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Thesis 15 hp – Journalism

# A watchdog on the loose

*A qualitative study of the journalistic profession in the UK after the phone hacking scandal*



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*Semester:* HT14  
*Subject:* Journalism  
*Level:* Bachelor

# Abstract

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Title: A watchdog on the loose

Location: Linnaeus University

Language: English

Number of pages: 40 (45)

The purpose of this study was to find out how journalists working at newspapers in the UK are experiencing the ongoing, forceful change of the press situation in their country. After the phone hacking scandal was revealed in the year 2011 which led to the shutdown of the Press Complaints Commission, the PCC, it's been unstable work conditions in the newspaper industry. The method of this study was qualitative interviews with journalists living and working in London and we analysed the results with parts of grounded theory. We used these four theories: freedom of press, consequence neutrality, journalists and their sources, and watchdogs - fourth estate. The main issue of this research was: How do British journalists see their profession right now? The overall picture that the journalists in the study gave us was that the rules and the regulating system are uncertain to them but does not affect them in their everyday working life that much. For many journalists the focus lies on winning back the trust from the public and getting sources to work with them again, especially the police.

## Key words

Press Ethics, Phone Hacking Scandal, The Leveson Inquiry, The Press Complaints Commission, IPSO, The UK, Watchdog, Consequence Neutrality, Editors Code of Conduct

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# 1 Introduction

After the revealing of several scandals in the newspaper industries, the situation of the press in the UK is an unstable view. The incidents of phone hacking and other questionable journalistic methods have raised an old issue. During the last couple of centuries there have been discussions about how the press should be regulated in the UK.

The question is, how do the incidents in the twenty-first century effect the journalistic field today? In this research, we want to hear the journalists own point of view in the chaotic situation and let them give their point of view of what is happening with their profession.

Before we try to answer those questions and look closer into todays' issues in the press, we need to look back at the history. The following headlines are included in this research for the purpose of understanding the incidents leading up to the phone hacking scandal and the shutdown of the former regulator, The Press Complaints Commission, or as we frequently called it in this study, the PCC.

## 1.1 Background

### 1.1.1 The phone hacking scandal

In July 2011 Andy Coulson got arrested and the newspaper that he was editor in chief of, News of the World, published their last edition. The cause of the arrest and the shutdown was a series of illegal phone hacking incidents that the newspaper had preformed to get information during a significant part of the twenty-first century. Celebrities, politicians, relatives of victims in bombings and a murdered teenager were some of the people who got their phones hacked. When the questionable journalistic methods of News of the world were revealed, all political parties in the UK agreed that it was time for a new kind of regulation of the press. (Tomlinson, 2014)

Their conclusion was that the old press regulation system, the Press Complaints Commission, the PCC, did not work satisfactory anymore. Therefore, it was decided that the PCC should shut down, which it did in September 2014. To replace the old regulator, several proposals, from both the government and the press industry itself,

have occurred. Although, none of them has yet gained enough respect or followers to be seen as the official solution (Tomlinson, 2014) (Sveriges Radio, *Andy Coulson döms till 18 månaders fängelse*) (Sveriges Radio, *Tidigare chefredaktör döms för inblandning i avlyssning*)

### **1.1.2 Press regulation history**

In 1947 the first of three Royal Commissions on the Press was formed. The mission was to address the growing public's worry at the increasingly control and unethical environment that had poisoned the press. In the report the press was blamed for incorrect reporting and political favoritism. This led to the creation of an independent company funded by newspaper publishers, in 1953, called the General Council of the Press. The company did not have any legal power but was created to improve the public opinion for the press and avoid constitutional supervision. (Thomas, Finneman, 2013)

The General Council of the Press stayed in regulation till 1962 when a second Royal Commission came to place that suggested that the membership to the commission should be increased to nonprofessionals. This led to the forming of a Press Council where twenty percent was controlled by nonprofessionals. In 1974 the third Royal Commission was created when the public once again was worried about the unethical environment of the press. To regulate the situation the commission advocated a written Code of Practice. But the Press Council rejected this in the meaning that it was an intrusion to press freedom. In return the National Union of Journalists pulled out of its membership on the council, in 1980, and the public confidence support in the Press Council dropped dramatically. (Thomas, Finneman, 2013)

### **1.1.3 The PCC**

Under the Thatcher government in 1989 a committee chaired by David Calcutt QC was set up to inspect press ethics and the integrity of the Press Council. This eventually led to the parting of the Press Council and instead, in 1991, the Press Complaints Commission, PCC, was created and started operating. The PCC had sixteen members in 1991 even though only twelve was recommended. Nine of the sixteen members were editors or managers. Before shutting down the majority of members of the PCC was non-journalists. The PCC was specifically constructed to settle complaints on press malpractice but had no legal powers. It was a self-regulatory representing a new Code

of Conduct, were newspapers and magazines contributed to the costs. The purpose of the PCC was to be dependable, nonpartisan and objective. It was created to deal with complaints, offer a 24-hour available complaints telephone line and influence the fact that an apology appeared in the publishing when needed. (O'Malley, Soley, 2000: 88-89)

The PCC system has been criticized for years, ever since it was first set to operate. The majority of complaints has been that the PCC did not do its job correctly or with the needed force that had to be put in to the process. A lot of newspapers didn't take the PCC serious and did therefore not apply to the rules that were created to keep the press ethics climate truthful and objective. During the revelation of the phone hacking that the newspaper News of the world had been involved in, the PCC received massive criticism and it became clear that the UK was in need of a new press-regulating system. On the 8 of September the year 2014 the PCC was forced to shut down due to failure to do its purpose and from the remains a new self-regulated body was created - the Independent Press Standards Organisation (Independent Press Standards Organisation, *Welcome to the website of the Independent Press Standards Organisation.*)

#### **1.1.4 The Leveson Inquiry**

In July 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron formed a group with the mission to study the culture, practices and ethics of the UK press. The group, lead by Lord Justice Byron Leveson, published the first part of the report called The Leveson Inquiry in November 2012. It contained proposals for a new regulation of the press which was described as a self regulatory body who should be audited by an independent board. The board should work as a "watchdog" controlling that the regulation body does its job properly. The members of the board should be chosen in an open selection, without influences from either the government or the press industry. Unlike at the PCC, no journalistic editors or former editors can be a part of the board. The new regulator gets the assignment to draw new ethical guidelines as a standard code for newspapers to follow as well. In the process of forming these rules no one with a journalistic profession have a deciding power. In the Leveson Inquiry, there is also said that the new regulation should be able to fine the newspapers who publish offending material, a power that PCC never had. The rules for the regulation body and the auditor of it should be statutory to gain respect from journalists and fulfill its purpose effectively. Which implies the government and

parliament being brought into the formal regulation of the press for the first time in the modern period (Giroux, Trudel, 2014:248, 298) (BBC, *Q&A: Press regulation*) (BBC, *Press regulation: The 10 major questions*)

The Filkin report, by Elisabeth Filkin, became a part of The Leveson Inquiry, and circulates around the subject that police contact with media should be controlled with accurate transparent recording. After the phone hacking scandal Filkin meant that the police's relationship with the media was partial and that this caused damaging problems to the public's confidence in them both. Her report suggests that police officers will be urged to keep a note of any conversation they have with journalists. (BBC, *Filkin report: Police warned over press links*)

### **1.1.5 IPSO**

As a backlash to the Leveson Inquiry, a lot of the big newspaper concern chose to create their own independent regulation-system - IPSO. It is currently backed some of the main newspapers, but not all of them. Like the PCC, IPSO will work to maintain a freedom of the press, handle complaints, protect individual rights and deal with harassments from journalists. IPSO follows the Editors' Code of Practice and is working under a chairman, a board of eleven members and a complaints committee with twelve members. The majority of the members have no connection with the newspaper industry. (Independent Press Standards Organisation, *Welcome to the website of the Independent Press Standards Organisation.*) The main difference between the PCC and IPSO is that the later have the power to levy fines up to one million pounds when persisting wrongdoing of the press has occurred. (Media Ethics, *New Regulatory body for UK media IPSO launches*).

With this summary of the history and explanations of the press regulating institutions leading up to today's problem we are now facing the issue of today's British Press. The UK are standing without an official press regulator and the journalists on the field are facing new conditions to adjust to, which the rest of the research from now on will be focused on.

