference." *American Photographer* recently illustrated its magazine with a cover and more than 30 pages on the subject of photojournalism. Marianne Fulton, associate curator of photographic collections at the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House in Rochester, N.Y., was the author of an important book on photojournalism, *Eyes of Time: Photojournalism in America.*[2] Jim Dooley, photo editor/chief for *Newsday*, recently remarked that "newspaper photojournalism is in its heyday. It's going through a tremendous renewal." Professor of photojournalism at the University of Missouri, Bill Kuykendall, also feels that there is now a photojournalism renaissance. "I think there has been a rebirth of interest in candid ... photojournalism," says Kuykendall.[3]

One of the jobs of a photojournalism instructor is to come up with the right tools and methods to teach photojournalism most effectively. With lectures, slide shows, and demonstrations, students have been taught to use their cameras, lenses, flashes, and darkroom equipment to produce images that will be accepted by newspaper and magazine editors. However, photojournalism instruction should concern itself not only with technical and aesthetic concerns, but also with ethical principles.

Photojournalism instructors can use traditional teaching methods (usually a lecture with slides) to analyze a controversial news image or a photographer's conduct. But short of an internship where a student gets first-hand experience, traditional classroom techniques do not adequately give an undergraduate student an understanding of the decisions a working photojournalist makes during an assignment.

In 1981, Craig Hartley asked professional

Lester is an assistant professor of communication, University of Central Florida, Orlando.

newspaper photographers and the general public their reaction to ethical situations a photojournalist might experience.[4] Hartley's survey is a good method for introducing students to ethical situations. However, the situations often do not supply enough information for students to give decisive evaluations. Figure 1 shows the ten situations obtained from Hartley's study.

With the computer, the situations can be more than mere one-line descriptions. Figure 2 shows the computer version of the first ethical situation. A computer program with a complex interactive structure gives students insights into ethics not readily obtained by traditional teaching methods. Depending on each answer, the student follows a unique path through the computer program. The computer records every choice and comment made by the student. After all the students have seen the lesson, a lecture in class with slides and videotapes takes place. Discussion is more insightful than without the computer program because the students have a much clearer idea of the choices a photojournalist sometimes has to make.

The value of computer instruction for classroom use has been widely publicized. In large lecture classes it is sometimes impossible to determine an individual student's response to a particular ethical situation.

"Computers," writes Alfred Bork, "can create an interactive learning environment and personalize the learning situation for each student."[5] Likewise, George Kontos notes that "the computer keeps students actively involved and lets them progess at their own pace while providing infinite patience and attention to each student."[6]

A survey was written to test the effectiveness of a paper version against a computer version of 10 ethical situations.

Method

Two groups of beginning photojournalism students participated in the survey. One group of 100 students completed the Hartley survey detailed in Figure 1. They were asked to rate the photographers' actions on a 10-point Likert-type scale, where one was extremely unethical and 10 was extremely ethical. Another group of 100 students completed the computer version. After each situation, the student was asked to rate his or her action on the same 10-point scale as the paper version group.

Student ratings of the photographers' actions in the paper version and their own actions in the computer version should not be compared. Naturally, the ethical ratings for the computer version group will be higher than the paper version group since students

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FIGURE 1
Paper Version of Ethical Situations

Situation 1 - Photographer stays at the scene of a demonstration despite being warned by police that his or her presence might encourage violence.

Situation 2 - Photographer shoots pictures of an obnoxious actor making him look bad.

Situation 3 - Photographer shoots ad for a car and makes it look better than it actually is by using a wide-angle lens from a low camera position.

Situation 4 - Photographer shoots funeral of a police officer at a public cemetery despite being asked to leave.

Situation 5 - Photographer shoots nude sunbathers in a public park from a distance and turns in the prints to the newspaper.

Situation 6 - Photographer parks illegally but safely at the scene of a fire.

Situation 7 - Photographer shoots a female volleyball player whose shorts were accidentally pulled down during a game and sends the image over the wire.

Situation 8 - Photographer shoots a gruesome accident of a famous actress and sends the image over the national wires.

Situation 9 - Photographer trespasses at the scene of a construction accident to get pictures.

Situation 10 - Photographer creates the appearance of bumper-to-bumper traffic with a telephoto lens for an illustration of holiday traffic.

FIGURE 2
Computer Version of the First Ethical Situation

You are a photographer for a medium-sized daily newspaper. You arrive at the scene of an anti-CIA demonstration in front of the post office. It is about 9 p.m. There are about 50 demonstrators and 10 members of the police. Someone is making a speech while some demonstrators carry signs. Generally the mood seems quiet and peaceful. A policeman notices your cameras, asks for identification, and then suggests that you leave because he feels that your presence might encourage violence. Do you stay or do you go?

