

The finding that formal sources of ethical norms are relatively unimportant is consistent with the findings of American research into ethics codes (Pritchard & Morgan, 1989) and news ombudsmen (Pritchard, 1993). Ethics in Canadian journalism, as in American, may be much more individual and idiosyncratic than any formal set of guidelines.

The finding of ethical boldness flows from the fact that clear majorities of both anglophones and francophones would be willing to consider using hidden microphones or cameras, to report the criminal record of someone police say is a murder suspect, and to use re-creations or dramatizations of news events by actors. Even when reporting something would violate unambiguous legal rules (e.g., publishing the name of a living victim of a sexual assault, violating a publication ban issued by a judge, eavesdropping on cellular phone conversations), substantial minorities of Canadian journalists would consider disseminating the information, at least in some circumstances.

Respondents were more ethically cautious when it came to financial conflict of interest; less than a third would consider accepting free travel from a company, even though such behavior is perfectly legal. Journalists were most ethically pure when it came to keeping their word; almost all of the survey's respondents said they would never break a promise of confidentiality to a source.

Although there were some differences between anglophones and francophones as to the kinds of behaviors that could sometimes be justified, the similarities between the two groups were far more striking than the differences.