

**“Front Page” and “Truth Searcher” Journalists:
An Alternative Method of Categorizing Movie Journalists and Analyzing Narratives**

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Introduction

As the press is the “fourth estate” in democracies, the image of the journalist is vital for maintaining public trust in this institution. This image, however, depends not only on journalists themselves but also on other factors. For example, cinema profoundly affects the images of journalists by presenting recurring characters, archetypes, and myths.

Many scholars have already examined, identified, and categorized journalist characters in films. However, the categorizations that those scholars have offered may not offer a broad enough perspective on what cinema says and reinforces about the journalist. Thus this article will present an alternative framework for studying movie journalists and film narratives. The article highlights two main character types in films in terms of the journalist’s stance and his or her conduct: “Front Page” and “Truth Searcher” journalists. These two character types are drawn from previous scholarly studies, journalistic principles, and two cornerstone journalism films in cinema history: *The Front Page*, which created ongoing journalist stereotypes, and *All the President’s Men*, which portrayed ideal journalists.

Hollywood movies present archetypes such as heroes and scoundrels and address society’s problems. However, there has been limited research focusing specifically on the narrative structures of journalism movies. This article, therefore, also aims to uncover the journalistic archetypes, myths, discourses, and messages found in the films by analyzing those

narrative structures. It examines three films in this respect: *Spotlight*, *Truth*, and *Nightcrawler*, all of which were produced after 2010 and all of which feature a journalist as a main character.

Literature Review

A. Importance of Examining the Images of the Journalist in Films

Cinema is not just a medium that entertains people and let them escape from the world for two hours, but also a cultural product that represents and reflects its society and its time period. As Douglas Kellner says, cinema presents visions “either [by] reproducing conventional modes of seeing and experiencing the world or enabling one to perceive things one has not viewed or experienced.” Films, therefore, can provide “deeper and more critical visions [about] human beings, social relations or historical processes,”¹ create and reinforce myths, and establish stereotypes and images about gender, ethnicity, nations, institutions, professionals, and social and political issues.

As the continuous subject of cinema, journalism is not immune to those image-making processes. Scholars who have studied the image of the journalist in popular culture agree that Hollywood constantly reinforces stereotyped journalist characters and creates myths about journalism. Howard Good, one of the first to study the image of the journalist in novels and films, says, “My first impressions of the world beyond my immediate experience came from films (and TV), and that they may have been the most lasting.”² Matthew Ehrlich and Joe Saltzman argue that the public’s ideas about the press, “whether positive or negative, are shaped by the image of the journalist in popular culture”³ because few people are ever acquainted with journalists in their daily lives or visit a newsroom. Because of that, “Hollywood has a virtual monopoly on the public’s image of the press,” as Thomas Zynda

argues,⁴ and “those portrayals may not only shape the public’s view . . . but also form current journalists’ self-expectations,” as Jessica Strait points out.⁵

Moreover, those images affect the American public’s love-hate relationship with the press that public opinion surveys highlight.⁶ Loren Ghiglione and Saltzman argue that the public’s ambivalent feelings come mainly from movies and TV shows.⁷ Saltzman adds that the image of the journalist “swirls between the real and the fictional images without discrimination” given that the public “seldom distinguishes” between the two.⁸

All of these studies show that not only journalists themselves but also the cinema, and in a broad sense popular culture, are responsible for the lasting public images of journalism. In that respect, as this article suggests, it is important to examine how cinema presents “ways of seeing and experiencing” journalism⁹ and what Hollywood’s “virtual monopoly” on the public’s image of the press is.

B. Effect of Two Prominent Movies on Journalism’s Image

Cinema’s portrayal of the press dates back to the silent era.¹⁰ Since then, Hollywood has depicted journalists in almost every genre, whether as a protagonist, a supporting character, or just as a bit player. According to the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Database, there have been thousands of movies and television films about journalism.¹¹ Out of all those films, *The Front Page* (Lewis Milestone, 1931) and *All the President’s Men* (Alan J. Pakula, 1976) seem the most important in that they have created lasting journalistic archetypes and functioned as sources and inspirations for their successors.

First appearing as a play and then as a film, *The Front Page* has created the most prominent and persistent image about the journalist in cinema. Alex Barris explains its significance:

It set a pattern that was to be used again and again, followed, imitated, distorted, sometimes equaled, and occasionally improved upon. In all the bumpy history of Hollywood, nothing has been more evident than that blind adherence to the philosophy of Me-Tooism that leads producers to believe that if one man can turn out a successful movie on a given theme, then anyone can achieve equal success merely by copying the original. The remarkable thing is how often audiences will sit still for this sort of shabby treatment.¹²

The film “created the “prototype of the journalism movie genre”¹³ and “became the yardstick by which virtually all newspaper movies for the next several decades would be measured,”¹⁴ with journalists in films often continuing to be “an echo of *The Front Page* reporter of the 1930s.”¹⁵

Barris points out that the film became the part of the mythology about American newspaper reporters: “The Story was always their prime consideration, that to get The Story, any means were justified, any deceit pardonable, any extreme understandable.”¹⁶ According to Ehrlich and Saltzman, “The film established a useful template about the tyrannical editor and the young reporter in bitter thrall to him, the ignored love interest, and the thrill of scoops and the depths to which the press would stoop in pursuit of them.”¹⁷ For Zynda, the stereotype of the journalist the movie created is “the street-wise, hard-driving, utterly unscrupulous journalist who will do anything for a story.”¹⁸

In the film, the journalist is likable, chatty, and clever. He, however, can distort and fabricate news. He “understands news in terms of its emotional effect, and hence is interested in scoops and scandals rather than information; looks upon both the public and his fellow journalists with contempt; feels fulfilled by reporting.”¹⁹ He also can “insult everyone he meets, be shrewd, sardonic, and if necessary (and sometimes even if unnecessary) ruthless.”²⁰ In terms of appearance, the journalist is handsome, young, “wears his rumpled fedora inside,

keeps a whiskey flask in his bottom desk drawer, wisecracks out of one side of his mouth while smoking a dangling cigarette out of the other.”²¹ At the same time, the press corps is shown as reckless, lying, “callous and cynical.”²² The main characteristics of the journalist that *The Front Page* created “carried over with relatively little variation into the portrayal of radio and television news people and later of cyber journalists.”²³

By the 1950s, more serious and professional characters emerged in films. Zynda explains the changes in the image of the journalist over time:

1930s films emphasize the unconventional nature of journalists and life in the press; this focus widens in the 1940s to an image of the press as a unique instrument of power. Films in the 1950s portray the press as an established business, and with the early 1960s they begin examining the nature of truth as a media problem. The 1970s films renew the examination of the press as an organization. Along with these changes, the movie reporter evolves from a simple newsmonger into a serious and careful journalist.²⁴

All the President’s Men, which depicts *Washington Post* correspondents Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward investigating the Watergate scandal, is an excellent model for serious and careful journalists. For Daniel Hallin, the image of the journalist has evolved in popular culture “from the rowdy, corrupt, politically-entangled ambulance-chaser of *The Front Page* to the altruistic professionals of *All the President’s Men*.”²⁵

In the film, the journalists are principled professionals who prioritize the public interest over their own interests and dedicate themselves to uncovering the truth, standing up against oppressors, and upholding professional principles.²⁶ The film “combines some earlier imagery of the newsroom with a picture of the press as the protector of democracy. The journalists in the film are on the side of the truth . . . combining a nose for news with knowledge of what the public needs to know about its government.”²⁷ They “represent a shining of truth against the menacing corruption of the nation’s capital.”²⁸

In that regard, the film created an “ideal” journalist archetype. The film represented “a significant moment in the elevation of the American journalist to mythical status,”²⁹ presented a “heroic-journalist” myth,³⁰ and embodied “the central myth of American journalism.”³¹

Meanwhile, the most negative aspects of *The Front Page*-style journalist also continued to appear in films, most notably in *Network* (Sidney Lumet, 1976). In the movie, the veteran news anchor Howard Beale (Peter Finch), who is about to be fired because of his bad ratings, announces that he will commit suicide on live television. He turns into a significant TV icon as “the mad prophet of the airwaves” through the efforts of the ratings-hungry head of the TV network’s programming department Diana Christensen (Faye Dunaway). The film shows how Beale affects public opinion and how network executives and Diana have no qualms about arranging Beale’s assassination after he reveals negative information about the network’s parent corporation and his ratings founder again. According to Zynda, “*All the President’s Men* portrays socially conscious reporters successfully practicing journalistic ideals concerning truth and the responsibilities of the press in a democracy. The subsequent *Network* . . . demonstrates how fragile these values are, and how quickly they fade when the press becomes simply another organization for generating profits.”³² Subsequently, according to Ehrlich, “Films have presented portrayals as resplendent as *All the President’s Men* and as gloomy as *Network*.”³³

That all suggests that the most lasting images of the journalist in the public’s mind can be traced back to either *The Front Page/Network* or to *All the President’s Men*. This article will thus focus on two basic character types—the Front Page journalist (as embodied by the movie of that name and others such as *Network*), and the Truth Searcher journalist (as embodied by *All the President’s Men*). It will examine those two character types through a

framework that goes beyond how previous studies have categorized journalists while also taking into account how journalists in movies perform their work, how they are stereotyped in the movies, and how they are mythologized through the movies’ narratives.

C. Categorizations of Movie Journalists

Scholars have heavily examined, identified, and categorized journalist characters in films. Journalists have been generally categorized by their job titles or personal characteristics.

