

Canadian Journalists' Views on Media Law and Ethics

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Although Canadian journalism in many ways resembles the journalism practiced in the United States (Pritchard & Sauvageau, 1997), the normative context of Canadian journalism -- the set of laws and professional norms that govern the craft -- is distinct.

Canadian law and ethical norms place greater controls on the practice of journalism than do American law and ethical norms (Pritchard 1991, in press; Kijeski 1995). In addition, many observers stress the differences between francophone and anglophone news organizations in Canada, and studies have documented English-language media cover Canadian political events quite differently from French-language media (Siegel, 1977; Robinson, 1984; Robinson & Charron, 1989). It is quite possible, accordingly, that francophone and anglophone journalists have different views on legal and ethics issues.

The legal rules that govern the practice of journalism in Canada have been detailed by a number of researchers (e.g., Trudel 1984, Vallières 1985, Martin & Adam 1994). In recent years scholars and professional groups also have paid increasing attention to ethical norms in Canadian journalism (Bernier 1994, Russell 1994, Fédération Professionnelle des Journalistes du Québec 1995).

Such work focuses on how journalists *should* behave, rather than on how they actually *do* behave when confronted with situations that have legal and/or ethical implications. The implicit assumption underlying normative research of this kind is that legal rules and ethical norms have a direct influence on journalists' behavior.