## 1.2 Key terms

The following key terms are used in this research and are essential for understanding the context of some issues and questions.

### **Fleet street**

Is the street where the London press and the first modern newspaper, The Daily Courant, was created in 1702. Today the street is the home of some of London's tabloid newspapers. (Telegraph, *Fleet Street: the surprising origins of Britain's newspaper industry*)

### **Code of conduct and the Editors code of practice**

All members of the press have a duty to maintain the highest professional standards. The Code which includes public interest and exceptions has ethical standards, protecting both the rights of the individual and the public's right to know. It is the cornerstone of the system of self-regulation to which the industry has made a binding commitment. Editors and publishers have a responsibility to apply the Code to both to editorial material in both online and printed versions. (Editors Code of Practice Committee, *Editors' Code of Practice, September 2014*)

### **Broadsheet**

A broadsheet is a newspaper which is regarded as less sensational and more serious than a tabloid. The Guardian is a broadsheet newspaper. (Oxford Dictionaries, *Broadsheet*)

### **Tabloid**

A tabloid is a newspaper of a certain style that is known for having sensational stories and gossip. For example, The Daily Mirror is classed as a tabloid newspaper. (Oxford Dictionaries, *Tabloid*)

### **Watchdog**

A person or organization who serves as a guardian against illegal practices, unacceptable standards or inefficiency. In our research we define the term watchdog as journalists working in the press industry or a third body committee that watches over the media industry to make sure they don't do anything illegal or break any ethical rules. (The Free Dictionaries, *Watchdog*)

## 1.3 Aspects of society

Andy Coulson was sentenced to prison for 18 months after the trial in June 2014 (Sveriges Radio, *Andy Coulson döms till 18 månaders fängelse*). But the watchdog in the UK is still on the loose. The big changes in the UK press are directly connected to democracy. The press have for a long time been seen as the watchdog and the fourth estate in society, as a power to watch over the government and other official institutions to reveal any form of abuse of their powers that could harm the citizens. What happens to the watchdog role after a scandal? If the conditions for the press changes, how will journalists uphold their roles as watchdogs? And what consequences for democracy can that have?

It is an important issue for journalism as well, to examine how a scandal like this could affect the work environment for journalists and how the journalistic profession changes while the press industry finds itself in this kind of situation. It is relevant to document and try to understand how the journalists are experiencing the uncertain and changing times.

## 2 Theory and earlier research

### 2.1 Theory

The following media theories are used in this research.

#### 2.1.1 Freedom of press

Barendt, professor in media law, discuss the differences and the relations between freedom of speech and freedom of speech in the media. The theory of freedom of speech is often connected to the freedom of individuals. (Barendt, 2005:417). This means, bringing media into the equation makes it a complex issue. The target group that media reaches is bigger than most individuals will reach on their own. Media does as well take on the role as “watchdogs”, being the eyes and ears of the general public. There are three perspectives on the theory of the certain branch of freedom of speech; freedom of press. The first and traditional perspective equals the freedom of speech with the freedom of press. Press freedom is just speech freedom for owners, editors and journalists in the newspaper industry. That means, that the press does not earn any special treatment if an editorial or publish issue is brought to court.

The second perspective give press freedom extra privileges apart from the freedom of speech. Press freedom exists to protect mass media institutions and gives them special treatment for the purpose of fulfilling their roles as watchdogs and making it easier for them to fulfill their purpose. But, for example, sometimes newspapers which have political lines let that dictates the contents. That is an act that contradicts the original thought of freedom of speech, which complicates this perspective. (Barendt, 2005:421) The third and last perspective picks up where the second ends, being an compromise between the first and the second perspective. As Lichtenberg says "press freedom should be protected to the degree to which it promotes certain values at the core of our interest in freedom of expression generally" (quoted in Barendt, 2005:422) this perspective does not exclude, for example, individual writers or artist, to take part of the special rights of press freedom.

Barendt also discusses the fact that free speech and privacy sometimes conflict with each other since there is a complicated relationship between them. In 2000 The Human Rights Act started working in the UK in which the respect for private life as well as freedom of expression was supposed to be guaranteed by articles eight and ten in the European Convention on Human Rights , ECHR. Barendt says that a common argument in the debate between free speech and privacy is the fact that it might be hard to control publishing of personal information since privacy can be considered a fleeting concept. And according to freedom of press there is the fact that the public also has the right to know somewhat intimate details about politicians, celebrities and public officials if it lies in the public interest. Therefore the line between what is free speech and privacy is blurred and it is basically up to the journalist to decide weather the story is worth publishing or not. (Barendt, 2006:11-13)

There are four known theories of the press, these are The Authorian, The Libertarian, The Social Responsibility and The Soviet Communist Concept. In The Libertarian theory it is of great importance that the press is free from governmental influence and control and this is also something that characterizes The Hutchins Commission, that was connected with The Libertarian theory early on and received wide publicity. (Siebert, Peterson, Schramm, 1984:3-5) The Hutchins Commission was created by a group of scholars in 1947 and the point was to analyze if the freedom of the press was

in danger and if there should be a restraint on how much the state should have the right to intervene in the media system. Since the freedom of the press actually was in danger, the Commission created five certain requirements to be established in the press so that the society had the knowledge on how to remain free.

The five requirements for the press was:

- A truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning. (The press should not lie.)
- A forum for the exchange of comment and criticism (The press should publishing ideas that may contradict their own and through the media contrasting viewpoints can come to mutual understanding.)
- A means of representing all the constituent groups of society (a respect and understanding for each other can be built up if different groups are exposed to one another.)
- A method of presenting and clarifying the goals and values of the society (stating and clarifying ideals toward which the community should strive.)
- A way of reaching every member of the society with the information that the press supplies (There is a need for wide distribution of news and opinion even though everyone may not actually use all the material they receive.)

(The Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947:25-26)

The Social Responsibility theory has also been linked to Hutchins Commission, since it somewhat emerged from the ideologies presented in Hutchins Commission. However it should not be thought of as an theoretical construction produced by the scholars that made up the Hutchins Commission. (Siebert, Peterson, Schramm, 1984:3-5)

We have used this theory to construct questions so we could analyze the answers from journalists with the different inputs from this theory. The different perspectives of freedom of press is important to this research because the issues that the theory is dealing with lays the ground for the journalist force to practice their work and gave us important information to compare the journalists answers to. The theory helped us also to see the different aspects of society that the study could bring new information to.

### 2.1.2 Consequence neutrality

The theory of consequence neutrality is based on the idea that the truth is more important than consideration. In shortness, the ground of the theory means that to imply consequence neutrality in everyday work, you have to publish without any regard for the consequences. The truth is what counts since it is considered more democratic and important to inform the public and that the point of journalism is to serve the democratic and free society. A journalist that lies or deliberately distorts information does not conduct the definition of journalism. According to the German philosopher Kant, an argument to always tell the truth is the fact that we don't know the consequences of our actions and that we for that reason always should keep in mind to act according to duty. (quoted in Wigorts Yngvesson 2006:32-33).

The theory of consequence neutrality has been summarized by Wigorts Yngvesson in three points:

1. Publish what is true and relevant regardless of the consequences.
2. Journalists should stay as neutral as possible to what gets published.
3. Only take responsible for the predicted consequences of publications.

The expression "publish and be damned" is often associated with consequence neutrality in the sense that what gets published doesn't always consider the individual. But that doesn't mean that journalists are free to publish everything, it still has to be relevant and media should avoid spreading rumors and have a bias publishing. According to Swedish journalist Erik Fichtelius, a publisher in charge cannot, within the frames of the law, publish anything. There are situations where consequence neutrality should be disobeyed and these include taking consideration to relatives to victims of suicide and accidents, among others. (Wigorts Yngvesson 2006: 38).

Schöier (quoted in Von Krogh, 2009:70) gives further aspects of the theory. According to him, if a story is true and relevant for the public, it should be published. That is the basis of journalism. The only thing that can alter that basis of publishing is if the story involves a person which makes it to an ethical question. But Schöier means that it is not the actual publishing that needs motivating but the lack of one. Von Krogh, on the other hand, talks about the importance of being aware of the consequences before publishing. Even though there is ethical rules concerning publishing Von Krogh means that the final

decision whether you should publish or not lies with the journalist that wrote the story, it is only this person that knows the full content of what consequences the published story might bring. It is also of importance in this theory to depict what is really common interest when it comes to news. Von Krogh's definition of common interest is information that citizens have use for in their everyday life, to make decisions. He does not include stories about other peoples privacy in that definition, "Common interests does not mean a common curiosity in others private life". (Von Krogh 2009: 71-73).