Alex Barris, who was the first to study this field, categorizes journalist characters as Crime Busters, Scandalmongers, Crusaders, Overseas Reporters, Human Beings, Sob Sisters, Editors and Publishers, and Villains.³⁴

Ehrlich and Saltzman classify movie journalists as anonymous reporters, columnists and critics, cub reporters, editors and producers, investigative reporters, newsroom families, photojournalists, publishers and media owners, real-life journalists, sports journalists, television journalists, veteran male journalists, war and foreign correspondents, and women journalists.³⁵

Good puts journalism films into three subgenres as a “sort of triptych, with each panel revealing a different facet of the screen image of the journalist.” According to Good, “the first one shows a war correspondent losing his bearings in an orphan country of bombed-out buildings and mass graves, the second is a reporter destroying innocent lives while madly chasing scoops, and the last is an investigative journalist unraveling a far-reaching conspiracy.” He adds, “Taken together, the sub-genres represent the public’s complex, often contradictory expectations of the press.”³⁶

All of these categorizations present quite valuable and important aspects about journalist characters in cinema; however, they may create some confusion in determining and

fully understanding the presentation of the characters. First, Barris’s categorization may create difficulty in classifying journalist characters since it comprises both the job duties and the personal characteristics of the journalist. For example, an Overseas reporter may have a Crusader ability, a Sob Sister may behave like a Scandalmonger, or an Editor may be a Villain. Second, Ehrlich and Saltzman’s classification is mainly based on the journalist’s job title. Although this classification indicates which position of the journalist is the subject of films, it is limited in giving insight into how films depict journalism principles and practices. Third, although Good’s description of the scoop-chasing reporter and the investigative journalist give an idea about the journalist’s conduct, “war correspondent” is a job title that may blur into the other two categories. In addition, “investigative journalist” is also used as a job title.

The images in general that last in the public’s mind are often related to journalists’ professional actions and stance on journalism principles. According to the Ethical Journalism Network, the core principles are truth and accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality, humanity, and accountability.³⁷ These principles need to be taken into consideration in examining the films.

In addition, media critic Robert McChesney has identified what he describes as “three deep-seated biases that are built into the professional codes that journalists follow and that have decidedly political and ideological implications.”³⁸ Those biases are regarding only official and prominent sources as legitimate, avoiding contextualizing the news appropriately, and serving the commercial and political aims of owners and advertisers. The importance of these biases is that they affect how journalists apply the core principles of journalism. For example, seeing only official and prominent sources as legitimate may prevent the journalist from putting the story into the correct context, which is vital for accuracy and accountability.

Avoiding contextualization prevents the public from completely understanding developments, raising questions about accuracy and impartiality. The third bias impacts journalists' independence from power. Taking McChesney's three biases into account can help determine just how well journalists in the movies perform their jobs.

D. Common Journalist Stereotypes in Cinema History

Many films picture the journalist as “having a round-the-clock obsession with the news.”³⁹ There is heavy competition in the business. The job requires the journalist to interact with “a variety of social types, from the most respectable to the criminal.” The “reporters are usually confident, aggressive people who are young, attractive, and single. The women are equal to the men, and sometimes their betters.” Reporters also have “great personal power; they can make or break the lives of those who come to their attention and they have a behind-the-scenes knowledge of society's secrets.”⁴⁰ Packs of anonymous reporters are “one of the most indelible images of the journalist.” They are shown chasing after a story and rudely invading the privacy of others.⁴¹

Newsroom relations are also important elements of journalism movies. Films show “the newsroom as a refuge and fellow journalists as a surrogate family, with non-journalists viewed as ‘civilians’ who can never understand what the news business is truly like; the only friends most news people seem to have are the people who work with them.”⁴² For Strait, “if anything has changed over time, it's the setting—the newsroom has morphed from the good ol' boys club of *The Front Page*, where the reporters drank, played cards and practically invented stories, to the home of a more polished and ethical profession.”⁴³

There is an editor-reporter conflict in almost every movie.⁴⁴ Moreover, there is a continuous conflict between love and duty, especially for women journalists. There is “the

stereotype of a journalist as married and loyal to his [or her] job or newspaper. Because of the long hours and demanding nature of the journalism profession portrayed in movies, it makes love and journalism seem incompatible.”⁴⁵ Hence, “it seldom features journalists in marriages that last; the exceptions typically involve a man and a woman who are both working journalists.”⁴⁶ Love always competes with the job and “the paper is the other woman.”⁴⁷ Films also celebrate “the sanctity of home and family while revealing not-so-secret envy of those who are free of such obligations.”⁴⁸

Films present journalism itself as an important profession. They imply that the press is vital for the public and democracy. In addition, according to Zynda, “The press is a field of opportunity for the resourceful and clever—journalists are seldom portrayed in routine or dead-end positions; life in the press is glamorous and exciting, full of economic, professional and romantic possibilities.”⁴⁹

In short, cinema presents journalists with shared characteristics in almost every period, regardless of the journalists’ job titles or whether the films are inspired by *The Front Page* or *All the President’s Men*.

E. Dichotomy in Journalist Characters and The Free Press Myth

Cinema also depicts the journalist as being somewhat ambivalent and conflicted. Although Front Page journalists are in many ways portrayed negatively, they still can serve the public interest. Despite their cheating, flaws, and search for scandal, they may help people and uncover the truth. Thus the Front Page journalist can be seen as a positive character or a hero. Similarly, the *All the President’s Men*-type Truth Searcher journalist may cheat or lie in search of the truth or fail to protect the public interest at the end. They even may serve villainy without knowing it. According to Ehrlich and Saltzman:

A key distinction between their being viewed as heroes or scoundrels is the extent to which journalists are portrayed as serving the public interest. They can lie, cheat, distort, bribe, betray, or violate any ethical code as long as they expose corruption, solve a murder, catch a thief, or save an innocent. Such journalists are heroes. If they use the power of the media for their own personal, political, or financial gain, then no matter what they do, no matter how much they struggle with their consciences or try to do the right thing, evil has won out, and they are scoundrels.⁵⁰

They also note that films on the one hand show journalists “acting disreputably and unprofessionally,” and on the other hand they “underscore the long-standing professional ideal of truth-telling in the public interest.”⁵¹ Thus there is a dichotomy in the films’ depictions of the press.

Even if there is an ambivalent presentation of the journalists in the films, all these representations serve the “free press myth” that “suggests that the press is the essential nurturer of an informed citizenry. By venerating journalism for using its power well and vilifying it for using that power badly, popular culture offers visions in which a free press and a free people cannot be separated.” At the same time, critics have charged that the free press myth also “has served the powerful at the expense of the powerless” by suggesting that problems with the press largely stem from bad journalists as opposed to fundamental flaws in the media structure.⁵²

The ambivalent portrayal of journalists and the free press myth can be located in the narrative structures of films.

F. Narrative Structures in Journalism Movies

Scholars indicate that although every society has its own mythology, fairy tales, and folktales, their underlying structures and archetypes are almost universally the same across the centuries.⁵³ Joseph Campbell identifies the core shared structure of the stories as “The Hero's

Journey,” or what will be abbreviated here as THJ.⁵⁴ Christopher Vogler’s adaptation of THJ points to multiple stages in this journey: The Ordinary World, The Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Meeting the Mentor, Crossing the Threshold, Tests, Allies, Enemies, Approach to the Inmost Cave, The Ordeal, Reward, The Road Back, The Resurrection, and The Return with Elixir.⁵⁵

According to Stuart Voytilla, “Every story involves a problem or Central Dramatic Question that disrupts the Ordinary World where the hero lives. The Hero must enter the Special World (Unknown World) to solve the problem, answer the dramatic question, and return balance.”⁵⁶ Heroes receive a Call to Adventure. During their journey, they may receive help from a Mentor (and sometimes an Inner Mentor in the form of a strong code of honor or justice), and they confront Tests, Allies, or Enemies. They undergo an Ordeal in which they experience a life-or-death crisis forcing them to face their greatest fear or confront their most difficult challenge. They may experience symbolic or actual death before undergoing a Resurrection in which they are transformed or reborn. Finally they return from their journey with an Elixir to share with others or to heal them. This final stage shows that balance has been restored in the Ordinary World; the hero may now embark on a new life.⁵⁷

In THJ, the hero usually wins and the villain loses at the end, according to Vogler: “As the hero gets the reward, villains should earn their ultimate fate by their evil deeds, and they should not get off too easily. . . . In other words, the way the villain dies or gets his just comeuppance should directly relate to his sins.”⁵⁸ In this way, the stories not only let the audience identify with the hero and witness the villain’s punishment, but also experience

catharsis. In so doing, the stories also carry the messages and myths through which society’s rules and orders are upheld.

The classic narratives have evolved over the years in cinema. Nowadays the movies sometimes let the hero lose or even allow the villain to win. In the last two decades, movies about journalism such as *Spotlight* (Tom McCarthy, 2015), *The Post* (Steven Spielberg, 2017), *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (David Fincher, 2011), *Frost/Nixon* (Ron Howard, 2008), *State of Play* (Kevin Macdonald, 2009), and *The Company You Keep* (Robert Redford, 2012) present an ideal the hero-wins ending for journalists, whereas movies such as *Shattered Glass* (Billy Ray, 2003) present the classic scoundrel-loses finale. However, *Good Night, and Good Luck* (George Clooney, 2005), *Veronica Guerin* (Joel Schumacher, 2003), *Truth* (James Vanderbilt, 2015), and *Kill the Messenger* (Michael Cuesta, 2014)—all interestingly based on real events—show how journalists lose their job or life or are even labeled as a villain or a scapegoat by others, although they have done their best to try to uncover the truth. And movies like *Nightcrawler* (Dan Gilroy, 2014) present villain protagonists who win a victory at the end.

