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Journalists Avoiding The News

SELF CENSORSHIP: HOW OFTEN AND WHY

A Survey of Journalists in Association with
Columbia Journalism Review

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SELF CENSORSHIP: HOW OFTEN AND WHY

Self-censorship is commonplace in the news media today, according to a survey of nearly 300 journalists and news executives by the Pew Research Center and the Columbia Journalism Review. About one-quarter of the local and national journalists say they have purposely avoided newsworthy stories, while nearly as many acknowledge they have softened the tone of stories to benefit the interests of their news organizations. Fully four-in-ten (41%) admit they have engaged in *either or both* of these practices.

The poll of 206 reporters and 81 news executives — 150 from local news outlets and 137 from national news organizations — found widespread concern over commercial and competitive pressures. As a result of these pressures, say journalists, good stories all too frequently are *not* pursued.

There is general agreement about the extent of the self-censorship and its principal causes. Market pressures — manifested when newsworthy stories are avoided because they are too boring or complicated — are seen as the most common factor. Majorities in the print and broadcast media acknowledge that newsworthy stories are often or sometimes avoided because of their complexity or lack of audience appeal.

Nearly eight-in-ten (77%) say stories that are seen as important but dull are often (27%) or sometimes avoided (50%). A majority (52%) also says that overly complex stories are at least sometimes ignored. Fewer but still significant percentages report that such stories are not pursued because they conflict with organizational interests. More than one-third (35%) say news that would hurt the financial interests of a news organization often or sometimes goes unreported, while slightly fewer (29%) say the same about stories that could adversely affect advertisers.

Three Kinds of Self -Censorship

Avoidance of stories that audience might find ...

	All	Natl	Local
Too complex	%	%	%
Commonplace	12	15	10
Sometimes	40	47	33
Rarely	33	28	37
Never/Don't know	15	10	20
	100	100	100
Important but dull			
Commonplace	27	30	25
Sometimes	50	54	46
Rarely	16	13	20
Never/Don't know	7	3	9
	100	100	100

Avoidance of stories that could damage ...

	All	Natl	Local
News organization or parent co.	%	%	%
Commonplace	6	3	8
Sometimes	29	28	31
Rarely	40	44	37
Never/Don't know	25	25	24
	100	100	100
Advertisers			
Commonplace	6	3	9
Sometimes	23	20	26
Rarely	44	47	41
Never/Don't know	27	30	24
	100	100	100
Friends of the boss			
Commonplace	2	2	2
Sometimes	16	16	14
Rarely	46	48	48
Never/Don't know	36	34	36
	100	100	100

Avoidance of stories that would hurt reporter's ...

	All	Natl	Local
Relationship with source	%	%	%
Commonplace	6	4	8
Sometimes	36	36	35
Rarely	45	46	45
Never/Don't know	13	14	12
	100	100	100
Standing with other journalists			
Commonplace	7	6	8
Sometimes	31	32	31
Rarely	38	39	37
Never/Don't know	23	23	24
	100	100	100
Career			
Commonplace	5	6	4
Sometimes	33	35	31
Rarely	36	35	38
Never/Don't know	26	24	27
	100	100	100

The survey highlights the difficult challenges faced by local journalists in the increasingly competitive media environment. About one-third (32%) of local reporters acknowledge they have softened the tone of a news story on behalf of the interests of their news organization; only 15% of those in the national media say they have done so. And 26% of local reporters say they have been told to avoid a story because it was dull or overly complicated, but suspect the real reason for the decision was that the story could harm their company's financial interests. Just 2% of national reporters harbor such suspicions.

Investigative journalists, who were surveyed separately from the local and national reporters and editors, are most likely to cite the impact of business pressures on editorial decisions. Fully half of this group — drawn from members of Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) — say newsworthy stories are often or sometimes ignored because they conflict with a news organization's economic interests. More than six-in-ten (61%) believe that corporate owners exert at least a fair amount of influence on decisions about which stories to cover; 51% of local journalists and just 30% of national journalists agree. Since this group is comprised of members of IRE, and thus does not represent a cross-section of journalists, its responses are not included in the total.

Broadcasters Cite Audience Factors

The reasons for avoiding stories can be many and varied. Often, time-starved reporters say they simply do not have the opportunity to follow up on important subjects. But market forces are seen as the primary reason why worthwhile stories are not pursued, and this factor is especially prevalent in the broadcast arena.

Pressures to Avoid Stories

	National		*Local*	
	Print	Brdcst	Print	Brdcst
Journalists commonly/ sometimes avoid story because it might be...	%	%	%	%
Too complicated	47	75	40	57
Ridiculed by other journalists	40	29	43	14
Damaging to financial interests of news org.	23	35	38	39

Three-quarters of national broadcast journalists (and nearly six-in-ten of their local counterparts) say newsworthy stories are at least sometimes ignored because they are regarded as too complicated for the average person. Print journalists, both local and national, are far less likely to cite this as a factor.