We used this theory in our research as a tool to understand how aware the journalists are about the possible consequences anything they publish can give. The theory of consequence neutrality is closely connected to the journalistic profession and making ethical, publishing decisions is a part of the journalists everyday life. We used this theory to create questions to our questionnaire and to analyze the journalists answers. In the analysis we will approach the results with the question: do the British journalists apply consequence neutrality when they interact with their sources or do they reflect about the consequences before they write a story?

### **2.1.3 Journalists and their sources**

As the sources are providers of raw material to create the news, reporters become dependent of them, especially to experts and officials, to be able to proceed their work. (Herman, Chomsky, 1995, quoted in Berkowitz, 2009:103). The relationship between the reporter and the source is therefore essential in the journalistic profession. An important aspect to count into that relationship is that the journalist and the source probably got different agendas in the exchange of information. The journalist want to write a story and the source want to be portrayed in the best way possible. (Griffin, Dunwoody, 1995, Herman, Chomsky, 1988, Reich, 2006, quoted in Berkowitz, 2009:103). In the theory of how journalists and their sources interact, a branch of the core tenets of journalism's profession, there are two different positions journalists can use to approach their sources. In the adversarial position the journalists act strictly like like watchdogs, seeing that role like the central element to watch over the government and big business (Kaniss, 1999, quoted in Berkowitz, 2009:104). Then there is also the symbiotic one, where both reporters and their sources give up something to gain something in return, seeing the relationship fairly as an ongoing negotiation, without demanding too big a sacrifices from one another or involving bribery. (Berkowitz,

2009:111). The problems in this theory is that the one position does not exclude the other one. In reality, it is rather so that the two positions is used equally frequently. Other circumstances like how the journalist and the source meet and how the press system is constructed where the journalist work are are also factors that inflate the journalists' approach.

How a journalist interact with a source and use the information is an ethical issue and is a big part of the journalistic working process. Therefore, we found it important to examine in this research how the journalists are acting with their sources and if that interaction has changed since the scandal. We used this theory to create questions that we put in our questionnaire and to analyze the journalists' answers after the interviews. In combination with the theory of consequence neutrality, which we used to examine how the journalists handle the information they get, we used this theory to examine how the journalists interact with the ones giving them the information.

#### **2.1.4 Watchdogs - Fourth estate**

A theoretical outgrowth of Libertarianism is the theory of the press as a fourth estate. This comes in different versions, in America the fourth estate serves as the fourth branch and comes after the executive, the legislative and judicial branch. In the UK the fourth estate got it's role in the 18th century after lords, the church and commons. In all cases the fourth estate theory is based on the fact that the press's role in society is to serve as a spokesperson for the people and that journalists should take on the role as watchdogs. They should, in other words, keep an eye on governmental and political institutions, warn the public of corrupt leaders and give them information they need to protect themselves. (Weiss, 2009:574-575)

A reporter can have four main dimensions of professional interpretation. (Berkowitz, TerKeurst, 1999. Zleizer, 1993, quoted in Berkowitz, 2009:106) The first one suggests that the reporter is guided by their professional ideology meaning they have thoughts about fairness, objectivity, independence and also take on a role as a watchdog in their everyday professional life. The second role is hermeneutic and the policy that journalists follow is the one that they have learned through everyday life on the job. It has been discussed that this interpretive role is conflicting with the first since it might lead to favoritism of certain sources and organisations and reporting more aggressive on

others. (Berkowitz, 2009:106-107) The third and fourth role comes from author Zelizer's concept of 'double time'. In this role journalists acknowledge both present-day geographical meanings for circumstances and issues and a more extensive historical reference point so that they can do a consistent comparisons between what has happened in the past and what is going to happen in the future. (Berkowitz, 2009:106-107)

This theory is useful to us since it will help us to analyze if there is common for British journalists to take on the role as a watchdog and if it is an role that comes naturally in their everyday work life. In our research we want to know how the role as a watchdog effects the job for journalists and if the role sometimes affects of difficult ethical decisions. We choose not to ask the journalists directly about the watchdog role or even use the word in our questionnaire, because we wanted to get their objective and real life opinions about their every day working life without putting a label on it. We thought they would answer more honestly if we did not use the word watchdog, since they might feel forced to apply that role on themselves. Instead we used this theory to interpret their answers after the interviews.

## 2.2 Earlier research

### 2.2.1 Who watches the watchdogs?

Thomas and Finneman (2013) have researched newspapers opinions about the Leveson inquiry and the future of British press regulation. They chose to look at editorial material in 10 daily and 11 Sunday newspapers on the British market, analyzing articles published from July 6 2011 to August 25 2012, covering the time from David Cameron announcing the form of the Inquiry to one month after the end of the hearing phase of the inquiry. On the total 141 editorial articles that was found, including the word "leveson" or "hacking" they did a qualitative textual analysis of journalistic metadiscourse.

The result of the research showed that the British newspapers took on four different strategies to handle the question about the inquiry.

- The catastrophization, portraying the inquiry as a threat to press freedom
- The self-affirmation, underlining the journalistic importance in democracy

- The minimization, with the purpose to make the phone hacking scandal less of a deal
- The localization, pointing out the journalists at the News of the world that preformed the phone hacking as “the bad guys” to show it is a pity that everyone have to suffer for what one newspaper has done.

The conclusion of *Who watches the watchdogs?* lays a ground perspective for us in this research, knowing that the newspaper industry has reacted at the inquiry and have different point of views on it. We can use the different strategies as background information when we form our questionnaire and analyze the result.

### **2.2.2 An ethical deficit?**

In the book *New Media, Old news* (Philips, Couldry, Freedman, chapter in Fenton (edt.) 2010), a quantitative interview study made the senior lecturer Phillis, is presented. The research present interviews with journalists from daily newspapers focusing on the organizational structure, with owners and editors in the top, and how it effects the ethical decisions that the reporters on the field takes in their everyday work life. The journalists from different daily newspapers in the UK, describes that they seldom have a say in whether a story should be published or not, even if there is an ethical problem with it. They feel pressure from editors and to deliver the exact amount of words and with the angle that is expected from them. “They don’t care whether it’s true or not. They literally do not”, an interviewed says and refers to the news desk at the newspapers as ”they”. The study shows on a hierarchic atmosphere in the British newspaper industry, a consideration that is important for us to bring in our own research.

### **2.2.3 Watchdog on a leash?**

In the danish quantitative study *Watchdog on a leash? The impact of organizational constraints on journalists’ perceived professional autonomy and their relationship with superiors*, (2014), Skovsgaard, assistant Professor at the Center for Journalism, has made a large scale survey with Danish journalists to study their sense of professional self-determination.

The purpose with Skovsgaards study was to examine if danish journalists are constrained from press freedom by structures, routines and guidelines at their

workplace. One of the main questions that he wants to answer is to what degree individual journalists feel that they can control their own work process and still carry out their work together with the organisation they work for.

In the study, Skovsgaard brings up several issues where journalists often get limited by the structure of their workplace. One example and one of the most important constraints in journalists daily work is deadlines. When dealing with time pressure professional sense of autonomy gets lowered and professional values like accuracy and objectivity comes in second.

To measure the autonomy of the danish journalists, Skovsgaard created different variables and had the journalists in the study place themselves on a scale from zero to ten on how well the questions about their professional self-determination were accurate. The result showed that even though time pressure and deadlines reduce some professionalism there was a high level of professional autonomy among danish journalists. The majority felt a freedom to make important choices when it comes to the product they produce. In the study Skovsgaard also discovered that if a journalist has more experience they will feel a lesser need to adjust their structures and guidelines towards their workplace and superiors.

## 3 Purpose and issues

### 3.1 Purpose

The purpose of this research is to get a picture of the current press situation in the UK. After the phone hacking scandal, the shutdown of the PCC and the long wait for a new press regulator there are unstable times. We want to know how the journalists are adjusting to a work environment that is changing. This research was important to do because it is a documentation of the press industry in a changing time. Since the phone hacking scandal is a fairly recent happening, there has not been any studies like this and we thought that this study could open up for further research on the subject and contribute to a larger discussion.