Michael Welles Schock’s Unified Theory of Narrative helps us understand the changes in movies by dividing Hollywood narratives into four categories.⁵⁹ He defines the classic hero-wins stories as Celebratory and the villain-loses stories as Cautionary. In the Celebratory narrative, a protagonist in his or her journey eventually realizes that the dramatic situation can only be resolved by abandoning “negative” personal qualities and replacing them with more “virtuous” ones. This positive transformation allows the protagonist to make “wiser or more ‘heroic’ decisions necessary to overcome all obstacles and achieve success.” In contrast, in the Cautionary narrative, a protagonist does not overcome his or her “negative personal qualities,” and these lead him or her to punishment and defeat. According to Schock, Celebratory and

Cautionary narratives accomplish similar ideological ends by rewarding what the society considers “good” and by punishing what it considers “bad”; they remind audiences of important cultural values and reinforce prevailing systems of belief.⁶⁰

Schock defines stories in which the hero fails and the villain wins as Tragic and Cynical narratives, respectively. He indicates that these narratives seem counterproductive at first glance, but in fact, “by punishing what the audience has come to believe should be rewarded, or by rewarding what the audience believes should be punished,” they challenge viewers’ preconceptions and inclinations, draw attention to serious problems about society’s direction, and suggest the need for social change.⁶¹

Beyond that, according to Douglas Kellner, Hollywood movies “can be read within the history of the social and political struggles and context of their period.” In this way, film can help interpret the social and political history of an era,⁶² as well as the ways in which journalism has changed over time.

G. Archetypes in Journalism Movies

Scholars also have pointed to many archetypes that are relevant to journalism films. For example, Vogler refers to willing and unwilling heroes and to group-oriented and loner heroes. The willing hero is gung-ho and committed to the adventure, whereas the unwilling hero is full of doubts and needs to be pushed into the adventure. In contrast to the group-oriented hero, the loner hero is estranged from society. Vogler also calls attention to other hero types that will be referred to here as “flawed” heroes and as “ideal/catalyst” heroes. Flawed heroes battle inner demons, and ideal/catalyst heroes help transform others for the better. Heroes typically display considerable ego at first, but they become willing to make sacrifices through their journeys.⁶³

Robert Ray categorizes the hero as an “official” or an “outlaw” type. The “official” hero works within the legal process, while the “outlaw” hero has his or her own rules and is more of an “adventurer, explorer, gunfighter, wanderer, and loner” than the official one.⁶⁴ Another type of hero, according to Jack Lule, is the Good Mother, which is one of the predominant archetypes in human storytelling. She represents kindness, gentleness, selflessness, and compassion. Lule notes that all hero types represent ideals and virtues that society prizes.⁶⁵

Journalism characters display the same archetypes. Ehrlich and Saltzman write that journalist heroes are “often self-made persons, independent spirits, or people who are angry about injustice and unfairness. They are unselfish, honorable with a sense of fair play, self-confident, resourceful, and sometimes too witty for their own good.”⁶⁶ They also write that outlaw journalists are “resolutely independent and shun convention and obligation while taking pride in seeing through sham or pretension,” while official journalists are “upstanding, decent members of society who work for the common good.”⁶⁷

Journalism characters also appear as different types of villains. A villain journalist may display either outlaw or official characteristics, according to Ehrlich:

As an outsider opposed to conventional morality, the outlaw villain poses a threat. He is in it only for himself, exploiting innocent others just to get a scoop or make a buck. He mocks the sacred bonds of marriage and family. The official villain represents official immorality and subjugation. He works for “The Media,” a technologically invasive force in league with other powerful forces opposed to individual autonomy and liberty.⁶⁸

In addition, journalist villains may appear as tricksters. Lule writes that the trickster archetype represents “a sly, cunning, crude, stupid, senseless, half animal and half human figure” who is “driven by physical appetites, lust, and desire.” Because of that, the trickster

brings on himself and others “all manner of suffering.” He thus “shows the need for societal standards as he lives an error-filled life of ruin.”⁶⁹

Another common archetype in journalism movies is the scapegoat, which Lule says shows “what happens to those who challenge or ignore social beliefs.”⁷⁰ According to Ehrlich, “By presenting morality tales in which wayward reporters are duly punished for their sins, the films also highlight rules of proper professional and personal conduct; a common function of myth is to use a deviant or scapegoat figure to reassert and enforce social norms.”⁷¹ In addition, the films present victims who elevate society through their sacrifices, as well as mentors who teach heroes by setting both good and bad examples.⁷²

Methodology

This study explores the following questions:

1. How can journalists be categorized in contemporary films? Are the Front Page and Truth Searcher types applicable?
2. Which archetypes are represented and reinforced by journalist characters in recent films?
3. How are the narrative structures in recent journalism films set up, and what journalistic myths, discourses, and messages do those narratives carry and reinforce?

Regarding the first question, this article claims that for movie journalists, an alternative method of categorization is needed in order to detect and understand the impact of films on the public’s perception of journalism, and that the categorization should be based on a journalist's way of conducting the job and administering professional and ethical standards.

Concerning the second question, the archetypes identified in the literature review are appropriate to guide the analysis. The article focuses only on the main archetypes embodied by

the protagonist(s). In recent films, alongside hero-wins and villain-loses plots, some journalists are shown as heroes but lose at the end of the film or are labeled as tricksters or scapegoats by others. Depending on their success in uncovering the truth and upholding journalism principles, heroes can be defined as ideal/catalyst or flawed; and in terms of characteristics, heroes can be classified as official or outlaw, willing or unwilling, or group-oriented or loner. Villain journalists also may be classified as official-outlaw, as willing-unwilling, or as tricksters. The victim, scapegoat, and Good Mother myths of Lule and THJ archetypes such as the mentor will be taken into consideration if they appear prominently in the protagonists’ characters.

For the third question, the article will examine what implications the films’ narratives have about contemporary society and politics and also which journalistic myths the movies present. Campbell’s THJ and Schöck’s Unified Theory of Narrative seem useful to analyze the narratives.

Conducting the Study

The article focuses on three recent films: *Spotlight* (Tom McCarty, 2015), *Truth* (James Vanderbilt, 2015), and *Nightcrawler* (Dan Gilroy, 2014). Although those movies were produced at about the same time, they present different journalist protagonists, different media organizations, and different outcomes for journalists. *Spotlight* presents the classic hero-wins ending and shows the print media; *Truth* has a hero-loses protagonist and covers national television; and *Nightcrawler* presents a victorious villain protagonist and deals with the local media. While the first two films are based on real-life journalists and real events, the latter features fictional events and characters.⁷³ The three sample movies were viewed several times

and deciphered to ascertain representations of journalist characters and narratives. The films also were viewed in light of the characteristics of the Front Page and Truth Searcher journalist types and the common stereotypes identified by previous studies.

A. Front Page and Truth Searcher Journalists

The Front Page journalist can be characterized as someone who is mainly interested in scoops and scandals; who does anything to get the story, even by cheating, deceiving, lying, and fabricating news; who has few ethical standards; who drinks hard; who mocks everything; and who is street-wise, hard-driving, and competitive.

The Truth Searcher journalist can be characterized as someone who is reliable and honest; who honors professional principles and ethics; who stands up to power and protects the public interest and the innocent; and who embodies and upholds the role of the press as the fourth estate.

B. Common Shared Stereotypes

- Stereotypes about the profession:

Journalists race against the clock and work around the clock; experience heavy competition; display callousness; interact with every part of society; demonstrate the power of the press; and experience typical newsroom relationships and conflicts, with anonymous reporters portrayed negatively.

- Stereotypes about the individual:

Journalists typically are young, single, attractive, self-confident, and aggressive; have problematic private lives and limited social lives; and drink heavily and celebrate success at the bar.

- Stereotypes about gender:

Male journalists are seen more often than female journalists in films, but female and male journalists are presented as equal; female journalists experience a continuous dilemma between being a mother/wife and a journalist.

Analyses of *Spotlight*, *Truth*, and *Nightcrawler*

The analysis shows that the protagonists in *Spotlight* match with ideal/catalyst heroes, while in *Truth*, the protagonist looks more like a flawed hero. *Spotlight* presents the successful Truth Searcher journalist while *Truth* depicts the failed, scapegoat Truth Searcher. On the other hand, *Nightcrawler* presents an extreme villain/trickster version of the Front Page journalist.⁷⁴

A. *Spotlight*

Ideal Truth Searchers

Spotlight is based on a true story of how the *Boston Globe*'s “Spotlight” team uncovered the massive child sex abuse scandals and the cover-up within the local Catholic Archdiocese, shaking the entire Catholic Church to its core.

Marty Baron (Liev Schreiber), who comes from Miami as the new editor of the *Boston Globe* after the *New York Times* buys the newspaper, is the main representative of the Truth Searcher journalist. At the beginning of the film, in a dinner scene with *Spotlight* editor Robby Robinson (Michael Keaton), Baron⁷⁵ states his main goal for the newspaper as “making the paper essential to its readers” even if “readership is down and the internet is cutting into the classified business.” Hence, he is seen as focusing on the press’s fourth estate functions.

In the editorial meeting the next morning, the audience learns what the “making the paper essential to its readers” means: doing follow-ups and in-depth research about the critical developments that take place in the city. That means investigating the sexual abuse allegations against priest John Geoghan in the Boston area.

Baron looks at the scandal from the perspective of journalism principles, not of social or cultural norms. In the face of claims that the victims’ attorney Mitchell Garabedian (Stanley

Tucci) is a “crank,” Baron does not regard official sources as the only legitimate sources. He considers only the facts and does not ostracize Garabedian.⁷⁶ He also insists on doing follow-ups about Geoghan case, which he says is an essential story for the city.

The audience also sees that while the other editors at first have the bias of avoiding contextualization, Baron insists on getting the full scoop and decides to file a motion to lift the seal on documents about Geoghan case, although everyone interprets his action as suing the Catholic Church. That approach emphasizes not just the importance of being independent and impartial, but also of being accurate and accountable when preparing the news.

The audience learns that more than half of the *Boston Globe*'s readers and most Bostonians are Catholics, which means running a story about the Church may bother the readers and risk the newspaper's circulation. Baron, however, dismisses the publisher's worries about the Catholic readers by calmly saying, “I think they are interested.” In this respect, he does not act with commercial concerns. When Baron enters the publisher's office, the publisher greets Baron by standing up from his chair and walking up to Baron. They then sit together in the guest chairs in front of the desk. That implies an equal status of the newsroom and the management.