In general, local journalists and news executives cite conflicts of interests — financial and otherwise — more often than their national colleagues. In particular, more local than national *print* reporters say stories that are damaging to the financial interests of news organizations are commonly or sometimes avoided. At the local level, print reporters and executives are about as likely as broadcast news professionals to cite this as a reason for ignoring stories. But among national journalists, broadcasters cite this as more of a factor than print reporters.

Perhaps surprisingly, peer pressure — fear of embarrassment or potential career damage — is mentioned by about half of all journalists as a factor for avoiding newsworthy stories. But the survey finds little evidence that journalists steer clear of newsworthy stories because they might aggravate community problems. Only about one-in-five (19%) of all journalists say newsworthy stories are often or sometimes avoided for this reason.

Journalists say that, typically, they do not decide on their own to avoid newsworthy stories. More than half of those who think stories are sometimes ignored (54%) say they either get signals from their bosses to avoid such stories (30%) or ignore them based on how they think their bosses would react (24%). Of those who believe newsworthy stories are being ignored to protect corporate interests, fully three-quarters say journalists get signals or anticipate negative reactions from superiors, and just 8% say journalists decide to avoid such stories completely on their own.

Suspicions, Some Unfounded

Just as journalism is often more art than science, the process of determining when, why and even whether good stories are being ignored is an imperfect one — as journalists themselves freely admit. A strong majority (58%) says that journalists at least sometimes *wrongfully* suspect stories are killed or buried because of conflicts of interest, when the stories in question simply lack merit.

On the other hand, the survey provides considerable evidence that at least for some journalists, there has been an unmistakable intrusion of commercial interests into newsroom decisions. For instance, about one-in-five local (20%) and national (17%) reporters say they have faced criticism or pressure from their bosses after producing or writing a piece that was seen as damaging to their company's financial interests.

Overall, journalists have a more pessimistic attitude toward their profession than in the Pew Research Center's last major poll of journalists in early 1999. More local journalists report influence by corporate owners and advertisers in decisions on which stories to cover. And on the question of whether the media does a good job of informing the public, both local and national journalists give themselves poorer marks than last year.

At that time, about half of national (49%) and local (55%) journalists said the news business did a good or excellent job of balancing journalism's twin goals of telling the public what it *wants* to know and what it *needs* to know. Now, only 37% of national journalists and 35% of local journalists give the profession high marks, with majorities in both groups saying the media does only a fair job at this crucial task.

For the first time, the Center's survey of journalists was conducted online over the Internet. This survey is based on a representative sample of 287 working journalists, editors and news managers, drawn from several media directories. In addition, 90 members of the IRE were also interviewed. The majority of these journalists (243 out of 287) took the survey online. In addition, follow-up mailings and telephone calls were used to encourage participation and, when necessary, to complete interviews by phone or mail. A complete description of the methodology follows. The questionnaire, results and methodology are also available on the Internet at Web sites for the Pew Research Center (www.people-press.org) and Columbia Journalism Review (www.cjr.org).

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Press Sample

Two representative samples were drawn for the press portion of this survey: a *national* news media sample and a *local* news media sample. Both the national and local samples were divided into two groups: print and television (which includes television and radio). For the national sample, the print category includes newspapers, magazines, wire services, and news services; the television category encompasses cable, television and radio networks. For the local sample, the print category includes newspapers from a listing of the top 100 newspapers ranked by circulation, excluding those selected for the national sample; the television category includes stations from the top 100 media markets. Within each of these market/medium strata (national and local, print and television), specific organizational positions (eg., managing editor, correspondent) were selected.

To obtain a sample that represented a cross-section of news organizations and of the people working at all levels of those organizations, the news media were divided into the following groupings:

(1) Importance of medium in terms of size of audience, market or influence.
   a. National audience
   b. Local audience

(2) Type of medium.
   a. Newspapers
   b. News magazines
   c. Wire services
   d. News services
   e. Television stations and networks
   f. Radio stations and networks

(3) Organizational responsibility of the individual respondent.
   a. Executive
   b. Senior editors and producers
   c. Working editors and journalists

Identifying the Samples

National newspapers were identified using circulation numbers in the 1998 edition of *Editor & Publisher*. National television news organizations included the three national networks, major national cable networks, public television, and radio chains with Washington, D.C. bureaus. Particularly for the national sample, every attempt was made to replicate the selection of news organizations used for an earlier Center survey conducted in 1995. The news media executives and journalists in each position within these organizations were drawn from the *News Media Yellow Book*, Summer 1998 edition. A complete listing of the selected national news organizations is below.

Local newspapers were also identified using circulation numbers in the 1998 edition of *Editor & Publisher*. They include the 87 (out of the top 100) papers that were not pulled for the national sample. Local television stations were selected from the top 100 media markets, as listed in the 1996 *Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook.* After the local sample was selected, the *Working Press of the Nation* (published by Editor & Publisher) was used to identify the news media executives and journalists in each organization.

In addition to the main sample of journalists, 90 members of the Investigative Reporters and Editors organization were surveyed online. This group was analyzed separately from the main sample.

Media Organizations Sampled

Respondents were selected using a two-stage sampling procedure. In the first stage, news media organizations were selected and in the second stage individuals were chosen from those organizations. The criteria for selecting national and local news organizations is outlined below.