### 3.2 Issues

The main issue for this study is:

- **How do the** British journalists see their profession right now?

To answer this issue we created two additional issues, gripping two different angles of the issue. One focusing on the outer pressure and one on the journalists own behavior.

- How do the journalists see their possibilities to practice their profession, now, since the phone hacking scandal?

We wanted to know if the work conditions for the journalists have changed since the phone hacking . Focus lays on external influences and how the journalists are experiencing them. Have there been any restrictions from the government that challenges the journalists? To interpret the journalists answers regarding this issue, we used the theory of freedom of press, the theory of watchdogs - fourth estate and the theory of journalist and their sources. We used them to measure the different aspects and angles of the journalistic profession, like the ethical rules and guidelines, the role as a watchdog.

- How do the British journalists see their own awareness of the possible consequences from their newspaper reporting?

Have the journalists been restricting themselves after the phone hacking scandal in any way? Do they perform their work differently now or do they continue on as they always done? By asking them on their own views of consequences of their reporting we can analyze how much they reflect of their own usage of the information they get from sources and how they interact with them.

## 4 Method

We chose to do a qualitative interview study to research our subject. The form was in-depth, semi-structured interviews and the interviewees were journalists living and working in London. As method of analysis we chose to use some parts of grounded theory.

### 4.1 Method discussion and critics

The purpose of this study was to get a picture of what happens with the journalistic profession after a press ethical scandal. We thought that the best way to get that picture was to speak with the ones practicing that profession; the journalists themselves. That

does not exclude that we also could have chosen a quantitative method for this study. For example, we could have done a survey, which is the one of the most common form to research peoples opinions on a certain subject. In a quantitative survey, we would have approached the issue with a larger number of voices giving their opinions. If we had chosen a proper selection and done the research in a measure that was large enough, we could have been able to generalize the results to a whole population. (Bryman, 2008). So, why not do a quantitative study in this case?

There were mainly two arguments we based our choice of a qualitative method on. The first was the issue of getting access. In order to get contact with a larger number of journalists and do a proper survey, we would have needed to get almost all of the biggest media concerns to agree to let us in. That would have been very time consuming and not realistic for us to go through with within our time schedule. As the founders of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (Lundgren, 1989:22) means, the data and the method should be chosen with considerations of the condition of the field and the condition of the scholar in the case. The conditions of the field in this case, the journalistic society, is generally very closed and hard to get access to. The scholars conditions, that means us, are that we are born and raised in another country than were our research focus is pointed, which means we have even smaller chances to access. Therefore a qualitative study seemed as the best option for this study and for us as scholars.

The second argument was based on the fact that the phone hacking scandal happened rather recently and haven't been researched that much in a scientific way yet. Therefore, we thought the best way to approach this issue was to lay the ground with a deeper study and let the journalists steer the conversations and talk freely around the subject. Both these aspects are distinctive for a qualitative interview. (Bryman, 2008:413-415).

To strengthen our vision to lay scientific ground on the subject by letting the journalists steer the interview, we used semi structured interviews where the questions do not need to be asked in the same order in every interview and follow-up questions that's not printed in the questionnaire (see appendix) is allowed to ask, as long as they are related to what the interviewed talked about. That gives the interviewed chance to really steer the interview, as mentioned as a core aspect of qualitative interviews. (Bryman,

2008:413-415). That is also the reason why we chose grounded theory as method of analysis. Grounded theory gives the scholar possibilities to develop existing theories further (Lundgren, 1989:22). That approach fits a qualitative study on this subject, which is, as mentioned, rarely explored.

There are critics who dispute the part of grounded theory that's proposing discovery of new theories or developing the exciting ones, in areas which have theories to offer. But as proponents of the theory says, there is no theory that cover all aspects, especially not in social science. (Lundgren, 1989:28).

#### **4.1.1 Reliability and validity**

It was inevitably for us as scholars to have personal interest in this study, since we are journalist students and have experience in journalism. The subject concerns us and people in the same profession as ourselves which means that it was hard for us to be objective. We knew that we would bring our own pre understanding into the research.

This kind of dilemma follows the scholars in almost all kinds of social science. But in the qualitative study and with the interpretation which it implies, other scholars have come to the conclusion that total neutrality is not an option. Instead, scholars can use their interest as a resource (Tjora, 2012:159). We have tried to use the journalistic competence in the best way possible, as a tool to be objective and use source criticism, which are two main approaches in the profession.

In this kind of interview situation, there could be an interviewer / respondent - effect. (Bryman, 2008:229). As for example: all the respondents in this research were journalists and they were all more used to interviewing other people than being interviewed themselves. During the interview they may have thought their answers through more carefully than a person without any experience as an interviewer and reconstructed their answers to fit the expectations of the interviewer. That factor was probably even higher when the subject was focused around the journalistic profession, as it is a subject that concerns them and they too have a personal agenda on the issue. This effect was something that we thought about before we performed the interviews and had in mind when we did the analysis.

## 4.2 Operationalizing and forming the questionnaire

We designed a questionnaire to use as a guideline when we performed our qualitative, semi structured in-depth interviews. We used the theories of our research to give ourselves background information and pre-understanding to bring with us in the interview situations. We used the theories afterwards to analyze the results in form of the answers from the journalists we interviewed. A part of the analysis method grounded theory is the implied element of verifying data (Lundgren, 1989:35) which we used the theories for.

When we formed these first five questions with subquestions to our questionnaire we took the different aspects of the theory of freedom of press (Barendt, 2005) (Barendt, 2006) (Siebert, Peterson, Schramm, 1984) (The Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947) in consideration. We wanted to know in which way the journalists answers would match the theories and in which ways they would not. The theories focuses both around the subject of rules and regulation and the journalists professional role, which was what we wanted to enlighten with the following questions.

- What ethical rules or guidelines do you follow (on a daily basis)?
- What kind of relation did you have to the PCC? Do you think the PCC did a good job? Do you feel like journalists generally cared about the PCC as a regulating system?
- What did you think about The Leveson Inquiry when it was published?
- What is your opinion about IPSO?
- How do you see the future of the press regulating system in the UK?

To form the following two questions with subquestions we took the theory of journalists as watchdogs (Berkowitz, 2009) (Weiss, 2009) in consideration. We wanted to examine how the journalists look at their whole profession now, after the scandal. By asking open questions about the general press situation and if they noticed any changes since the shutdown of the PCC we wanted to see if and how they role of the journalist as a watchdog was described. By asking open questions we gave opportunities for

unexpected answers (Bryman, 2008:244) which is an important part in a qualitative study, especially in a subject that is so rarely researched like this one.

- How do you feel about the press situation in the UK right now?
- Has the press situation changed since the PCC was forced to shut down? (In your professional life?) (Why/why not? How?)

To answer the issue *How do journalists see their awareness of the consequences of their working with news reporting?* we used the two theories consequence neutrality (Von Krogh, 2009) (Wigorts Yngvesson, 2006) the theory of journalists and their sources (Berkowitz, 2009) and the theory of journalists as watchdogs (Berkowitz, 2009) (Weiss, 2009). The theories brings different aspects of the journalistic profession which can answer the main issue.

- Can you name a specific situation were you've been forced to make a ethical crucial decision during the last year?
- Do you ever think about what consequences anything you write can have for the person you write about?

As an early part of designing the questionnaire, we preformed two test interviews to check how the how first draft questions would work in a real interview situation. It is essential to do test interviews, because then you can more easily spot simple problems with the formation of the questions (Bryman, 2008:258). We preformed two test interviews on two male journalist students in Sweden, one of them with roots in the UK. After the test, we realized that some of the questions were unnecessary or badly constructed so we redesigned them or removed them before we designed the final questionnaire.

### 4.3 Selection

In our research we were hoping to speak with four men and four women, but we ended up with three women and five men in our selection. Women are underrepresented in the newsrooms at the newspapers in the UK, but we were not in a qualitative research supposed to mirror the reality and generalize. So therefore, for the sake of quality, we

thought we could get the best answers if they came from both male and female perspective.