Baron's meeting with Cardinal Law (Len Cariou) is another important scene. Baron ignores Cardinal Law's warning of being a “meddling outsider” and rejects the Cardinal's offer of cooperation.⁷⁷ Baron underlines the importance of the free, independent, and impartial press by saying, “I am of the opinion that for a paper to best perform its function, it really needs to stand alone.” The characters' positions in the *mise-en-scène* support this stance. The characters sit face-to-face on opposite couches. While the Cardinal sits in a relaxed position and talks with hand gestures, Baron sits tightly upright with hands crossed. The Cardinal's

position shows his aim to sway Baron, while Baron’s position emphasizes the distance that he wants to keep between himself and the Cardinal and between the press and the Church.

When it comes to the Spotlight team—Mike Rezendes (Mark Ruffalo), Sacha Pfeiffer (Rachel McAdams), Matt Carroll (Brian d’Arcy James), and Robby Robinson—they get in touch with not just the sources close to the Church, but also those who are ostracized by pressure or defamation campaigns, such as the victims’ attorney Garabedian, victims advocate Phil Saviano (Neal Huff), and the victims themselves. Furthermore, the Spotlight team does not resort to assumptions or rush to publish the report. They confirm and double-check all the information they get.

The film also shows that the journalists avoid cheating, faking the news, or hiding the facts or their identities. The Spotlight team records every interview, takes notes, and respects the privacy of sources when the victims reject talking with them or when they prefer to speak off the record. In that way, the team upholds every ethical standard.⁷⁸ The victims and the attorney come to see the journalists as reliable and honest. The film emphasizes these principles almost in every scene. For example, the journalists are shown working everywhere: at the library, at home, at the bar, and so on; they knock on every door to reach the victims, and the film allows the audience to witness the interviews in lengthy scenes.

In terms of social and family pressures, Robby does not cave in when his acquaintance Pete Conley (Paul Guilfoyle) threatens him indirectly by saying, “Marty Baron is just trying to make his mark. He’ll be here for a couple years and he’s gonna move on. Just like he did in New York and Miami. Where you gonna go [as a Bostonian]?” Matt keeps the investigation secret from his family even though he knows that an abuser priest lives in his neighborhood. Sacha takes the assignment although she knows she could upset her devoutly Catholic

grandmother. Mike makes the investigation a priority and delays solving problems with his wife.

Eventually the journalists uncover the scandal. Eric MacLeish (Billy Crudup) sends them a list of abusive priests, and Jim Sullivan (Jamey Sheridan) confirms the priests’ names. At the end of the movie, non-stop ringing phones representing calls from victims to the Spotlight team symbolize not just the victims’ trust in them, but also implicitly point to the journalists’ next mission: there is more to uncover, and they have a continuous duty as the Truth Searcher. Those calls also imply the public’s yearning for trustable investigative journalists since the victims specifically choose to call the Spotlight team rather than the newspaper generally.⁷⁹

There is not always a sharp distinction between the Truth Searcher journalist and the Front Page journalist. However, the Spotlight reporters have every characteristic of the Truth Searcher and almost no elements⁸⁰ of the Front Page journalist.

Ideal/Catalyst Heroes

Spotlight’s journalists are depicted as group-oriented heroes who work as a team. They also are ideal/catalyst heroes who bring about change. According to Vogler, “Heroes have qualities that we all can identify with and recognize in ourselves: the desire to be loved and understood, to succeed, survive, be free, get revenge, right wrongs, or seek self-expression.”⁸¹ The journalists in the film are driven by righting wrongs but also by patriotism and idealism. They embody not just ideal role models for journalists, but also for society about standing up to power, oppression, and unfairness.

Concerning Ray’s description of official and outlaw heroes, in *Spotlight* the characters mainly display official hero characteristics, but Baron also displays a few outlaw hero

characteristics. He is a loner, an adventurer in the foreign city, and independent from the city’s norms and beliefs as seen in his actions in the Geoghan case. He shuns conventions as seen when he rejects the cooperation between the press and the Church. He is even portrayed as an outsider: a guy from Miami, a Jew in a Catholic city, a single man, and not a fan of baseball, which is an important sport in the city.

B. *Truth*

Flawed Truth Searcher

Truth, based on Mary Mapes’ 2005 memoir *Truth and Duty: The Press, the President, and the Privilege of Power* and written and directed by James Vanderbilt, focuses on the 2004 CBS *60 Minutes* report investigating then-president George W. Bush's military service during the Vietnam War and the subsequent firestorm of criticism that cost anchor Dan Rather and producer Mary Mapes their careers.

The film starts by showing that Mary (Cate Blanchett) and her team are about to break a story about the U.S. Army’s serious human rights violations in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq; the story later wins CBS a Peabody Award. When the program airs, the camera shows televisions in the newsroom, and on the TV screens there is an image of a hooded man who is standing on a box and whose body is connected to electrodes. In the background, the audience hears the voice of Dan Rather (Robert Redford) saying, “Americans did this to an Iraqi prisoner.” The film starts by implying that Mary protects victims from all around the world; is interested in revealing truths, even if an evil act comes from her own country; aims to serve the public interest; and stands up to power, as the Truth Searcher journalist does.

The audience learns that Mary’s next investigation is going to be about the allegations concerning Bush’s military service in the Texas Air National Guard during 1972-1973. Then

the film introduces the audience to Mary’s team: Lieutenant Colonel Roger Charles (Dennis Quaid), Mike Smith (Topher Grace), and Lucy Scott (Elisabeth Moss). In a meeting, Mary, Roger, Mike, and Lucy evaluate the facts and discuss which questions they need to answer in this investigation. In this more than four-minute scene, the camera focuses on the notes on the map at the blackboard and the documents attached to the meeting room’s window. The scene bombards the audience with information. The dialogue gives the audience perspective on this issue, which is that Bush seemed to misuse his family ties to get into the National Guard and to escape from the Vietnam war, but he has never been held accountable.

After that, Mary and her team are portrayed as working relentlessly on gathering information and getting the facts straight. They talk to individuals who worked in the National Guard at that time, but they get the same answer from all of them: “No strings were pulled for Bush.” Mary also cannot persuade Ben Barnes (Philip Quast), who claims to have helped get young Bush into the National Guard as a pilot, to go on the record. They almost come to a dead end.

However, when they get memos from Lieutenant Colonel Bill Burkett (Stacy Keach) that were allegedly written by Bush’s former commander Lieutenant Colonel Jerry Killian, they start digging into the story again. Since Killian is already dead, they send the memos to four experts to examine their authenticity. Dan interviews Ben Barnes, document examiner Marcel Matley, and other related people. The scene in which Dan interviews Matley shows the audience that Matley is confident that the handwriting on the memos belongs to Killian. The camera focuses in closeup on the enlarged signatures on the blackboard to indicate that they are genuine. All of those scenes imply that Mary and her team try to provide an accurate report and to contextualize the story appropriately with different sources.

On the other hand, the film does not overlook Mary’s mistakes. She is portrayed as quickly regarding Burkett as a reliable source and as believing that the memos are authentic. The film shows how she rushes to broadcast the report in five days. Subtitles showing how many days are left before the broadcast indicate the time pressure.

The film also shows that Mary skips and overlooks some of the essential elements of journalism, such as confirming every detail to make the report accurate and accountable. Although one of the document experts raises questions about the documents’ authenticity, she does not pay much attention to those concerns. Then Mary asks Burkett where he got the memos, but she does not call back George Conn (from whom Burkett claims getting the memos), and she does not confirm the memos with General Robert Hodges (Killian’s direct supervisor). During her phone conversation with the document expert, the audience watches her talking at the phone while walking, entering the office, and putting her things on her desk. She acts defensively and never takes notes regarding the questions raised by the expert. Those scenes show that she does not query all the information carefully or attentively and instead acts with prejudice.

In addition, the audience never sees Mary asking questions of official sources, such as the White House, about the allegations. The only reference in the film is when Mike says the White House always gives the same answers: “that Bush served honorably and that military records go missing all the time.” This approach is as biased as seeing official sources as the only legitimate ones. However, *Truth* also stresses the importance of challenging official sources. In a scene close to the end of the film, when a CBS-appointed panel led by Republicans challenges Mary’s investigation, she replies that by their standards, the *New York*

Times never would have published the Pentagon Papers and the *Washington Post* never would have listened to Deep Throat.

The same scene shows the panel’s bias against Mary and raises questions about the real “truth.” While Mary explains why it is unlikely that the memos are fake, the camera zooms in to her face. By creating a contrast between the dark background and her lit-up face and blond hair, the film focuses the audience’s attention only on Mary and her words. In that way, the film supports Mary's claims visually and depicts her as a true hero.

With slow and emotional music in the background, Mary and her attorney then step out of the building where the panel was conducted. She describes why she did what she did before the panel: “In the immortal words of Popeye: I am what I am.” Mary extends a hand to the attorney; they shake. Then she turns, heading off down the street. Her attorney calls out to her: “I believe you.” Those words are what the attorney had not said before in two separate scenes when Mary had told him, “I did my job, believe me.” By bringing this subject (she did her job) to the audience’s attention three times—at the beginning, in the middle of the film, and at the end—the film gives a message to the audience: Mary really “did her job.” However, by showing Mary smiling back at the attorney and then blending into the crowd in the street, the film gives the sense that Mary is no more than an ordinary citizen now and has lost the battle.