National Media

Television

ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS, CNN, C-SPAN, CNBC, MSNBC, FOX, Cable News
Chains with Washington, D.C. Bureaus — Gannett, Cox, Conus, Hearst

Radio

Associated Press Radio
ABC Radio Networks
CBS Radio Networks
Westwood One (NBC Radio)
Black Radio Network
National Public Radio

Newspapers

Wall Street Journal
USA Today
New York Times
Los Angeles Times
Washington Post
Chicago Tribune
Long Island/New York Newsday
San Francisco Chronicle
Dallas Morning News
Boston Globe
Detroit Free Press
Miami Herald

Magazines

Newsweek
Time
U.S. News & World Report

Wire Services

Associated Press
Reuters

News Services

Copley
Cox Newspapers
Gannett
Hearst
Knight-Ridder
McClatchy Newspapers
Newhouse
Scripps-Howard
States News Service

Local Media
Television — a random sample was selected from all stations listed in the top 100 media markets.

Print — the top 100 newspapers ranked by circulation were selected, excluding those newspapers selected for the national sample.

Respondents Selected at Each Organization (By Title)

National Sample

Executive Level

TV & Radio: President/CEO, Vice President, General Manager, Station Manager
Print: Publisher, President/CEO, Vice President

Senior Editors and Producers

TV & Radio: News Division Executive, Executive Producer
Print: Assistant Managing Editor, Managing Editor, Executive Editor, Section Editor

Working Journalists and Editors

TV & Radio: Bureau Chief, Senior Producer, Correspondent, Anchor
Print: Bureau Chief, Senior Editor, Columnist, Associate Editor, Reporter, Correspondent, Assignment editor

Local Sample

Executive Level

Television: President/CEO, Vice President, General Manager, Station Manager
Print: Publisher, President/CEO, Vice President

Senior Editors and Producers

Print: Assistant Managing Editor, Managing Editor, Executive Editor, Business, Metro and Editorial Section Editors
Television: News Director

Working Journalists and Editors

Television: Producer, Correspondent
Print: National Editor, Editor, Reporter, Senior Editor, National and Foreign Editors, Associate Editors, Columnist

Survey Procedures

Each person sampled for this survey was mailed an advance letter. The letters were intended to introduce the survey to prospective respondents, describe the nature and purpose of the survey and encourage participation. The letter was sent from the Pew Research Center and the Columbia Journalism Review. The letters invited respondents to take the survey online, by visiting a secure Internet web site. In addition, follow-up mailings and telephone calls were used to encourage participation in the survey and, when necessary, to complete the interview by phone or by mail rather than online.

The survey was conduced in February and March, 2000. Overall, 30% of the journalists, editors, and managers who were selected participated in the survey.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER AND COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW
SURVEY OF JOURNALISTS
FINAL TOPLINE
FEBRUARY 8 - MARCH 21, 2000 N=287(National and Local)
N=90 (Investigative)

1. What do you feel is the most important problem facing journalism today? **(OPEN-END)**

		National			*Local*			Investigative
Total[1]		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
15	Credibility problem	15	5	19	15	22	13	23
10	Coverage should be less sensationalized	13	10	16	7	8	7	9
8	Corporate ownership	9	10	8	7	3	9	7
6	Too much emphasis on costs/profits	6	8	4	7	0	5	13
6	Competing with other forms of media	8	10	8	4	8	4	4
3	Reporting accurately/factually	5	0	8	2	8	0	3
3	Financial cutbacks/budget constraints	4	5	4	3	5	2	1
3	Making sure coverage is relevant	3	0	4	3	3	4	2
2	Reporting objectively/fairly	1	0	1	3	3	3	3
2	Decline in circulation/audience	1	0	1	4	3	4	3
2	Competition damaging to journalism	2	0	3	2	0	3	1
2	Staffing problems/Not enough quality journalists	3	0	4	2	3	2	8
2	Confusion between opinions and reporting	4	3	6	0	0	0	1
2	Attracting readers/viewers/listeners	0	0	0	3	8	2	1
2	24 hour/Around the clock competition	1	3	1	2	0	3	3
2	Ratings take precedence	0	0	0	3	3	4	1
25	Other	24	42	18	26	27	27	31
21	No answer	20	24	17	22	8	23	11
37	**BUSINESS/FINANCIAL (NET)**	**35**	**37**	**36**	**38**	**35**	**40**	**40**
24	**Economic pressures(subnet)**	**23**	**24**	**24**	**25**	**24**	**24**	**32**
11	**Competition(subnet)**	**13**	**16**	**13**	**9**	**11**	**11**	**11**
2	**Commercialism (subnet)**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**5**	**3**	**6**	**1**
27	**QUALITY AND STANDARDS (NET)**	**30**	**24**	**34**	**23**	**30**	**23**	**27**
25	**Quality of coverage (subnet)**	**28**	**21**	**31**	**22**	**30**	**21**	**24**
1	**Quality of writing (subnet)**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**0**
1	**Ethics and Standards (subnet)**	**1**	**0**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**2**
19	**CREDIBILITY/TRUSTWORTHINESS (NET)**	**18**	**8**	**22**	**19**	**27**	**17**	**24**
4	**PUBLIC'S APPETITE**	**3**	**5**	**2**	**5**	**8**	**4**	**4**

[1] The Total column (N=287) is based on National (N=137) and Local (N=150) subgroups. "Investigative journalists" is a discrete category.