We also wanted to speak to journalists with different working experience and backgrounds and different current positions, which we succeeded with. In our research we have journalists working as lectures, middle-aged journalists with long experiences working at big newspapers and young newly graduated journalists working at smaller newspapers or freelancing. We also have Nick Davies who freelances for The Guardian, the journalist who reviled the whole phone hacking scandal in our selection. When we interviewed him we added a few questions to our questionnaire to approach his extraordinary role of the issue in a proper way. The importance of having him in the study is both to get the background information to the scandal and having him as another voice among the other journalists, giving his view of the ethical climate in the UK.

To come in contact with the journalists in the UK and begin our selection, we e-mailed big newspapers, organizations, universities and individual journalists. Out of them who answered that they had time to meet with us, we choose the eight journalists that follow under the next headline. We used an targeted selection, a form of selection that Bryman (2008:434) describes as containing elements of creating compliance between the issues of research and the interviewees, by seeking up the ones we found most suited for the purpose. The following descriptions are short presentations of the eight journalist we choose to interview in the research. We have given them fictive names out of ethical aspects and for the purpose of showing that in this research they are studies of cases and we do not want to distinguish any importance of them as individual journalists, whatever status the name they have can carry.

### **Steven**

Is a 57 year old lecturer at London School of Journalism. He worked as a journalist for over twenty years before he started teaching at university level in the year 2002. His journalistic education is a post-graduate vocational course he took in the 1980's that gave him the first job at a regional paper and he has after that worked a various of regional and national papers in the UK.

### **Chris**

Is a lecturer at Birkbeck College which is a part of the University of London and at London School of Journalism. He has been lecturing for ten years and before that he worked as a journalist full time. He is also freelancing now for The Independent and does feature pieces and book reviews for other newspapers in the UK. He is 54 years old.

### **Llewyn**

Is 43 years old and work as the home affairs editor at The Observer. He has been working at The Observer for 12 years. He began his journalistic career in 1995 when he took a course at NCTJ, The National Council of the Training of Journalists. Since then, he has worked at a regional paper and at The Daily Express.

### **Stacy**

Is the chief reporter at The Observer. She has worked for The Observer for 15 years in different positions. She is 47 years old. She took a one year course with NCTJ, The National Council of the Training of Journalists in her twenties after her university degree and has worked as a journalists since then, involving working at The Express, The Times, The Sun and local newspapers in the UK.

### **Julie**

Is a senior correspondent at The Guardian, recently being leveled up from working as a crime reporter at the newspaper for six and a half years. She is 46 years old. During her 23 years as a journalist she has been at three different local and national papers in the UK. After her English degree she did a diploma in journalism at Cardiff University.

### **William**

Is a reporter at The Irish Post in the UK. He recently moved to London from Ireland where he grew up and did a masters in journalism. He is 23 years old and has worked full time as a journalist for two years and been freelancing for five years.

### **Dick**

Is a freelance, investigating journalist at The Guardian. He was the one who reviled the phone hacking scandal in 2009. He was trained in journalism at a local newspaper who had a trainee program in 1976. He has been working as a journalist for 38 years. He is 61

years old. Apart from The Guardian he has worked for London Daily News, The Observer and been freelancing in the USA and the UK.

### **Lily**

Is a 25 year old freelancing journalist who finished her master in newspaper journalism at The City University in London 18 months ago. Before she became freelance she worked for The Feminist Times and has done some shifts at national newspapers.

## **4.4 Proceeding**

During a week in December, 8th to 14th, we visited London to meet up with six of the journalists that we had planned meetings with in beforehand. We met with the interviewees at different locations. One in a empty classroom, three at the cafeteria at their work place, and two in different public cafés. We have also done two interviews via Skype, one during our visit in London and one the week after, in Sweden. We recorded all the interviews, with approval from the journalists and did transcriptions of the recordings afterwards. The duration of the interviews was between 15 minutes and an hour. All the transcriptions are available to read in their full forms, which gives opportunity for secondary analysis.

We choose to use the method of grounded theory in our analysis. Grounded theory is based on the principle that data is analyzed during the research process continuous. Collecting of data and the conclusions has close connections, since they are done parallell and grows and develops during the working progress. (Bryman, 2008:511-517) For us, that implies that we have done brief analyses after every interview, scanning them though and have looked for different aspects worth picking up on and raising at the next interview, forming the direction of the study in line with issues and theories along the working process. We also marked pieces in our transcriptions that we knew would be valuable in the analysis and assortment of quotes to the results as another part we embraced to combine the analyzing and collecting part of the research.

We have used the form of selective encoding, which the founder of grounded theory, defines as deciding a core category that you select data from and use as a basis to built other categories on as the analyzing process proceed. (Bryman, 2008:511-517) With

selective encoding we created codes from our main issues to capture the primary opinions from the journalists in our collected data. The codes were created by writing headlines based on our main issues and we placed relevant data in groups under them. For example we created the headline "publish and be damned" as one category of codes, under which we collected all the examples the journalists gave us of situations where they been thinking about consequences, to answer the issue of our research that falls in line with the concept of consequence neutrality. We looked for patterns in the journalists answers, both during the interviews and after, that were either similar to earlier answers or completely opposite from earlier answers, as a first step looking for extreme values, the ones that often turn out to be the most interesting. We also sifted answers that were not relevant to the research in a developing purpose. Selective encoding requires a decision about which of the initial codes are of the utmost analytical weight when it comes to categorizing data in a penetrating and thorough manner. (Charmaz (2006), quoted i Bryman 2008:514-515). As we mentioned earlier in this method section, grounded theory is a theory of developing and generating new theories (Lundgren, 1989:21). We have not fully embraced that part of grounded theory in this study, but still it is hard to be totally deductive, a method of research where you are supposed to have expressed hypothesis in beforehand (Bryman, 2008:26) in a qualitative semi-structured study where the respondents are supposed to steer the study in the direction of their opinions. Therefore, there will be some elements of development of theories in the discussion of this research by using the analyzing tools of grounded theory.

#### 4.5 Research ethics

Since our research is based on interviews with humans we have taken the CODEX rules for how to handle humans in social science research in consideration when we have done our research. We have always asked in beforehand if it is okay to record the interview, therefore we have never recorded anything with hidden microphone and the interviewed persons have always been aware of when the recording has started. We choose to anonymize the eight journalists in this research, because the data we collected could be harmful while represented in this kind of context. The answers that the journalists have given us are presented in quotes in the results and contains information about the journalists personal experiences with employers and colleagues

which could give eventual consequences that the interviewees might not have taken in consideration or realized the measure of. Therefore, we saw it as the best solution to anonymize the journalists, even though none of them asked for it.

We have not falsified any of the interviews and the transcriptions of them are as accurate as possible from a recorded sound. The transcriptions in their full form are kept on our computers with passwords and have not been shared on any open cloud service on the internet so there is no risk of them getting in the wrong hands.

## 5 Results and analysis

The result from our study is presented in quotes from the interviews with the British journalists. We have picked out those quotes that matches our issues and answers our questions in the best way possible.

### 5.1 Background

How does the journalists in this study feel about the recent changes in the press ethical climate? We let them explain their thoughts on the situation and laid a ground to understanding their answers on the questions later on, concerning the issue of this study.

On the subject the Leveson Inquiry, there were mixed opinions among the journalists we interviewed. Some thought that Leveson's proposal for a new press regulating system contained too much of governmental interference, some thought that elements of governmental steering was needed.

Stacy (about the Leveson Inquiry):

*"I thought that was ludicrous, it was really silly and I was really disappointed that the labor party backed it. And I was really disappointed that the editor in chief here [at The Guardian] backed it, because I don't think it's right at all, absolutely ridiculous. And that, to suggest for one minute that, especially looking at British politics at the moment it's so polarized and so insidious and so corrupt, morally corrupt and honestly you know we, the lacking of kind of any honesty i think it's ludicrous to accept any kind of political interference."*

Chris:

*"I was in favor of a system where there is light touch state regulation of newspapers. And I thought that this system that the government and opposition parties agreed to [the Leveson inquiry] was stronger in terms of regulation than one that the newspaper editors agreed to [IPSO]. None of the newspapers are gonna accept that system and that's a problem."*

Few of the journalists have had any opinions at all about the IPSO-proposal for a new press regulator. Only Dick had a real say on the subject, and he was reserved and mostly negative to the proposal.