The film implies that Mary stood up against the Bush administration, fought for press freedom, and tried to get the truth out, but was stopped by a rigged system. The rest of press did not focus on the essence of her report, and there was a witch hunt against Mary. The film also shows the political and commercial aims of the owners. When CBS’s parent company Viacom sees that its business interest is at stake because of Mary’s report, the network starts focusing on stopping the bleeding, and then appoints the panel led by former Republican

officials to investigate Mary and the team. A lengthy scene in which Mike talks about Viacom is striking in its description of media companies’ complicated relations with politicians.⁸²

In summary, the film’s narrative and cinematographic style depict Mary as a Truth Searcher, but a flawed one. The audience never sees Mary or her team cheating, lying, or distorting the facts. The film depicts Mary as a relentless journalist who devotes her life to this profession and wants to uphold the role of the press as the fourth estate. However, CBS and *60 Minutes* are never able to authenticate the documents they get from Bill Burkett, and Mary falls short in meeting some journalistic principles. In this way, the film emphasizes the potential and vital mistakes that Truth Searcher journalists can make if they neglect professional rules, ethics, and standards.

At the same time, the movie emphasizes the importance of Truth Searcher journalists and the threats and pressures to which they are subjected. Dan gives advice to Mike—and in fact it is a message to all journalists and to the audience—by saying that journalism is about “questioning things. People say it does not matter; one side or the other will always say we’re being partisan. But the day we stop asking questions is the day the American people lose. It may sound hokey, but I really believe that.” At the end of the film, Mike criticizes other CBS staffers by saying, “You’re supposed to question everything. That’s your job. We are supposed to question everything.” That means the press should continue to ask the toughest questions and hold the ones who have power accountable, so that “the day that the American people lose” never arrives.

Ehrlich and Saltzman point out that in *All the President’s Men*, “the filmmaker employs long takes and tight closeups in showing the reporters constantly on the phone and taking copious notes.” The “documentary-like details” in *All the President’s Men* continue in

Spotlight and *Truth*. Furthermore, both films show the “newsroom in brilliant white light”⁸³ as in *All the President’s Men*. In that sense, both movies resemble *All the President’s Men*’s visual presentation of journalists.

Flawed Hero and Scapegoat

Mary represents a flawed hero. She tries to do her best but never overcomes her inner struggles, and her flaws win out in the end.

The audience learns from dialogue between Mary’s colleagues Roger and Lucy that Mary had wanted to do the Bush story during the 2000 presidential campaign but could not achieve it because of her mother’s sudden death. Roger says, “An election decided by 537 votes. Sometimes I think if Mary's mom had not died that summer, there is a good chance Al Gore would be President right now.” It is implied that Mary feels some responsibility for Bush having been elected. However, that guilt and obsession led Mary to act in a rush in 2004, and that brought destruction to herself and her job. Hence, as a hero, she is not just driven by righting wrongs, patriotism, and idealism as seen with the *Spotlight* team, but also by anger, guilt, and obsession.

As Vogler points out, a flawed hero lets the audience see the flaws and their consequences, and it teaches them what mistakes to avoid. As the flawed hero, Mary shows the result of ignoring or overlooking principles and rules that the journalist needs the most.

Mary mainly displays official hero characteristics, but also has an outlaw sensibility in considering the government and big business as “inherently corrupt.”⁸⁴ Uttering the words “rigged system” shows her stance on this issue. She also rejects some “conventional” perspectives like getting the full scoop before publishing news.

Mary embodies the scapegoat myth as well. She is turned into a scapegoat by other media outlets and people, and even by her own company when its interest is at stake. The film suggests that the scapegoat may be made an outcast even while acting heroically. The film warns society against having prejudices about scapegoats, and it also suggests that both journalism and society be more critical, questioning, and courageous about what they see, hear and read.

C. Nightcrawler

Front Page Journalist

Nightcrawler, written and directed by Dan Gilroy, features a con man who becomes a stringer/freelancer recording violent events late at night in Los Angeles and selling the footage to a local television news station.

The protagonist Lou Bloom (Jake Gyllenhaal) violates every journalistic principle. He does not care about accuracy, impartiality or accountability; instead he does everything he can to get sensational stories. He even commits crimes that include breaking into a house and changing a wounded man’s position to get better footage, hiding footage of murderers, and assassinating his assistant Rick (Riz Ahmed) and rival cameraman Joe Loder (Bill Paxton). However, he is neither punished nor pays the price for what he does. In the end, he achieves all that he wants, starting a news production company with a bigger crew.

Lou has neither a journalism degree from a university nor a proper education. He learns everything from the internet including reporting, shooting, framing, and editing. His only aim at first is to earn money; then the aim turns into creating his own profitable business through the media. Because of that, he does not have any journalistic ideals. He pursues graphic and sensational news, fabricates and distorts events, and cheats and lies.

When Lou arrives at a crime scene where a wounded man is lying on the street, he starts filming the incident right next to another cameraman, who films it from a respectable distance. Lou gets closer and closer until he is just over the victim and filming the man in extreme closeups until the police turn him away. Later at the scene of a shooting, Lou opens the gate of a house, enters without permission, starts filming, and zooms in on a stroller. When Lou sees a photo of a young couple with their baby, he moves the photo close to a nearby bullet hole, then frames the photo and bullet hole together. He rearranges the *mise-en-scène* to get better footage.

Then Lou gets footage of murdered people by arriving a house before the police. He focuses on the victims in closeup. The audience watches the scene through Lou’s camera, and in that way the film forces the audience to be complicit with Lou’s act. He even sees that one of the persons is still alive, but he does not help the man and deletes the footage of him afterward. Moreover, he hides crucial information about the homicide by cutting a scene that shows the murderers leaving the house. He lies to the police, follows the killers for a follow-up story, and calls the police on the whereabouts of the killers after they enter a fast food restaurant, increasing the possibility of filming more graphic images that he can sell at a much better price. Then he films a shootout between police and the suspects by sitting in his car outside and placing the camera on the car’s window; he looks like a hunter in the woods who waits for the prey to fall into the trap. He sends Rick out of the car to film the shootout from different angles, risking Rick’s life instead of his own.

During a subsequent car chase, Lou is again only interested in getting good angles. After the suspect’s car crashes, Lou calls out to Rick to film the suspect, falsely claiming that the suspect is dead. Lou then films Rick in a coldhearted manner as the suspect shoots him,

and Lou tells the dying Rick, “I can’t jeopardize the company’s success to retain an untrustworthy employee.” When he goes back to the TV station, he looks very happy, and is not ashamed of selling Rick’s death as a sensational story. The film emphasizes the intensity of Lou's brutal, ruthless, and unethical acts by creating a mostly dark atmosphere in almost every scene in the film. The movie reminds the audience that Lou belongs to darkness and the night, as the film’s name suggests.

Meanwhile, Nina Romina (Rene Russo), a news editor at a local TV channel, contextualizes crime stories in terms of “victims, preferably well-off and white, who are injured at the hands of the poor or a minority.” She loves Lou’s extreme closeup of a man cut in the throat and advises Lou to keep bringing her these kinds of pictures. Nina does not question Lou about the incident in which he breaks into the young couple’s house. She only cares about Lou's dramatic footage showing the bullet hole and the couple with their baby.

Nina later labels a story as “Horror House” and as “urban crime creeping into the suburbs” although she does not know what exactly happened at that house, and she refuses to update the story even after she learns that it did not involve a home invasion, but rather a drug robbery. Nina also accepts having a sexual relationship with Lou after he threatens her position at the station if she does not do what he wants.

Lou and Nina display McChesney’s three deep-seated biases in journalism in a different way. In respect to the bias of favoring commercial and political aims, their only goal is to increase the ratings and ads: a commercial gain. They do not care about presenting the facts or informing the public; instead they try to manipulate the public. In terms of seeing only official sources as legitimate, they do not even care about legitimate sources, which is even

worse. In terms of contextualization, they do their own “contextualization” by fabricating and distorting stories compatible with the ratings.

In all these aspects, *Nightcrawler* portrays the worst villain version of the Front Page journalist. Protagonist Hildy Johnson in *The Front Page* saves an innocent man from being executed even if his main purpose is to get sensational news, and he is not portrayed as a villain. However, like Diana and the executives in *Network*, a Front Page journalist can cause death, and Lou shows that these type of journalists still are around. If Lou had been Hildy, he would have done anything to get the man executed and would have tried to get the best video while covering the execution even after he learned the truth about the man’s innocence. Moreover, Diana in *Network* had at least worked in the media for a long time and had made many efforts to achieve her position, but Lou shows that anyone who is ambitious and ready to do anything can succeed in the business.

Villain/Trickster

Nightcrawler presents an example of a villainous loner protagonist driven mainly by competition, success, and the desire to get the story. Lou also has almost all of the characteristics of the trickster; he is sly, cunning, and driven by lust and desire. He focuses only on himself and his own ends and exploits innocent others just to get a story.

By creating a hero-villain conflict, popular culture portrays the journalist hero as “defending the truth against the many dragons of darkness in the modern world” and the villain as “a malicious, mendacious agent of the dragons of darkness themselves.”⁸⁵ As one of the “dragons of darkness,” Lou is an outlaw villain who poses a threat to society. However, the film breaks from the typical ending for the villain/trickster. Lou does not live an “error-filled life of ruin” or become an outcast, but instead triumphs.

Myths always aim to teach a lesson. By avoiding catharsis and preventing the audience from identifying with the protagonists, the film implicitly upholds the myth that social and professional standards are needed; otherwise society and the profession will face collapse, and scoundrels will rise. With these characteristics of Lou, the film expresses how the deterioration of the principles of the press could lead to disaster. It also shows how the media features ruthless competition and how everything has become legitimate to get a scoop.

Nina is an “official” villain. She represents how The Media distorts the truth, fakes the news, creates stories, and manipulates people only to increase the ratings. Lou and Nina both have all the villain characteristics that Ehrlich and Saltzman describe: they are “braggarts, usurpers, abusers, snobs, traitors, sneaks, chiselers, narcissists, and parasites who use the news media to serve their own social, economic, political, or personal ends. They care nothing about the public [and] usurp the public’s right to know by using information to extort and destroy.”⁸⁶

As villains and tricksters, Lou and Nina help the audience question and be critical about the news they watch every day on TV.