If you go:
Although the demonstrators don't look violent, you return to your car and head back to the newspaper.

If you stay:
The policeman respects your decision to stay and moves on to other matters. After the speech, you notice several of the demonstrators are getting more vocal. The only light source is from a street lamp. Without a flash, the light reading is F/2 at 1/30 of a second at ASA 1600. Do you use a flash or will you shoot under the available light?

If you use a flash:
You start to take pictures using your flash. As you photograph, you notice that some of the demonstrators seem to be reacting to the flash and become much more vocal and animated. The group that you are photographing suddenly starts to push the police back.

If you use available light:
You start to take pictures under the available light. As you photograph, you see that one of the television camera operators has turned on an incandescent light in order to make video pictures. You move along side the videographer, and notice that some of the demonstrators seem to react to the bright light. The demonstrators become much more vocal and animated. The group that you are photographing suddenly starts to push the police back.

One of the demonstrators looks at you and says, "Hey, photographer. Take a picture of this." He picks up a rock and poses as if he's about to throw it in the direction of the police. Do you take his picture?

If you take or do not take his picture:
The demonstrator throws the rock at the police. Rocks and bottles fly through the air. More police arrive. You see some of the police use their clubs on particularly violent demonstrators. Your eyes, nose, and throat start to become irritated by the tear gas in the air. You are right in the middle of the worst trouble. A policeman next to you is hit in the head by a bottle. Blood drips down the side of his face. You notice that he is the policeman that suggested you leave in the first place. Do you photograph him or do you help him?

If you photograph him:
Most of the worst violence is over. The police have arrested or dispersed most of the demonstrators. Ambulance attendants help the injured demonstrators and police. You make one final picture of a demonstrator being carried to a police van. You rush back to the newspaper, process the film, and turn in six photographs to the night photography editor.

If you help him:
You put your cameras in your shoulder bag and awkwardly help the policeman to his feet. He is a bit disoriented and blood covers his face. You put one of his arms around your neck and help him to an ambulance that is parked about 25 feet away. As you approach the ambulance, two medical assistants take him from you and put him inside. Most of the worst violence is over. The police have arrested or dispersed most of the demonstrators. Ambulance attendants help the injured demonstrators and police. You make one final picture of a demonstrator being carried to a police van. You rush back to the newspaper, process the film, and turn in six photographs to the night photography editor.

are asked to rate themselves. The computer version group, however, are able to see how their answers compare with professional photojournalists, the general public, and other undergraduate students. The computer version students also get written evaluations of their ethical judgments based on their responses. Such feedback is not possible with an ethical survey on paper.

For both groups, students were asked to evaluate the lesson with 10 statements. The students rated the statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale where one was strongly disagree and five was strongly agree. All

TABLE 1
Means of Lesson Evaluations
of Paper and Computer Versions

	Paper	*Computer*	*p value*
1. I felt in control of this lesson.	3.46	4.09	<.001
2. The lesson moved along quickly.	4.12	4.09	.608
3. The lesson was informative.	3.21	4.38	<.001
4. I was not annoyed by this lesson.	3.57	4.03	<.05
5. I felt like an active participant during the lesson.	3.53	4.45	<.001
6. I like the graphic look of the lesson.	2.75	3.78	<.001
7. The lesson was interesting overall.	3.45	4.44	<.001
8. I received adequate feedback to my responses.	2.76	4.11	<.001
9. The lesson made me think of photojournalism in new ways.	3.46	4.19	<.001
10. I learned a lot from this lesson.	2.90	3.94	<.001
	(n=100)	(n=100)	

A 5-point Likert-type scale was employed
where one was strongly disagree and five was strongly agree.

FIGURE 3
Mean Scores for Paper vs.
Computer Ethics Lessons

— Paper (n=100)   ▬ Computer (n=100)
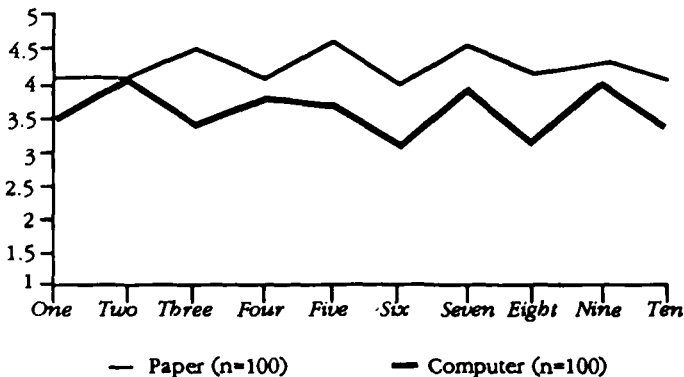
students were also asked to write any general comments they had.