Dick:

*"In far to many ways IPSO has the same weaknesses as The Press Complaints Commission did. Because the, the newspapers themselves have too much influence over the way it operates and so that is very disappointing. And I believe that what Lord Justice Leveson proposed was clever and that it would actually increase the freedom of the press, it would make it easier for us to do our jobs but the, the bad guys in Fleet Street are so desperate to hold on to the press regulator so they can continue to do what they want to do, however bad, that they would rather sacrifice, get rid off, kill off the possibility of being more free in order to keep control."*

None of the journalist had personally been in contact with the former regulator or had gotten any complaints from the PCC. Their opinions about the former regulator were mixed, but most of them thought that the regulator needed to be replaced.

Chris:

*"I think it was a weak body and basically it was set up because the press did not want to have regulation. So they said that 'we'll put our own*

*house in order.' [...] I think the PCC was a toothless watchdog. What happened then when the Human Rights Act came in in 2005 and took some power away from the PCC because it introduced into British law, the law of privacy, which in most european countries exists but it didn't exist in Britain."*

Llewyn:

*"It pretty lacked a bit of aggression a bit a few powers. [...] The idea behind it, of the news industry pleasing itself is very good, you need a free press, it's very important. I think just, no one could've really predicted how, destructive the tabloids were becoming. So, It needed, it needed to be replaced. Definitely."*

Stacy:

*"No they were dreadful, they were dreadful. It was full of editors who all pat each other on the back and drank whiskey together, it was a little boys club, no, no, it was dreadful. I think it's really good it's closed down."*

Steven:

*"I think there was sort of a feeling that perhaps, a small number of both press barons, like the Murdochs, and individual editors had come to feel fireproof [...] You know, 'as long as we believe in that we can do just about anything.' [...] Fleet street seems to think they can do anything and of course the money involved in publishing a three million circulation tabloid, might be one factor."*

Steven:

*"I think that they'd [The PCC] in many sentences lost their credibility with the public and of course the phone hacking coming siding with the other things like the police, like the MP:s expenses, undermine public faith in the PCC."*

There were opinions that the PCC was seen as a credible regulator while still running, at least there was shown in the journalists answers that the journalist force had a respect for the PCC.

Llewyn:

*"The Guardian, if we'd get a PCC complaint, we take it very seriously. [...] We had a different culture to some of the other papers, who new they could get away with the PCC investigating a complaint. So it didn't really work."*

Julie:

*"I think if you're a journalist and you got a PCC complaint you were worried about it, yeah, you absolutely were. It wasn't something to be taken lightly."*

When the journalists in this study got the opportunity to speak free about what kind of regulating system they would be satisfied to work under, there was different kinds of examples shown. A free and independent regulator was highly advocated in the journalists answers, like these examples:

Julie:

*"I don't think the government should have anything to do with it, I think it should be totally independent. I don't buy underpinning or whatever they wanted to call it, I still believe it should be an independent body. I mean, independent of the media as well as independent of the government. [...] I think there should be elements of the media having representatives on that body. But no, not totally self regulation, there should be independent people on that body, definitely. It should be more independent than the PCC, less of editors say so, editors had too much say so on that body. Yeah, I don't know what process that would be, but it does definitely needs to be independent."*

William:

*"I don't think state intervention will work, but there does need to be some level of that, because people would be more trusting of what*

*they're gonna need if there is a level of state intervention that.. I don't think it could be completely state, that would destroy the industry, so I think it needs to be kind of input from different groups and different members of society, so it's a fair system where everyone get a say what's right and whats wrong in journalism, because if it's just one group, they're not gonna want anything bad published about them, whether it's governmental, whether it's NUJ or anything, so I think it needs to be some kind of combination of different groups in society, different key groups."*

## 5.2 Press ethical reference frame

What kind of rules and guidelines the journalist follow was an essential question in this study. To get a picture of how the journalists practice their profession we asked them what rules they abide by on a daily basis.

Stacy:

*"You don't even think about it anymore, I think your ethics are personal. [...] I think you have to have your own ethical standards and they have to work with the job so the job doesn't teach you to be ethical - you have to bring your own ethics to it."*

Julie:

*"I think every journalist has their own moral baseline I've always got strong moral baseline. I don't push people too far, I don't harass people, but I keep digging."*

William:

*"I just stick to what I learned in the university [...] and, just for my own experience and working I just kind of picked up my own ethics I know what to ask and I know if there is a question that's some people might want answered but not relevant for the story I wont ask it, I just stick to my topic, that I have to cover."*

Dick:

*"Yeah, I would try to [follow the rules and guidelines in the code of conduct] I mean they are very obvious. You don't really need to read them and learn them, they're just fairly obvious."*

Berkowitz and TerKeurst (quoted in Berkowitz, 2009) suggest as one of the four approaches a journalist can take on as a watchdog, is that the journalist design their own ethical guidelines as in their everyday work, making up the rules as they go. That means that they do not, as another three of the four approaches suggests, strictly follow a professional ideology. That fits in on the journalists answers, that in the study generally gave the picture that was leaning more towards hermeneutic way of working. Barendt (2006) also suggests in the theory of press freedom, where several perspective of medias right to spread information is presented, that the conflict between privacy and free speech makes it hard to actually have a strict theory of how the journalist can act, they always have to decide for themselves whether the story should be published or not, which is the general message from the journalists in this study. The journalists answers does also touch the second perspective of press freedom that says that media should have more privileges than freedom of speech (Barendt, 2005) and they do in some way put themselves on a pedestal thinking they have worked up a routine that is so familiar that they do not even reflect about it anymore. The journalists way of talking about ethics does not express the rules that Hutchins commission contributed to the theory of freedom of press, since that is based on five requirements (Siebert, Peterson, Schramm, 1984) that none of the journalists expressed.

### 5.3 Prerequisites after the phone hacking scandal

What examples are there of changed conditions for practicing the journalistic profession in the UK, after the phone hacking scandal? The journalists in this study answered the questions on how the press situation have changed since the scandal and how that effected their own everyday work life.

Llewyn:

*"The police now no longer talk to me and I can't talk of the record"*

*to MI5. So a lot of very important material, that I would use very very responsibly, now no longer is known. So, there's winners and losers, really, I think."*

Julie:

*"In the response to the hacking revelations, was the way that the the relationships with the police were closed down by the authorities. And there is not just the police, white hall department those relationships are closed down, but specifically with the police, because of the embarrassment about apparently over-closeness with the News International and News of the world. [...] So essentially it means that you can't have open conversations with police officers on the ground, you have to go to the press officers. There is no relationship with many police forces anymore so it means that as journalists in a democracy you can't test what you've been told, it's difficult to test what you've been told. [...] I mean, the contacts I have are terrified to speak to me, many of them have left because they don't like the environment they work in, and there's a top down pressure in the police not to talk, to stick to the messages, and the messages are corporate message about their reputation, not about individuals or investigations, not about admitting mistakes and being open but about what's the corporate view on this? Police officers aren't by their nature corporate beings and they're being forced to, you can't talk to them anymore."*

There are two ways for the journalists to approach their sources in the theory concerning the relationship between journalists and their sources, the first one strictly as watchdogs and the second one as a relationship in symbiosis, giving both parts the space to exchange of information (Berkowitz, 2009) . The journalists answers in this study shows that they used to take on the second approach with their sources, at least their police sources. But the scandal have changes their relationship and now the situation is that they are unable to match one of the two approaches. We could describe it as they have gone to the first approach, interacting only as watchdogs with their sources, but in this case that the journalists in this study describe, it is not the journalists who sets the agenda and decides how they want to act with the sources, that in this case

is the police. It is the police who decides how the relationship is supposed to be with the media.

## 5.4 Publish and be damned

Have the British journalist changed their own way of practicing their profession? To see if they changed their way of handling their sources or been more aware of the possible consequences of their news reporting, we asked the journalists to name a specific situation where they been forced to make an ethical crucial decision.