D. Common Shared Stereotypes in *Spotlight*, *Truth*, and *Nightcrawler*

Stereotypes about the Profession

Working round the clock. The motif of the round-the-clock obsession with the news in journalism movies continues in the three films. In *Spotlight*, the journalists work all day and night at home, at the bar, in the library, or in a café. Similarly, in *Truth*, Mary and her team are shown working constantly. The audience never sees the crew at home except for Mary, but Mary uses her kitchen and living room like an office. Regarding Dan Rather, the audience first sees him backstage sitting and taking notes before his speech at an event organized for him. After the speech, Mary and Dan leave the reception early despite a CBS executive saying that

the guests would like to talk with Dan. Then Mary and Dan go to a hotel, and the audience sees that they are going to interview a soldier in the U.S. Army about the torture scandal in the Iraqi prison. Dan opens his notebook, and it is clear that the notes are for the interview. The ideal journalist does not care about accolades; his only focus is his work. In *Nightcrawler*, Lou and Nina work all the time, as if they do not have any lives other than the job.

Racing against the clock. In *Spotlight*, closeups of the reporters’ reminders to themselves that they have “twenty-one days and four hours” show the time pressure the team faces. Also, when Mike gets an update on the investigation, he rushes back to the office, trying to catch a taxi. *Truth* shows how many days are left to airtime through subtitles on the screen like “two days to broadcast.” In *Nightcrawler*, Lou and Rick always have to be in a hurry to catch a story and arrive at places before other photographers. When they are late to a crime scene, Rick says they had gone in the wrong direction just a few blocks. However, they learn that the ambulance left two minutes ago, and their competitor says, “You’re a lifetime too late.” These type of scenes emphasize that missing just a couple of minutes means being “too late” to get the story.

Competition. Competition is one of the key motifs in journalism movies. In almost every film, journalists have the fear that their competitors may get the story before them. It appears in *Spotlight* through Mike’s concern that the rival *Herald* may dig into the story and publish it before them. *Truth* shows conflict among CBS, ABC, and other media organizations. Lou’s savage assassination of the rival cameraman in *Nightcrawler* presents the worst possible example of competition in the sector.

Power of the press. Journalism movies present the press as a powerful and important institution and journalists with great personal power. How that power affects people, however,

depends on the journalist’s actions. As Zynda writes, “they can make or break the lives of those who come to their attention and they have a behind-the-scenes knowledge of society’s secrets.”⁸⁷ In *Spotlight*, thanks to their relentless efforts in gathering all the facts, the team obtains “behind-the-scenes knowledge of society’s secrets” and reveals it to the public.

Victims start to emerge from the darkness and express themselves. In *Truth*, the public never learns what the “behind-the-scenes secrets” are or whether the allegations about Bush’s military service are true or false because of Mary’s hustle to broadcast the program and the mistakes she makes. In *Nightcrawler*, Lou and Nina “break the lives of those who come to their attention” because of their extreme ambition.

In addition, cinema in general “has demonstrated the power of a free and privately owned press in serving as a watchdog, but also has shown it dozing on the job and barking up the wrong tree.”⁸⁸ In these three sample films, the audience sees the power of a privately owned press serving as a watchdog in *Spotlight*, but it witnesses the press dozing on the job and barking up the wrong tree in *Truth*, and it observes the problem of the privately owned press in *Nightcrawler*.

These films also emphasize the importance of facts and gathering evidence through long and detailed shots of the news preparation process. In *Spotlight*, the audience sees closeups of priests’ names in almanacs and the list of priests added to the spreadsheet program on the computer. In *Truth*, the audience sees the documents and maps concerning Bush’s military service. In *Nightcrawler*, the film lets the audience watch the “Horror House” incidents through Lou’s camera. Those scenes enhance the feeling of reality and the mythic status of the press.

Newsrooms and reporter-editor conflicts. The motif of the crowded newsroom with constantly working reporters, nonstop ringing phones, and desks covered with documents continues in *Spotlight*, *Truth*, and *Nightcrawler*. Furthermore, the classic reporter-editor conflict appears between Mike and Robby in *Spotlight*, Mary and her editors in *Truth*, and Lou and Nina in *Nightcrawler*.

Reaching every part of society. The motif that journalists can reach a variety of social types continues in contemporary films. In *Spotlight*, Sacha and Matt knock on doors in different neighborhoods to talk with victims. They meet their sources in every possible place such as in a park, a home, or a restaurant. In *Truth*, Dan is seen everywhere—at the formal reception, at an interview, or at the scene of a hurricane. In *Nightcrawler*, Lou can go anywhere to cover incidents.

Callousness. In *Spotlight*, before Baron digs into the story, other journalists in Boston missed seeing the dimension of the scandal for many years partly because of professional and social callousness. In *Truth*, Mary and her team are casually eating Chinese food while they are editing the torture images at the Iraqi prison. In *Nightcrawler*, Lou and the rival cameraman Loder only focus on getting the best shots and do not have any feelings about victims of tragedy. Loder’s comment about a plane crash is a good example: “Boom, five fatal. Come screaming outta the fucking sky. All lit up with the brush on fire. Mine. Exclusive. I’m banging.” Nina describes the graphic and tragic images as “wonderful.” Lou setting up a trap for Nick, filming Nick while he is dying, and then selling those images to a mesmerized Nina shows the worst possible level of callousness.

The negative image of anonymous journalists. In *Truth*, reporters waiting outside the airport crowd Mary and Dan and attack them with questions while the two are trying to get

into a taxi. Similarly, the film shows the reporters camping in front of Mary’s house and trying to get an image of her from outside.

Stereotypes about the Individual

Being young, single, attractive, self-confident, and aggressive. Although past movies have shown reporters as young, attractive, and single, movies in the 2010s show those depictions becoming more varied. In *Spotlight*, the journalists appear to be over thirty. They are all married except for Baron. In *Truth*, many newsroom workers also seem to be over thirty. Some of them are single, but Mary is married. In both movies, journalists do not look unusually attractive or use their attractiveness to get the story. In *Nightcrawler*, Lou and Nina are not especially young but are single, and Nina uses her attractiveness. Being self-confident and aggressive continues for characters, especially when it comes to fighting for the news.

Struggling in private life. The theme of struggling to have a steady private life seems both to continue and to change in the three movies. In *Spotlight*, Baron is constantly at work and is not social. One night while leaving the office, a colleague glances at Baron in his office and says, “Jesus, does this guy ever go home?” Another colleague responds, “Apparently not.” Mike carries on the image of a problematic family life. He and his wife have problems apparently stemming from his passion for his job, and they are separated. Mike also goes to the office even during the weekend after going jogging. The journalists in the film only socialize with one another. Mike watches a baseball game with his coworkers and still talks about the job there. When he is upset, he pays a visit to Sacha. Nevertheless, the film does not center on family struggles, nor does it create a negative image about the journalist’s family or social life.

In *Truth*, Mary spends her time mostly at the office in New York, and even when she returns home, she immediately starts working in her study. It is understood that she does not

have much family time when her son says, “Mom, you were away for a long time again,” and also when she rejects her husband’s offers to take a walk together. The audience never sees her interacting with people other than her newsroom colleagues or having a social life. The journalist-marrying-a-journalist motif recurs; Mary is married to another journalist. In *Nightcrawler*, Lou has no real life other than his job. The only other living thing in his home is a plant. He has no friends or relatives.⁸⁹ Nina seems the same. She is single; her only focus is her work. Lou wants Nina not out of love, but out of shared professional interests.

Heavy drinking and celebrating at the bar. Good says that the journalist is mostly an alcoholic, outcast, or propagandist in films.⁹⁰ This image does not appear as frequently in the movies examined in this article. In *Spotlight*, characters are seen drinking a cocktail or beer, but they do not seem to drink too much. After the Spotlight team completes the story, they spend time with their families and friends instead of going out and celebrating at a bar. In *Truth*, however, the journalists do celebrate at the bar after broadcasting the Abu Ghraib scandal and the Bush story. After apologizing live on air about the Bush report, Dan and Mary drink together. When Mary is unhappy about CBS opening its investigation into the report, she drinks wine. She also drinks while watching Bush’s reelection victory. In *Nightcrawler*, Lou is never seen drinking except for a dinner scene with Nina. Even in that scene, he does not seem to be keen on alcohol. However, Nina seems to be drinking heavily. She describes her margarita as “breakfast” and explains that she cannot watch her old stories without alcohol. When Lou threatens her job, she gulps down a drink.

Stereotypes about Gender

There have been more male journalists than female journalists in the movies. However, the female journalist has been a prominent figure in films from the beginning, as many studies

have indicated. Journalists who fall outside the white-male-heterosexual realm face extra difficulties.⁹¹ In *Spotlight*, male journalists are more numerous than their female counterparts, and they all are white Americans.⁹² In *Truth* and *Nightcrawler*, male and female journalists appear in almost equal numbers, but they are still white.

S. Ruken Öztürk says women are depicted as “often complicated, difficult, dependent, submissive” and “a sexual object”⁹³ in cinema. First appearing as a “sob sister,”⁹⁴ the woman journalist in films has changed over time, but there are common characterizations that persist. Woman journalists are typically single,⁹⁵ “competent, independent, courageous,”⁹⁶ and “intelligent, well-educated, [and] competitive” while “experiencing conflicts between their careers and personal lives.”⁹⁷

In *Spotlight*, *Truth*, and *Nightcrawler*, female journalists do seem powerful, assertive, competent, and ambitious. They are married, except for Nina. However, the discourse of “experiencing conflicts between their careers and personal lives” continues. For example, *Truth* implies that the woman journalist has not enough time for motherhood. One scene shows that Mary is not preparing a proper breakfast for her son while she is talking on the phone about the Bush story. She throws a cup and cereal on the counter toward him and forgets to add the milk. After Mary is fired, the audience sees her playing a game with her son, which suggests that a woman can be a proper mother only after she leaves her job. In *Nightcrawler*, Nina’s ambition for the job seems to have prevented her from starting a family and having children. In *Spotlight*, at least, Sacha’s marriage looks normal.