Results

Table 1 shows the difference in means for the lesson evaluation statements between the two groups of beginning photojournalism students. Figure 3 graphically shows the differences between the paper and computer versions.

Lesson evaluations are significantly higher for all the variables except for the "moved along quickly" statement. The computer program on the average takes about twice as long to complete as the paper version (15 minutes vs. 32 minutes). One student took as few as 10 minutes, while another took as many as 63 minutes to finish the computer lesson. Despite the difference in the length of time, students praised the computer program for its great amount of individual control, the feedback written for each student's response, and the knowledge gained from the computer version.

Figure 4 shows some of the general comments made by the paper and computer version students at the end of the lesson. The lack of feedback in the paper version and the personal insights obtained through the computer version are the two major themes running through the comments.

Quantitative and qualitative research supports the notion that in-depth situations presented through computer software can give students more information on photojournalism ethics than two-sentence scenarios on paper.

Exposing students to brief situations on paper is a good way to initiate discussion on the issue of photojournalism ethics, but it can create more questions than it answers, especially among inexperienced students. When

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FIGURE 4
Comments From Students
on Paper and Computer Versions

Paper version general comments
Wording in your surveys tends to be confusing and misleading. Point of view of photographer is essential.
Zero feedback on my responses. Lack of information concerning questions.
Who is to decide what is ethical?
I'm not sure if there was enough information about the questions.
Vague!
The questions were very unclear. The situations presented could be ethical or unethical depending on other characteristics not given.
Some situations do not really give enough information to make a good ethical judgment.
I didn't think the situations were sufficiently explained.

Computer version general comments
I enjoyed doing this project very much.
The lesson gave me good insight about myself. I think I learned an important lesson about the importance of photojournalism.
This was a really neat assignment. It made me think about others' feelings.
I think ethics is a very touchy subject and the fact that your ethics may be different from your editor's makes it hard to make the right choice.
This lesson made me more aware of what a photojournalist would really experience.
It was interesting that real life photojournalists do not seem to have absolute feelings when it comes to ethics. All of the evaluations seemed to be in the middle ranges. Do they break their own rules is the question.
The part that asked technical questions about lenses and flash gave me trouble. It was very thought provoking!
I enjoyed this program. The information is useful and the questions are challenging. It made me think of what I would do in other situations as well.

administrators bring their policies into line with other programs.

The results also demonstrate, for good or ill, that despite the efforts of professional organizations, administrators tend to prefer traditional academic research and publication when it comes to evaluating their faculty members for promotion and tenure.

It must be stated, however, that the specific question of tenure for "professional" faculty was not specifically explored in this study. It may well be that if this topic was specifically examined, more support would have been found for "continuing professional achievements in journalism." There seems little doubt that this will remain an area of controversy for some time, and it will be interesting to determine which and what kind of journalism and mass communication programs give specific recognition to "professional" as opposed to "academic" activity.

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combined with lectures and visual materials, interactive computer programs can give students a much better understanding of the problems faced by photojournalists than lectures with visuals alone. Through the use of the computer, an instructor more clearly learns how each student handles a specific situation. The instructor should make it clear, however, that the computerized situations will not prepare a student for an actual situation. The lesson is intended as a guide to the many choices a working photojournalist is sometimes forced to make.

The creative use of interactive computer software by journalism professors should be explored. Interactive programs could also be designed for news reporting, advertising, and public relations ethics.[7]

[1]See Todd Barrett, "Business Ethics for Sale," *Newsweek,* May 9, 1988, p. 56, Cal Thomas. (1988). *The Death of Ethics in America,* Waco, TX: Word Books, "Pentagon probing consultant fees," *The Orlando Sentinel,* November 4, 1988, p. A11, and "What Ever Happened to Ethics," *Time,* May 25, 1987.

[2]See "150 Years of Photography Pictures that Made a Difference," *Life,* (Fall, 1988), *American Photographer,* (October, 1988), and Marianne Fulton, (1988), *Eyes of Time: Photojournalism in America,* New York: New York Graphic Society.

[3]Mark Fitzgerald, (November 5, 1988), "Pretty as a Picture," *Editor & Publisher,* p. 35.

[4]Craig H. Hartley, "Ethical Newsgathering Values of the Public and Press Photographers," *Journalism Quarterly* 60 (Summer 1983), pp. 301-304.

[5]Alfred Bork, "Computers in Continuing Education," *Directions for Continuing Education,* (1980), pp. 79-84.

[6]George Kontos, "Instructional Computing: In Search of Better Methods for the Production of CAI Lessons," *Journal of Educational Technology Systems,* 13 (1984-1985), pp. 3-14.

[7]If you would like a copy of the photojournalism program, send the author an IBM-compatible floppy disk.