2. Here are some things being talked about in journalism today. For each one, please say whether it is having a positive effect on journalism, having a negative effect on journalism, or isn't having much of an effect.

		National			*Local*			Investigative
Total		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
	a. The increasing number of cable news outlets							
52	Positive Effect	51	63	47	53	46	58	46
28	Negative Effect	31	24	33	25	24	24	27
14	Not Much Effect	10	13	10	17	24	13	22
6	Don't Know/Refused	8	-	10	5	6	5	5
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	b. Television shifting more to a magazine format							
21	Positive Effect	22	31	19	21	11	26	31
53	Negative Effect	55	45	60	51	51	52	42
25	Not Much Effect	22	24	20	27	35	22	26
1	Don't Know/Refused	1	0	1	1	3	0	1
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	c. Buyouts of local newspapers by large newspaper chains							
7	Positive Effect	7	8	6	7	11	5	10
73	Negative Effect	73	79	70	73	62	77	81
18	Not Much Effect	17	10	22	18	24	16	9
2	Don't Know/Refused	3	3	2	2	3	2	0
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	d. Buyouts of news organizations by diversified corporations							
6	Positive Effect	8	13	6	3	3	4	3
73	Negative Effect	71	68	71	75	73	74	84
18	Not Much Effect	19	16	22	18	21	19	12
3	Don't Know/Refused	2	3	1	4	3	3	1
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	e. The emergence of online-only news pages and magazines							
58	Positive Effect	61	58	61	55	49	56	58
19	Negative Effect	20	21	19	18	22	16	25
20	Not Much Effect	16	16	18	24	24	26	17
3	Don't Know/Refused	3	5	2	3	5	2	0
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

3. How good a job does journalism do striking a balance between the two goals of what audiences want to know and what's important for them to know?

		National			*Local*			Investigative
Total		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
36	Excellent/Good	37	39	37	35	40	34	38
2	Excellent	2	5	1	2	5	1	2
34	Good	35	34	36	33	35	33	36
61	Fair/Poor	60	58	61	62	60	62	62
56	Only fair	55	53	55	57	60	56	58
5	Poor	5	5	6	5	0	6	4
3	Don't Know/Refused	3	3	2	3	0	4	0
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

4. In your opinion, to what extent do corporate owners influence news organizations' decisions about which stories to cover or emphasize?

		National			*Local*			Investigative
Total		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
39	A great deal/A fair amount	34	42	30	45	27	51	61
9	A great deal	5	5	4	13	3	16	17
30	A fair amount	29	37	26	32	24	35	44
58	Not very much/Not at all	64	55	69	52	70	47	38
54	Not very much	60	47	67	48	65	43	38
4	Not at all	4	8	2	4	5	4	0
3	Don't Know/Refused	2	3	1	3	3	2	1
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

5. In your opinion, to what extent do advertising concerns influence news organizations' decisions about which stories to cover or emphasize?

		National			*Local*			Investigative
Total		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
28	A great deal/A fair amount	22	31	17	34	8	43	49
5	A great deal	3	5	2	7	0	9	11
23	A fair amount	19	26	15	27	8	34	38
70	Not very much/Not at all	76	66	82	65	92	56	51
60	Not very much	66	50	75	54	73	47	43
10	Not at all	10	16	7	11	19	9	8
2	Don't Know/Refused	2	3	1	1	0	1	0
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Now, turning to another topic...

6. In your experience, do journalists sometimes purposely avoid covering certain stories that they believe are truly newsworthy?

		National			*Local*			Investigative
Total		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
37	Yes	31	40	25	41	24	42	55
62	No	68	60	75	57	73	57	43
1	Don't Know/Refused	1	0	0	2	3	1	2
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

ASK Q.7 THRU Q.11 ONLY IF ANSWERED "YES" (Q.6 = 1), IF ANSWERED "NO"(Q.6 = 2 or 3), SKIP TO Q.12

7. What would you say is the main reason *why* journalists sometimes avoid covering stories they believe are newsworthy? **(OPEN-END)**

BASED ON THOSE WHO THINK JOURNALISTS SOMETIMES PURPOSELY AVOID NEWSWORTHY STORIES [N=105]:

Total		National	Local	Investigative Journalists
35	**CORPORATE MANAGEMENT RESTRAINTS(NET)**	**26**	**42**	**47**
15	Bosses/Editors/Management wouldn't support	14	16	33
7	Advertising concerns	2	10	2
6	Corporate concerns	0	10	12
4	Bosses/Managers would retaliate	0	6	2
3	Internal politics	5	2	2
2	Corporate anger	2	2	0
2	Never get published (unspecified)	0	3	2
2	All other corporate/management concerns	2	2	0
30	**PERSONAL CONSTRAINTS (NET)**	**30**	**29**	**27**
16	Lack of time/resources	16	16	16
5	Laziness	2	6	8
1	Priorities	2	0	2
10	All other personal constraints	9	10	2
17	**AUDIENCE READERSHIP (NET)**	**21**	**15**	**8**
10	No audience/Not marketable audience	14	6	2
3	Ratings competition	5	2	4
3	Fear of angering audience	0	5	0
2	Political correctness	2	2	2
1	Fear of angering group being covered	2	0	0
8	**STORY LIMITS (NET)**	**9**	**6**	**4**
7	Too complex	7	6	4
1	Dull	2	0	0
3	Other	5	2	8
23	No response	23	23	18
		(n=43)	**(n=62)**	**(n=49)**

8. Typically, do journalists...

BASED ON THOSE WHO THINK JOURNALISTS SOMETIMES PURPOSELY AVOID NEWSWORTHY STORIES [N=105]:

Total		National	Local	Investigative Journalists
22	decide to avoid these stories on their own	16	26	14
24	decide to avoid these stories based on how they believe their bosses would respond to the stories?	35	17	31
30	get signals from their bosses to avoid these stories?	28	31	35
13	some other reason	14	13	10
11	Don't Know/Refused	7	13	8
100		100	100	100

ASK Q.9 THRU Q.11 ONLY IF ANSWERED "JOURNALISTS GET SIGNALS" (Q.8 = 3):
9.When journalists get signals from their bosses to avoid some stories...
What types of signals do they get? **(OPEN-END)**

BASED ON THOSE WHO SAY JOURNALISTS GET SIGNALS FROM BOSSES TO AVOID STORIES [N=31]:

Total		National	Local	Investigative Journalists
35	**DIRECT (NET)**	33	37	41
16	Don't Cover	17	16	24
10	Overt instructions about what kinds of stories to cover/avoid	8	11	0
10	Pretty clear	8	11	18
32	**INDIRECT (NET)**	25	37	65
13	Lack of interest in stories/ Stories don't get published/aired	17	11	41
13	Yawns/Hemming/Hawing	8	16	18
3	Banter/Jokes	0	5	6
3	Failure to free time/resources	0	5	18
3	Pleas for different stories	0	5	0
10	Warnings of declining budget/ No support in response to story	8	11	0
6	Dull	8	5	0
6	Ratings/No audience	17	0	12
3	Not newsworthy	8	0	0
3	Too expensive	0	5	0
3	No response	8	0	0

10. And what types of topics attract these signals? **(OPEN-END)**

BASED ON THOSE WHO SAY JOURNALISTS GET SIGNALS FROM BOSSES TO AVOID STORIES [N=31]:

Total		National	Local	Investigative Journalists
26	**TYPES (NET)**	**42**	**16**	**18**
13	Complicated/Complex/Hard	25	5	12
6	Investigative	8	5	12
3	Thinking/Academic	0	5	0
3	Speciality stories/Narrowcast	8	0	0
39	**SUBJECTS (NET)**	**33**	**42**	**41**
13	Politics	0	21	12
10	Economic (general)	8	11	0
6	Financial (corporate power, consumer)	8	5	24
6	International/Foreign affairs	17	0	6
3	Domestic Issues	0	5	0
3	Poor	0	5	12
3	Health/AIDS/Medical stories	8	0	0
3	Morality/Sex	8	0	0
3	Education	0	5	0
16	**POSSIBLE REACTIONS(NET)**	**8**	**21**	**6**
16	Stories that could alienate advertisers	8	21	0
3	Stories that could alienate local elites	0	5	0
0	Stories that could alienate (general)	0	0	6
3	Other	0	5	6
26	No response	25	26	35

11. What topics are "safe subjects" — that is, are *least likely* to attract these signals? **(OPEN-END)**

BASED ON THOSE WHO SAY JOURNALISTS GET SIGNALS FROM BOSSES TO AVOID STORIES [N=31]:

Total		National	Local	Investigative Journalists
29	**SUBJECTS (NET)**	**33**	**26**	**41**
13	Health/AIDS	25	5	0
10	Economic (general)	8	11	12
6	Politics	8	5	6
3	Financial	8	0	0
3	Crime	0	5	24
3	Government	0	5	6
0	The Poor/Needy	0	0	6
23	**TYPES (NET)**	**17**	**26**	**12**
13	Non-controversial/soft/puff	8	16	6
3	Typical controversies	8	0	0
3	Specialty stories/Narrowcast	0	5	0
3	Stories that don't alienate advertisers	0	5	0
0	Short/Simple	0	0	6
6	Other	17	0	12
42	No response	33	47	41

ASK ALL:

12. Here are some reasons for purposely avoiding truly newsworthy stories. How often, if ever, do you think the journalists you know avoid a newsworthy story because...