In addition, the female journalist is “likely to encounter sexual harassment.”⁹⁸ In *Truth*, after the Bush report is aired, people insult Mary online and use discriminatory language such

as “bitch,” “witch,” and “feminazi propagandist.” In *Nightcrawler*, Lou pushes Nina to have sex with him to maintain their business relationship.

E. Analyzing the Narrative Structures of the Films

Comparison of THJ and the Journalist’s Journey

The three films seem both to continue and break from The Hero’s Journey (THJ) schema. Though using the term “hero,” THJ actually explains the protagonist’s journey. From this perspective, even if the protagonists in *Spotlight* and *Truth* can be described as hero types and the protagonists in *Nightcrawler* are villain types, all the protagonists in these movies are the “heroes” of their own journeys and included in THJ.

Journalist protagonists never have a peaceful, quiet, and ordered Ordinary World, unlike heroes in THJ. The journalists in the films live in a world that requires them to be in search of a story all the time. The journalists are portrayed as being ready for the “Call to Adventure,” and sometimes they do not even need the Call. In *Spotlight*, when Baron “calls” the Spotlight team as the Mentor for the journey, the team is ready. In *Truth*, Mary is always in search of truth and finds her own “call” (the news subject). In *Nightcrawler*, Lou is in search of a job.

Journalists have Mentors (mainly their editors such as Baron) and Allies (mainly their coworkers and sources). In *Spotlight* and *Truth*, the journalist protagonists also have an Inner Mentor, a strong code of honor about journalism and a belief in justice that guides them through the journey. “Supernatural help”⁹⁹ in Campbell’s THJ schema is transformed into a “journalistic instinct” in these films. For example, in *Spotlight*, Robinson tells a coworker that his gut instinct tells him to broaden the investigation. The weapons that journalists use on the journey against their Enemies are their pens and notebooks and their computers and cameras.

The life-or-death crises of the Ordeal appear in different ways in journalism films. In some cases, the journalist feels himself or herself at a dead end in terms of finding the truth or writing the story, or the story may be at the risk of being buried due to political or commercial pressures. Sometimes the journalist faces real death or a death threat. In *Spotlight*, the newspaper delays publishing the story due to the 9/11 attacks, and it is like suspended animation for both the team and the victims. In *Truth*, Mary lies still on her bed with her eyes open after the harsh criticism against her, and later she tells her husband, “They can have my career. I don’t care.” Such scenes reflect the old Mary’s symbolic death. In *Nightcrawler*, there is a risk of being caught for Lou, but he faces neither a spiritual nor a physical life-or-death crisis.

When it comes to the kind of sacrifice that is the mark of a Hero, the scenes in *Spotlight* and *Truth* in which journalists work relentlessly and even neglect their family and private life to uncover the truth suggest that journalists are people who sacrifice themselves to protect democracy and the public interest. In that way, the movies glorify and mythicize journalism and make journalists true heroes. However, in *Nightcrawler*, Lou is full of self-desire and selfishness. He never sacrifices himself for others; instead he leads others to death to achieve his goals.

Resurrection also happens in journalism movies. *Spotlight*’s characters are transformed at the end of their journey: Baron becomes more social and a part of society, Robby learns from and fixes his past mistakes, and Mike loses his religious faith. In *Truth*, with her husband’s and her Mentor’s (Dan Rather’s) support, Mary is reborn. She chooses to stay as a fighter rather than being submissive, and she defends herself and her job furiously in front of the CBS review panel. Then, by crying at the end of her journey (Mary swore never to cry

when she was a child), turning off the TV, and leaving hand-in-hand with her husband, she is transformed from an arrogant, fearless fighter into a peaceful, domesticated woman. In *Nightcrawler*, Lou does not change in a positive way, yet he still succeeds.

In journalism films, the Elixir can be the story, the journalist’s exemplary behavior, or the power of the press. In *Spotlight*, the Elixir is the investigation that exposes the abuse. It gives some relief to the victims and opens the door for other victims to reveal their stories. It presents the truth to the city, country, and world, and it brings positive change. In *Truth*, at the end of the film, Dan calls on citizens and journalists to be brave. Thus, the Elixir in the film is advice to society: be brave, stand up against power, and fight for the truth.¹⁰⁰ *Nightcrawler* presents an evil Elixir in which anything is permissible to be successful, and anyone can succeed if one has enough ambition and a well-considered strategy.

A difference from THJ is that the journalist’s journey never ends. Even if the journalist brings the Elixir, he or she starts a new journey immediately, or the journey itself continues through different stages. In *Spotlight*, the continuous ringing phones and the information about the scandal at the end of the movie imply that this journey can never end; there is more to uncover, more victims to reach. At the end of *Nightcrawler*, the villain protagonist Lou starts a new night with a larger crew and two vehicles, and this means they will keep going to hunt for images; it is an endless duty. In *Truth*, after Mary uncovers the Abu Ghraib scandal, she starts investigating allegations about Bush.

Villains are not punished and do not pay the price for their sins. In *Spotlight*, although heroes get rewards and reveal the scandal, the film shows that Cardinal Law, who knew about the abuse for many years, is appointed to a higher position in the Vatican and that there are many other victims around the country and the world. In *Truth*, the hero cannot uphold the

public interest, loses her job, and never goes back into the TV business again. The ones who suppress her win the battle. In *Nightcrawler*, the villain protagonist gets the reward. These films, therefore, do not let the audience feel catharsis because they break from the classic “the hero wins, the villain loses” narrative and do not offer poetic justice for villains.

Unified Theory of Narrative in the Three Films

In terms of Schock’s Unified Theory of Narrative, *Spotlight* presents a Celebratory hero-wins narrative, *Truth* presents a Tragic narrative through the hero’s fall, and *Nightcrawler* presents a Cynical narrative by letting the villain protagonist win.

Journalists in *Spotlight* achieve their goal, uncover the truth, and become a voice for the victims. In compliance with the Celebratory narrative, characters transform themselves and “make wiser or more ‘heroic’ decisions.” The film reinforces “certain values, attitudes, or beliefs by showing how these attributes lead characters to reward.”¹⁰¹ Those values and attitudes include being honest, working tirelessly, standing up against injustice, upholding professional principles and ethics, and protecting the public interest and the innocent. Hence the film’s narrative celebrates the Truth Searcher journalist.

However, by preventing catharsis, the movie breaks from the Celebratory narrative’s “happy ending.” It suggests that “the truth of matters is not as we have been taught or would like to believe,” as Schock indicates. That means that in churches not everything is perfect, that there are ugly secrets and victims still out there, and that society has to pay attention. Also, the media should follow these kinds of important subjects and not just cover routine developments.

This discourse reflects the circumstance of the period in which the movie was produced, as Douglas Kellner has said is typical of films. Newly elected Pope Francis asked

for forgiveness from victims in 2014. He said there would be “zero tolerance” of sexual abuse. However, the Church is still criticized as never having fully clamped down on this issue. The speeches of producers Blye Pagon Faust and Michael Sugar during Oscar night in 2016 reflect society’s ongoing concern with this issue.¹⁰²

Truth falls into the Tragic narrative by showing the fall of the hero. As Schock indicates for Tragic narratives, “by revealing ugly ‘truths’ contrary to desires or expectations,” the film “urges us to reevaluate flawed assumptions” created about Mary Mapes. The film’s discourse criticizes the rest of the press for focusing on the authenticity of memos and Mary’s political views instead of on the real story, which is whether Bush misused his family’s influence to escape the Vietnam War.

During the period in which the film was screened (around the 2016 presidential election), there was a sharp conflict between the liberal and the conservative media and also between the press and Donald Trump, who was then the Republican presidential candidate. Since the election, whenever President Trump faces allegations or challenges, he does not give satisfying statements or clarifications; instead he publicly accuses the press of doing a “witch hunt” against him and labels stories as “fake news” and the press as “too liberal,” similar to what happened to Mary in the film. The press has become a Scapegoat nowadays just as the film showed in Mary’s story. It seems the film foresaw the future of the country.

Nightcrawler presents a Cynical narrative. By letting the villain win, the film indicates that the ethical deterioration in the media is much worse than we would like to believe. The film reveals ugly truths about the press by emphasizing Lou’s search for bloody images, by showing him killing people on his way to success, and by paying attention to Lou and Nina’s continuous manipulation of the news for ratings. The movie implies that the press does not

work as the fourth estate; rather it manipulates the public and uses every dirty tool for its own commercial gain. More broadly, by bringing Lou-like characters to the audience’s attention, the film warns about social corruption and calls for change, suggesting that otherwise disaster is near.

From this aspect, the film reflects society’s fears and concerns, as Kellner points out. At the time the movie was screened, a new and different type of leader emerged with Trump. It is interesting to see similarities between Lou and Trump. They both see everything as legitimate in order to succeed. They are populists who have no certain ethical standards, and they have problems with women. In that respect, Hollywood again seems to have predicted the future.

In summary, by rewarding good and ideal journalists, the Celebratory narrative of *Spotlight* reminds us of important ethical values in journalism and reinforces the need for a free press in society. As Tragic and Cynical narratives require, *Truth* and *Nightcrawler* draw attention to serious problems in society’s direction. According to Kellner, “Oscar-winning films reflect the mood and zeitgeist of an era.”¹⁰³ *Spotlight* had five nominations and won two of them, Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay. *Nightcrawler* was the nominee for Best Original Screenplay. Furthermore, these movies seem to revive *All the President’s Men* and *Network* from the 1970s. *Spotlight* presents journalism as it was in *All the President’s Men*, while *Nightcrawler* is a kind of resurrection of *Network*. Moreover Robert Redford, who stars in *All the President’s Men*, plays Dan Rather in *Truth*. The real-life Rather covered the Watergate investigation in the 1970s as a White House correspondent.