Stacy:

*"I had a story for a woman, a mother of a boy, who'd been sent to prison. And she gave me an interview at eleven o'clock at the phone, um, about her son and about how she felt betrayed, they've said he would get maybe one year, he got twelve years. So, eh... And then at two o'clock she rang me up and said she changed her mind, she didn't want the interview to go, and it's like, you know it's on deadline, I could have said to her really easily I'm sorry it's gone, and she would have believed me and she was a little old lady in Birmingham who would never had complained or you know, but personally, you know, I couldn't, I couldn't have let it happen."*

Llewyn:

*"Maybe two weeks ago, it was a story, it was involved in hostage negotiations and it's very important story, but because of his position, I couldn't revile him and his role in the story. Because it meant the hostage negotiations might have been compromised. So, you lost a very good story, you have to make decisions on what was more important. The story or negotiations?"*

Lily:

*"I did an interview at Feminist Times where, it was all quite a sensitive subject. And it was with someone who hasn't had a huge amount of media training and she said a lot of things on the record that, you know, would have made a really good story and quite juicy, political*

*stories, that could have been quite embarrassing for the politicians that she spoke about. I felt slightly uncomfortable doing the interview because I felt she was being more candid than I would have expected her to. And she later came back to me and said oh, you know, could you maybe not mention that I said all of these things. She's a campaigner so she's working alongside a lot of government figures, and she said it would be really harmful to my relationship with that politician if you were to say anything. [...] So it was a choice between respecting her relationship with that person and her relationship with me and the publication versus going for a better story. I did actually go for the more boring story, in interest of just keeping everyone happy."*

Llewyn:

*"You always have to write knowing what the consequences could be. So I do write about demolishing violence and people who are self harming or tried to commit suicide or have a mental disease. So you have to be very careful, what you write. So, generally, I'll always tell them very detailed what I'm writing and check with them every bit, so they're okay with it. People can react very strangely when they see the story so I always check with people that they're okay [...] each case is unique. So you'd have a politician, who was having an affair and that whole problem was causing problem... And he's begging you not to run it, then maybe, you'd run it. But if it was a grandmother with mental health problems, and she was saying, please, please don't run it, then maybe you wouldn't. So it depends on the case. Where there's public interest or not."*

Dick:

*"I had a police contact who allowed me to look through a lot of paperwork over a number of days and on the first day I came across some paperwork which showed that the police had done something illegal, and I said oh what's this and he took the papers away from me and put them in his desk. A couple of days later, this was massive of paperwork, I came across some other papers which showed that a man*

*was in prison for a very, very long time for something he had not done and the police knew who really had committed the crime but because they had already put the wrong man in prison they had decided to keep it secret. So, I thought to myself, If I say to this police officer 'what's this?' He's going to take it and put it in the drawer, so I could secretly take this papers and use them to get this man out of prison. But if I do that I'm betraying this man, this man trusts me and he's giving me access to the paperwork so what should I do? This man trusts me therefor I must ask him about these papers or do I do something secretive and in a way betraying his trust? So that is what I did. This was in the morning and I took the papers and I put them in my copy of The Guardian and then I went out to get a sandwich at lunch and I photocopied them all and then put the papers back in the box said anything to him. Then I could not do a story cause otherwise he would have known but I took that paperwork to the lawyer for the man who was in prison and eventually the man got out."*

*William:*

*"This is a story I did last week about a barber from Limerick in Ireland and he operates in Manchester and Liverpool. So, he operates a men only policy for his shops, and he just has a ban on women. If you go in with your dad or your brother or whatever, you have to leave while they get their hair cuts. So it's controversial, and I found that story so I was covering that, and I got in touch with him, and he didn't want the story published. But I had to do it because it's a news story, so, people needed to know, so I had to do that regardless. I had to be considerate of this might get some backlash and he might not be happy, so this could come back on me in a bad way. But still, I just have to think, that's news and it has to go out and I have the right to write about him, even though he doesn't want me to."*

In these stories, there is shown that journalists do think about the possible consequences of their news reporting. There were few examples in the interviews with the journalists of actual practicing the theory of consequence neutrality. Instead, there are other factors weighing in the choice to publish or not, the consequences of the reporters relationship

with the source, for example. Under the next headline, we have analysed this and other discoveries in the results.

When it comes to publishing a story that has some kind of ethical content, there is a lot of consequences that can follow. In the theory of consequence neutrality that we have used, many authors talk about the fact that stories that are true and relevant to the public should be published no matter what the consequences might be. Schöier (quoted in Von Krogh, 2009) has an aspect on the theory of consequence neutrality. According to him the basis of journalism is if a story is true and relevant for the public, it should be published. And Wigorts Yngvesson has summarized the theory in the fact that a journalist should stay neutral to publishing regardless of consequences. (Wigorts Yngvesson, 2006)

However there is a conflict between whether a journalist should publish or not, certain aspects need to be taken in consideration. One of them is to take consideration to relatives to victims of suicide. In the end the decision, to publish or to not, lies with the journalist that wrote the story since he or she is the only one who knows the full content.

All of the journalists that we interviewed told us that they do think about the consequences and the majority of them would actually choose not to publish a story if it meant getting in bad contact with their source. One of the journalists do mention that every case is unique and that you have to have the public's interest in mind at all times. Only one of the journalists did publish a story even though he was asked not to, but he did consider the consequences before. In other words very few of them follow the theory of consequence neutrality.

When it comes to the theory of journalists and their sources there are two different approaches that journalists can take. The role as a strict watchdog or a symbiotic relationship where both the reporter and the source can share a negotiation where they both give up something to gain something in return. (Berkowitz, 2009) However this theory also states the fact that the two approaches do not exclude each other, which we realized when we did our interviews. The majority of the journalists we talked to fit into the second category or approach where they want to have an ongoing relationship

with their sources. But there was also some answers that lead to the more watchdog-approach, like the example we brought up earlier with the journalist that published a story even though he was asked not to. This was an act of watchdog journalism since the reporter thought that the public's right to know about the story was more important than having a symbiotic relationship with the source.

## 6 Discussion and summary

The main issue of this study was *How do the British journalists see their profession right now?* and we got different answers from the journalists covering different areas and perspectives of the journalistic profession. The conclusions we draw and the discussion we present below here are exclusively representative for this study, we are not aiming to generalize to a whole population, which in this case are all the journalists in the UK. But, since we had a broad representing of journalists of different ages and different experiences, the answers might be legit to some other journalists in the UK besides the ones in this study.

So, how has the situation changed for the journalists in the UK after the phone hacking scandal? By measuring that we asked the journalists themselves how they thought the situation had changed to answer the second issue of the study *How do the journalists see their possibilities to practice their profession, now, since the phone hacking scandal?* There is one obvious and concrete change, that the journalist can no longer talk to the polices as sources in the same way. That was, as our research and the journalists themselves confirm, an direct provision after the phone hacking scandal was reviled. The Leveson Inquiry came out with the Filkin report that gave criticism to the police for having too open relationships with the journalists. Therefore, the polices became scared of might contributing with too much information to the journalists. The new relationships between the polices and the journalists are hard to connect to an existing theory, but it is also too fresh to see any really big and persistent consequences. Therefore, our conclusion of that was that it was sure an interesting discovery, but it is too early to tell if it is just a temporary phenomenon while the scandal still is fresh or if it is something more permanent.

To get to know if the journalists changed their own work ethics we asked them questions about what they think about the consequences of their news reporting. In that

way, we might hear changes in their way of practicing their profession that the journalists themselves hadn't reflected over before. To answer the issue *How do the British journalists see their own awareness of the possible consequences from their newspaper reporting?* we made the journalists reflect over their own way of working and as a result we heard stories about consequence neutrality in reality, which basically was more like consequence consideration. All the journalists in this study told stories about how they do think about the consequences before publishing a story and most of them had examples of how they decided to not publish a story just because the possible consequences. Their self-censure shows that the concept of consequence neutrality has developed into something much more complex than putting the truth and the right to spread information first. The theory promotes that the journalists' job is to tell stories to the public that they deserve to know and that they should publish them regardless of the consequences. But there are other aspects that need to be considered. For example, journalists are humans with feelings and a conscience and sometimes they might change their minds. There are also other conditions involved, when the journalists realize that the consequences of publishing a story could lead to them losing their sources or damaging the relationship with them so that they can't be provided with information in the future, they might step back and choose not to publish the story.

The grounded theory, which is the method theory of analysis that we have used, gives the scholars possibilities to develop existing theories further which in the case of consequence neutrality we have decided to do. The journalists in this study have showed proof that complex development of consequence neutrality has turned into a more strategic way of working. Strategic in that way that the journalists might be open to negotiate even more than the approach of the theory of journalists and their sources (Berkowiz, 2009) suggests, giving the sources more advantages to in a long term sight keep the sources happy so that they will keep on giving information.