Total		*National*			*Local*			Investigative
		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
	a. the story is seen as too complicated for the average reader							
52	Commonplace/Sometimes	62	63	61	43	41	45	59
12	Commonplace	15	10	15	10	6	12	11
40	Sometimes	47	53	46	33	35	33	48
42	Rarely/Never	35	34	38	48	54	48	31
33	Rarely	28	24	33	37	41	38	27
9	Never	7	10	5	11	13	10	4
6	Don't Know/Refused	3	3	1	9	5	7	10
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	b. the story is seen as important but dull							
77	Commonplace/Sometimes	84	79	85	71	62	76	77
27	Commonplace	30	29	32	25	13	29	33
50	Sometimes	54	50	53	46	49	47	44
20	Rarely/Never	15	21	14	25	33	23	19
16	Rarely	13	21	10	20	25	19	13
4	Never	2	0	4	5	8	4	6
3	Don't Know/Refused	1	0	1	4	5	1	4
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Q.12 CONTINUED ...

Total		*National* Total	*National* Exec	*National* Journ	*Local* Total	*Local* Exec	*Local* Journ	Investigative Journalists
	c. the story would hurt a reporter's relationship with a source							
42	Commonplace/Sometimes	40	34	42	43	32	48	57
	6 Commonplace	4	5	4	8	2	10	5
	36 Sometimes	36	29	38	35	30	38	52
54	Rarely/Never	57	63	56	52	60	51	38
	45 Rarely	46	42	48	45	46	47	30
	9 Never	11	21	8	7	14	4	8
4	Don't Know/Refused	3	3	2	5	8	1	5
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	d. the story would draw attention to or worsen a community problem							
19	Commonplace/Sometimes	13	8	13	23	27	23	27
	2 Commonplace	1	3	0	3	0	5	1
	17 Sometimes	12	5	13	20	27	18	26
77	Rarely/Never	83	89	82	72	68	76	69
	54 Rarely	59	63	60	49	49	52	40
	23 Never	24	26	22	23	19	24	29
4	Don't Know/Refused	4	3	5	5	5	1	4
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	e. the story might be ridiculed or frowned on by other journalists							
38	Commonplace/Sometimes	38	42	32	39	38	39	32
	7 Commonplace	6	10	4	8	5	7	12
	31 Sometimes	32	32	28	31	33	32	20
58	Rarely/Never	59	55	66	56	54	60	62
	39 Rarely	39	29	47	37	40	38	37
	19 Never	20	26	19	19	14	22	25
4	Don't Know/Refused	3	3	2	5	8	1	6
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	f. the story would be embarrassing or damaging to the financial interests of a news organization's owners or parent company							
35	Commonplace/Sometimes	31	42	28	39	32	44	50
	6 Commonplace	3	5	3	8	0	11	17
	29 Sometimes	28	37	25	31	32	33	33
61	Rarely/Sometimes	67	58	72	55	60	55	44
	40 Rarely	44	37	47	37	33	40	24
	21 Never	23	21	25	18	27	15	20
4	Don't Know/Refused	2	0	0	6	8	1	6
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Q.12 CONTINUED ...

Total		*National* Total	*National* Exec	*National* Journ	*Local* Total	*Local* Exec	*Local* Journ	Investigative Journalists
	g. the story would be embarrassing or damaging to a news organization's advertisers							
29	Commonplace/Sometimes	23	34	19	35	24	39	40
6	Commonplace	3	2	3	9	3	12	11
23	Sometimes	20	32	16	26	21	27	29
66	Rarely/Never	75	66	80	59	65	60	54
44	Rarely	47	40	51	41	32	45	36
22	Never	28	26	29	18	33	15	18
5	Don't Know/Refused	2	0	1	6	11	1	6
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	h. the story would be embarrassing or damaging to friends or associates of a news organization's owners							
24	Commonplace/Sometimes	18	18	16	29	16	32	30
4	Commonplace	2	2	2	5	0	6	9
20	Sometimes	16	16	14	24	16	26	21
72	Rarely/Never	79	82	82	66	79	67	63
46	Rarely	46	48	48	46	52	47	39
26	Never	33	34	34	20	27	20	24
4	Don't Know/Refused	3	0	2	5	5	1	7
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	i. the story would be embarrassing or damaging to friends of a news organization's editors							
20	Commonplace/Sometimes	15	18	15	24	16	28	31
3	Commonplace	2	2	2	4	0	6	3
17	Sometimes	13	16	13	20	16	22	28
75	Rarely/Never	79	74	83	71	79	71	62
46	Rarely	48	37	53	44	49	42	38
29	Never	31	37	30	27	30	29	24
5	Don't Know/Refused	6	8	2	5	5	1	7
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	j. the story would be damaging to a journalist's career							
38	Commonplace/Sometimes	41	39	42	35	38	34	37
5	Commonplace	6	5	6	4	0	5	7
33	Sometimes	35	34	36	31	38	29	30
55	Rarely/Never	52	58	53	59	57	65	59
36	Rarely	35	40	36	38	35	41	39
19	Never	17	18	17	21	22	24	20
7	Don't Know/Refused	7	3	5	6	5	1	4
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

IF ANSWERED "COMMONPLACE" OR "SOMETIMES" IN Q.12 ITEM f (Q.12f = 1 OR 2), ASK:

13. When journalists avoid stories because they would be embarrassing or damaging to the financial interests of a news organization's *owners or parent company*, do journalists...

BASED ON THOSE WHO SAID JOURNALISTS AVOID STORIES BECAUSE THEY WOULD BE DAMAGING TO FINANCIAL INTERESTS OF NEWS ORGANIZATION'S OWNERS [N=101]:

Total		National	Local	Investigative Journalists
8	decide to avoid these stories on their own?	2	12	4
30	decide to avoid these stories based on how they believe their bosses would respond to the stories?	24	35	33
45	get signals from their bosses to avoid these stories?	49	43	56
9	some other reason	16	3	7
8	Don't Know/Refused	9	7	0
100		100	100	100
		(n=43)	**(n=58)**	**(n=45)**

IF ANSWERED "COMMONPLACE" OR "SOMETIMES" IN Q.12 ITEM g (Q.12g = 1 OR 2), ASK:

14. When journalists avoid stories because they would be embarrassing or damaging to a news organization's *advertisers*, do journalists...

BASED ON THOSE WHO SAID JOURNALISTS AVOID STORIES BECAUSE THEY WOULD BE DAMAGING TO NEWS ORGANIZATION'S ADVERTISERS [N=84]:

Total		National	Local	Investigative Journalists
4	decide to avoid these stories on their own?	6	2	6
24	decide to avoid these stories based on how they believe their bosses would respond to the stories?	35	17	19
57	get signals from their bosses to avoid these stories?	44	65	67
6	some other reason	9	4	5
9	Don't Know/Refused	6	12	3
100		100	100	100
		(n=32)	**(n=52)**	**(n=36)**

ASK ALL:

15. How often, if ever, do journalists mistakenly *think* a story is killed or buried because it is embarrassing or damaging to the financial interests of a news organization's owners or parent company, when it is actually killed or buried because it is a not a good news story?

			National			*Local*			Investigative
Total			Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
58	Commonplace/Sometimes		58	66	59	58	62	61	67
10		Commonplace	9	13	9	10	16	7	12
48		Sometimes	49	53	50	48	46	54	55
34	Rarely/Never		36	32	38	32	30	35	30
29		Rarely	29	21	33	28	30	29	28
5		Never	7	11	5	4	0	6	2
8	Don't Know/Refused		6	2	3	10	8	4	3
100			100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Now a few questions about YOUR OWN experiences...

16. Do you sometimes purposely avoid covering certain stories that you believe are truly newsworthy?

		National			*Local*			Investigative
Total		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
26	Yes	26	18	27	26	8	31	28
69	No	70	82	71	69	89	68	69
5	Don't Know/Refused	4	0	2	5	3	1	3
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

IF "YES" IN Q.16 (Q.16 = 1) , ASK Q.17 THRU 19: IF "NO" (Q.16 = 2 OR 9), SKIP TO Q.20

17. What is the main reason *why* you sometimes avoid covering stories you believe are newsworthy? **(OPEN-END)**

BASED ON THOSE JOURNALISTS WHO SAID THEY THEMSELVES SOMETIMES PURPOSELY AVOID COVERING STORIES [N= 74]:

				Investigative
Total		National	Local	Journalists
41	**CONTENT CONSTRAINTS**	**46**	**36**	**56**
20	Time pressures	14	26	40
7	Too complicated	11	3	8
7	Boring	11	3	4
5	TV wrong medium	6	5	8
4	Audience not interested	9	0	0
1	Competition	0	3	0
1	Not newsworthy	0	3	0
34	**MANAGEMENT CONSTRAINTS**	**29**	**38**	**24**
19	Editor/Boss doesn't want	20	18	16
9	Past experience/tired of fight	3	15	4
3	Concern about ownership	3	3	0
1	Internal politics	3	0	0
1	Career concerns	0	3	0
0	Concern about advertisers	0	0	4
5	**PERSONAL REASONS**	**9**	**3**	**4**
1	Not interested in story	3	0	0
3	Misc. personal reasons	3	3	0
1	Laziness	3	0	4
8	Other	6	10	16
15	No response	14	15	4
		(n=35)	**(n=39)**	**(n=25)**

18. Typically, do you..

BASED ON THOSE JOURNALISTS WHO SAID THEY THEMSELVES SOMETIMES PURPOSELY AVOID COVERING STORIES [N= 74]:

				Investigative
Total		National	Local	Journalists
38	decide to avoid these stories on their own?	43	33	32
15	decide to avoid these stories based on how they believe their bosses would respond to the stories?	11	18	28
19	get signals from their bosses to avoid these stories?	17	21	20
9	some other reason	9	10	8
19	Don't Know/Refused	20	18	12
100		100	100	100