So is that a new phenomenon that grew out of the unstable times since the phone hacking scandal? Probably not exclusively. The development of the consequence neutrality is probably more of an ongoing process that is influenced from many factors at the same time. But it is an interesting parallel to draw between this discovery and the fact that since the phone hacking scandal, the journalists have lost the ability to talk freely to the police as a source. That phenomenon might be one contributing factor.

Now, over to another question that's been raised out of the results, how can the journalists relationships with their sources effect their roles as watchdogs? In our study there is shown that journalists see ethical rules as obvious and as something that has become second nature for them. They also reflect over the regulating system in a way that shows an ignorance. None of the journalists had been in contact with the former regulator, the PCC, which means they never got any complaint. Still, they give negative reviews of the regulator, saying it was not strong enough and also indicates it was corrupt. If they would get a complaint, they would take it seriously, but otherwise the regulator does not really seem to be a big authority to them, especially not now a days when the former regulator is shut down and few of the journalists had any knowledge about the new one and did not seem to care that much since their everyday work goes on as always. But how does that effect the public? The news papers readers might not know how the journalists work, especially not if the ethics and rules in the press are based on socialization in to the profession, experience and the feelings the journalists have in the moment of reporting. Their faith in the former regulator, the PCC, was so low that it eventually got to be shut down. Without a regulator holding the public's hand in the fight for privacy, who does? The journalist in this study showed symptoms of being more negotiable with their sources, which sometimes equals being more negotiable with their public. The phone hacking scandal made the public loose their faith in the newspaper industry in many ways which changed their role in society and their credibility as watchdogs. The way of handling that from the journalists side is maybe to be more considerate with the information the sources give to them. But by transferring the responsibility as watchdogs to the sources can also resulting in the press loosing its credibility and watchdog role.

The consequences from the phone hacking scandal did not only lead to the fact that a lot of journalists lost the police's trust and them as a source. The edges on what is solid news journalism and what is tabloid journalism were smudged and the journalistic profession got itself a shade. For now, after the phone hacking scandal, a lot of journalists might have to spend a lot of time building up trust and their reputation with the public again. Even though there was the tabloid newspapers that decided to breach privacy many decent journalists working on other magazines was blamed as well. The consequences from the phone hacking scandal were bigger than anyone could have foreseen.

In a democracy the press should play the part of a fourth estate preferably following the five requirements created by The Hutchins Commission. Which means they should be truthful, hear both sides, represent all groups of society, present goals for the society to strive towards and have a need to reach every member of society. And journalists should take the role as watchdogs.

Has the watchdog role changed since the phone hacking scandal, or did it actually exist in the first place? The journalists we interviewed seemed to let their sources get the upper hand in many situations. Although there were interesting stories that were of value and interest to the public, the sources often got the last say in the end. This means that journalists has lost their role as a watchdog and therefore they are not doing their full propose.

When it comes to press ethics and credibility there is a huge different when it comes to learning about something in school or during an education and learning by doing something at a workplace. Even though all the journalists we talked to had some form of education where they've studied ethical rules and guidelines it is the work they do in practice, that they have been socialized into it, that lead them to make up their own rules and has shaped them into the journalists they are today. In a way this could have a numbing effect on journalists since they might make a habit out of taking the easy way and letting their sources take control. As we have mentioned before journalists often involve feelings in the process of making ethical decisions and this means that the theory of consequence neutrality is somewhat lost in practice. The effect that this has on journalism as a profession is that some news stories that should have gotten published gets lost. If this is a behavior that continues in the future the values of journalism and the purpose of being watchdogs and examine the government might not be the same ever again.

So, who is the journalist today? How does the the watchdog ideal look? That is a question which answer we, in this study, just grazed on the surface to. As in a qualitative study, the purpose was to get a deep understanding instead of a broad one. Our study contributes with raised issues, both in line with and in conflict with the theories. Press ethics, the credibility within the watchdog role and the concept of

consequence neutrality are, as we can see, living organisms changing and developing every day. Therefore it is necessary to sometimes take the time and sit down with the ones practicing the profession to hear their point of views to lay a ground for further research. Under the following headline we will give proposals on topics for scholars in the future to research.

### **The comeback from a scandal**

In this study, we visited London shortly after the shutdown of the former regulator, the PCC, and took the temperature on the journalists. Therefore, it was in some questions hard to see the outcome of the scandal since it was still so fresh. In a couple of years, this study could be done again with more contents. How are the long term effects of the scandal shown in the journalistic force? And how has the restrictions between the journalists and the police sources become since now? It would also be interesting in that kind of study to compare it with how the news reporting has developed since the scandal.

### **The quantitative study**

To get a a broader result that is possible to generalize to a whole population, a qualitative study could be made on the same subject as this study. This study could also be seen as a pre-research to that quantitative research, giving examples of which subjects that are relevant to bring up and examine in a bigger scale. For example the most interesting questions of this study, the watchdog role and the concept of consequence neutrality could be examined closer with this study as a background, in a quantitative context.

### **Press regulation and the internet**

In our research we choose not to involve the impact online publications have on journalism. Though, that have been frequently brought up from the interviewed journalists as a issue. We think it would be interesting to investigate how the increasing online reporting and will effect the journalistic profession. Today, the newspapers regulator are not controlling their online versions, how will that be in the future, when everything goes online and the paper versions may die out? Is it possible to control the internet?

## 6.1 Conclusions

Under this headline, we have summarized the answers we got in the interviews with the journalists to answer our issues.

- **How do the British journalists see their profession right now?**

The overall picture that the journalists in this study gave us was that they are in an awaiting stadium right now. There are certain things, like rules and regulation, that seems to be unclear for them, but does not really bother them to effect their everyday working life. For many journalists the focus lies on winning back the trust from the public and getting sources to work with them again, especially the police. More about the relationships with the sources under the following issues.

- **How do the journalists see their possibilities to practice their profession, now, since the phone hacking scandal?**

The journalists does not seem to reflect that much over working without a decided regulator that all newspaper had agreed on. The shutdown of PCC does not effect their everyday working life. The big change is that the journalist can no longer talk to the police as a source in the same way as before, and that makes them feel limited in their profession. Besides that, there seems to be few factors and that the journalists are aware of changed conditions for them to practice their profession.

- **How do the British journalists see their own awareness of the possible consequences from their newspaper reporting?**

The journalists in this study are thinking about the consequences of their news reporting and they are aware of that. In almost every case, they give in for the sources requests and do not publish if they are asked not to. They do this because they want to keep their source around for the next time they need information. We think this conclusion is important to bring into the theory of consequence neutrality, as what we want to say, has developed to a much more complex theory where the sources and the conditions in the society and the press situation plays a big role in whether you publish or not. There are more restrictions to the theory of consequence neutrality than presented today, this conclusion being one example of that.

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Chris: lecturer at London School of Journalism and Birkbeck College and freelancing journalist for several UK newspapers, interviewed 2014-12-09 (Skype)

Dick: investigating journalist freelancing for The Guardian, interview: 2014-12-12

Julie: senior correspondent at The Guardian, interviewed 2014-12-10

Lily: freelancing journalist, interviewed 2014-12-16 (Skype)

Llewyn: home affairs editor at The Observer, interviewed 2014-12-10

Stacy: chief reporter at The Observer, interviewed 2014-12-10

Steven: lecturer at London School of Journalism, interviewed 2014-12-08

William: reporter at The Irish Post, interviewed 2014-12-11

# Appendix

## Questionnaire

### **Personal:**

How old are you?

What kind of journalistic education do you have?

How long have you been working as a journalist?

Where do you work now?

Whats your current position?

Where have you been working before?

### **Work:**

How do you feel about the press ethical situation in the UK right now?

What ethical rules or guidelines do you follow on a daily basis?

Has the situation changed since the PCC was forced to shut down? (In your professional life?) (Why/why not? How?)

What kind of relation did you have to the PCC?

Do you think the PCC did a good job?

Do you feel like journalists generally cared about the PCC as a regulating system?

Can you name a specific situation were you've been forced to make a ethical crucial decision during the last year?

Do you ever think about what consequences anything you write can have for the person you write about?

### **Future:**

How do you see the future of the press regulating system in the UK?

What did you think about The Leveson Inquiry when it was published?

What is your opinion about IPSO?