19.How often, if ever, do you avoid a truly newsworthy story because..**[N=72]**

Total			National	Local	Investigative Journalists
	a. the story would be seen as too complicated for the average reader				
40	Often/Sometimes		44	37	26
	7	Often	9	5	0
	33	Sometimes	35	32	26
60	Rarely/Never		56	63	74
	35	Rarely	32	37	57
	25	Never	24	26	17
0	Don't Know/Refused		0	0	0
100			100	100	100
	b. the story would be seen as important but dull				
58	Often/Sometimes		65	53	52
	12	Often	15	11	4
	46	Sometimes	50	42	48
40	Rarely/Never		32	47	48
	28	Rarely	26	29	31
	12	Never	6	18	17
2	Don't Know/Refused		3	0	0
100			100	100	100
	c. the story would hurt your relationship with a source				
18	Often/Sometimes		15	21	17
	0	Often	0	0	0
	18	Sometimes	15	21	17
79	Rarely/Never		85	74	74
	42	Rarely	47	37	26
	37	Never	38	37	48
3	Don't Know/Refused		0	5	9
100			100	100	100
	d. the story would draw attention to or worsen a community problem				
12	Often/Sometimes		9	16	4
	1	Often	0	3	0
	11	Sometimes	9	13	4
85	Rarely/Never		88	82	96
	24	Rarely	26	21	31
	61	Never	62	61	65
3	Don't Know/Refused		3	2	0
100			100	100	100

19. CONTINUED ...

Total			National	Local	Investigative Journalists
	e. the story might be ridiculed or frowned on by other journalists				
7	Often/Sometimes		6	8	9
	3	Often	0	5	0
	4	Sometimes	6	3	9
92	Rarely/Never		94	89	91
	25	Rarely	23	26	13
	67	Never	71	63	78
1	Don't Know/Refused		0	3	0
100			100	100	100
	f. the story would be embarrassing or damaging to the financial interests of your news organization's owners or parent company				
18	Often/Sometimes		12	24	13
	3	Often	3	3	0
	15	Sometimes	9	21	13
81	Rarely/Never		88	74	87
	21	Rarely	12	29	26
	60	Never	76	45	61
1	Don't Know/Refused		0	2	0
100			100	100	100
	g. the story would be embarrassing or damaging to your news organization's advertisers				
13	Often/Sometimes		6	18	18
	2	Often	0	2	0
	11	Sometimes	6	16	18
86	Rarely/Never		94	79	78
	15	Rarely	15	16	22
	71	Never	79	63	56
1	Don't Know/Refused		0	3	4
100			100	100	100
	h. the story would be embarrassing or damaging to friends or associates of your news organization's owners				
8	Often/Sometimes		6	10	13
	3	Often	3	2	0
	5	Sometimes	3	8	13
90	Rarely/Never		94	87	83
	22	Rarely	12	32	13
	68	Never	82	55	70
2	Don't Know/Refused		0	3	4
100			100	100	100

19. CONTINUED ...

Total			National	Local	Investigative Journalists
	i. the story would be embarrassing or damaging to friends or associates of your editors				
8	Often/Sometimes		6	11	9
	3	Often	3	3	0
	5	Sometimes	3	8	9
86	Rarely/Never		85	86	91
	25	Rarely	15	35	22
	61	Never	70	51	69
6	Don't Know/Refused		9	3	0
100			100	100	100
	j. the story would be damaging to your career				
11	Often/Sometimes		6	16	18
	1	Often	0	3	0
	10	Sometimes	6	13	18
86	Rarely/Sometimes		94	79	82
	47	Rarely	59	35	32
	39	Never	35	44	50
3	Don't Know/Refused		0	5	0
100			100	100	100
			(n=34)	**(n=38)**	**(n=23)**

ASK ALL:

20. Have you ever softened the *tone or angle* of a news story on behalf of the interests of your news organization?

		National			*Local*			Investigative
Total		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
23	Yes	17	26	15	29	33	32	23
69	No	77	71	84	61	62	66	69
8	Don't Know/Refused	6	3	1	10	5	2	8
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

21. Have you ever been asked or told to avoid a newsworthy story because it was too complicated or not interesting — but suspected the actual reason was the story might be embarrassing or damaging to the financial interests of your news organization's owners or parent company?

		National			*Local*			Investigative
Total		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
13	Yes	4	10	2	20	13	26	34
80	No	90	90	97	71	87	72	58
7	Don't Know/Refused	6	0	1	9	0	2	8
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

22 Have you ever been criticized or felt pressure from superiors *after* a news story you worked on came out because that story was seen as embarrassing or damaging to the financial interests of your news organization's owners or parent company?

		National			*Local*			Investigative
Total		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
19	Yes	17	21	17	20	27	20	19
74	No	77	79	82	71	73	78	72
7	Don't know/Refused	6	0	1	9	0	2	9
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Finally, a few background questions so we can describe the types of journalists who took part in this survey...

23. What type of news organization do you work for?

		National			*Local*			Investigative
Total		Total	Exec	Journ	Total	Exec	Journ	Journalists
51	Newspaper	29	21	35	70	79	73	62
3	Magazine	6	5	7	1	0	1	6
4	News Service	9	8	10	1	0	0	3
26	Television	36	40	36	17	16	21	16
4	Radio	9	10	9	1	0	1	0
4	Internet	5	13	2	2	5	2	0
1	Other	1	3	1	0	0	1	4
7	Don't Know/Refused	5	0	0	8	0	1	9
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100