The Free Press Myth

No matter whether films present a Truth Searcher or a Front Page journalist or whether they depict journalists as heroes, villains/tricksters, or scapegoats, they still serve the free press myth.¹⁰⁴

Spotlight rewards heroes and depicts the press as a watchdog and as the fourth estate. The journalists in *Spotlight* bring attention to victims and protect citizens. The film underlines the necessity of a free press to uncover truths for a free society.

Truth reflects the free press myth by letting the hero fall when she does not uphold every journalistic rule and also by focusing on the biases of other media outlets. The public could not get all the information about the allegations regarding President Bush before the 2004 presidential election because the press did not do its job properly. For citizens, making a decision about a vital election without every fact at hand is a problem for democracy. In that way, the film still underlines the need for an autonomous and free press.

Nightcrawler also highlights the importance of a free and non-commercial press by presenting the Front Page character in the vilest version and by allowing the villain/trickster to win. It warns of a catastrophe when the press loses sight of its main duty. By presenting the press as a “manipulating agent” and “showing the effects of commercial pressures on journalism,”¹⁰⁵ the film shows how the deterioration of the media hurts the public interest and the public’s right to know the truth.

Films emphasize the fourth estate role of the press through both its ideals (*Spotlight*, *Truth*) and its faults (*Truth*, *Nightcrawler*), and they remind the press “not to be too big for its britches and too threatening toward the innocent individual while maintaining its role as the public’s truth-teller and watchdog.”¹⁰⁶ They also suggest that “in spite of formidable obstacles and occasional wrenching change, the press and its noblest ideals will somehow endure.”¹⁰⁷

In addition, *Spotlight* reinforces the idea that private ownership is not an obstacle to the free press; rather it is necessary. It is implied that the newspaper was able to uncover the scandal after the *New York Times* bought it and the new editor led the newspaper from being a local paper to being a national one. However, *Truth* and *Nightcrawler* question a privately owned press. This questioning appears in *Truth* especially in Mike’s speech about Viacom and the company’s action toward Mary and the team after the questions appear about the authenticity of the memos. *Nightcrawler* emphasizes how the ratings-driven media turns into a cruel and ruthless business. *Spotlight* maintains the notion that problems with the press largely stem from bad journalists, but *Truth* and *Nightcrawler* show that the problems come from fundamental flaws in the media structure.

Through their narratives and journalist characters, the films continue to “offer visions of what the press could and should be.”¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

This analysis has shown that whether journalists are entirely fictional characters or based on real-life journalists, the alternative method of categorization proposed in this article is valid for recent journalism movies. Characters in the examined movies carry the Front Page or Truth Searcher characteristics with few changes. In terms of shared stereotypes, some have changed over time, but many stereotypes continue in recent films. The journalist characters continue to carry and reinforce the hero, villain/trickster, and scapegoat myths. Although The Hero’s Journey structure is mainly valid for the films, some stages change in the journalist’s journey. Finally, by moving away from the classical happy ending and catharsis, journalism films reinforce important ethical values in journalism; draw attention to wrongdoing,

corruption, and the political and commercial entanglements of the press; and reinforce society’s need for real journalists and real journalism. Examining journalism movies remains meaningful, especially when one considers the current “war” between President Trump and the U.S. press.

However, this article focuses on only three movies. Doing more analyses of journalism films, TV series, and novels that use the alternative method of categorization presented here and that evaluate the works’ narrative structures can bring broader and different perspectives to the field.

Endnotes

¹ Douglas Kellner, *Cinema Wars, Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 13-14.

² Howard Good, *Outcasts: The Image of the Journalist in Contemporary Film* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 1.

³ Matthew C. Ehrlich and Joe Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels: The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), Kindle edition, Introduction.

⁴ Thomas H. Zynda, “The Hollywood Version: Movie Portrayals of the Press,” *Journalism History* 6.1 (1979): 17, available at <http://www.ijpc.org/uploads/files/Thomas%20Zynda%20Hollywood%20Version.pdf>.

⁵ Jessica Strait, “Popular Portrayals of Journalists and their Personal Lives: Finding the Balance between Love and the ‘Scoop,’” Washington and Lee University, 2011, 14, available at <https://www.ijpc.org/uploads/files/Jessica%20Strait%20-%20Washington%20and%20Lee.pdf>.

⁶ See Pew Research Center, “The Modern News Consumer,” July 2016, available at <https://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer/>; American Press Institute, “A New Understanding: What Makes People Trust and Rely on News,” April 17, 2016, available at <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/survey-research/trust-news/>. See also Loren Ghiglione and Joe Saltzman, “Fact or Fiction: Hollywood Looks at the News,” 2005, available at <http://www.ijpc.org/uploads/files/hollywoodlooksatthenews2.pdf>.

⁷ See Ghiglione and Saltzman, “Fact or Fiction,” 2-3.

⁸ Joe Saltzman, “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture: A Unique Method of Studying the Public’s Perception of Its Journalists and the News Media,” 2005, 3.

⁹ Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Introduction.

¹⁰ See Joe Saltzman with Liz Mitchell, “The Image of the Journalist in Silent Films, 1890 to 1929: Part One 1890 to 1919,” *The IJPC Journal* 7 (Spring 2016-Spring 2018): 35-244, available at <http://ijpc.uscannenberg.org/journal/index.php/ijpcjournal/article/view/83/97>.

¹¹ See The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Database, available at www.ijpc.org/page/introdatabse.htm.

¹² Alex Barris, *Stop the Presses!: The Newspaperman in American Films* (South Brunswick, N.J.: A. S. Barnes, 1976), 18.

¹³ Matthew C. Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 21.

¹⁴ Barris, *Stop the Presses*, 13.

¹⁵ Loren Ghiglione, “The American Journalist: Fiction versus Fact,” 1991, 5, available at <http://www.ijpc.org/uploads/files/ghiglione.pdf>.

¹⁶ Barris, *Stop the Presses*, 14.

¹⁷ Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Introduction.

¹⁸ Zynda, “The Hollywood Version,” 17.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Good, *Outcasts*, 13.

²¹ Ghiglione, “The American Journalist,” 3

²² Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 20.

²³ Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Introduction.

²⁴ Zynda, “The Hollywood Version,” 17.

²⁵ Qtd. in Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Chapter 1.

²⁶ There has been criticism of the way Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward handled the investigation. For example, they were accused of misleading their sources. However, this article focuses on how journalists are depicted in the film’s diegetic world.

²⁷ Zynda, “The Hollywood Version,” 21.

²⁸ Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 106.

²⁹ Qtd. in Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Chapter 1.

³⁰ W. Joseph Campbell. *Getting it Wrong: Ten of The Greatest Misreported Stories in American Journalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 116.

³¹ Qtd. in Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Chapter 1.

³² Zynda, “The Hollywood Version,” 23.

³³ Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 180.

³⁴ See Barris, *Stop The Presses*.

³⁵ See Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Introduction.

³⁶ Good, *Outcasts*, 5.

³⁷ Ethical Journalism Network, “Five Core Principles of Journalism,” available at <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/who-we-are/5-principles-of-journalism>. See also Society of Professional Journalists, “Code of Ethics,” available at <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>; American Press Association, “Principles of Journalism,” available at <https://americanpressassociation.com/principles-of-journalism/>.

³⁸ Robert W. McChesney. *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 70.

³⁹ Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Introduction.

⁴⁰ Zynda, “The Hollywood Version,” 23.

⁴¹ Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Introduction. According to them, “especially starting in the 1970s, the portrayals became more intrusive and obnoxious, particularly with television reporters and photojournalists armed with cameras and microphones wielded like weapons. They have contributed to an image of overzealous news media.”

⁴² Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Chapter 3.

⁴³ Strait, “Popular Portrayals,” 14.

⁴⁴ See Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*.

⁴⁵ Strait, “Popular Portrayals,” 2.

⁴⁶ Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Chapter 3.

⁴⁷ Strait, “Popular Portrayals,” 3.

⁴⁸ Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 179.

⁴⁹ Zynda, “The Hollywood Version,” 23.

⁵⁰ Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Introduction.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Chapter 4.

⁵³ See V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963); Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969); Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960).

⁵⁴ See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁵⁵ See Christopher Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (Studio City, Calif: Michael Wiese Productions, 1998).

⁵⁶ Stuart Voytilla, “Excerpts from *Myth and the Movies*” (originally published as Voytilla, *Myth and the Movies: Discovering the Mythic Structure of 50 Unforgettable Films* [Studio City, Calif: Michael Wiese Productions, 1999]), 2, available at <http://www.tlu.ee/~rajaleid/montaazh/Hero%27s%20Journey%20Arch.pdf>.

⁵⁷ See Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*; Voytilla, “Excerpts from *Myth and the Movies*.”

⁵⁸ Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 220.

⁵⁹ See Michael Welles Schock, “Hollywood’s Four Classic Narrative Types,” *MovieMaker*, September 7, 2017, available at <https://www.moviemaker.com/archives/moviemaking/screenwriting/hollywoods-four-classic-narrative-types-part-i-when-the-bad-guys-win/>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Kellner, *Cinema Wars*, 12.

⁶³ Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 34-37.

⁶⁴ Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of The Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 59.

⁶⁵ See Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism* (New York: Guilford, 2001).

⁶⁶ Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Introduction.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Chapter 2.

⁶⁸ Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 8.

⁶⁹ Lule, *Daily News*, 24, 124.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁷¹ Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 9.

⁷² See Lule, *Daily News*, 22; Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 40-47.

⁷³ Interestingly, there appears to be no movie produced after 2010 that is based on real events and that has a villain-type journalist protagonist. The only film close to this description is *Shattered Glass* (Billy Ray) in 2003. However, even in this movie, the filmmakers make Charles “Chuck” Lane a journalist protagonist who finds that Stephen Glass is fabricating stories. It appears that Hollywood prefers to present only a heroic image when it comes to films based on real events and journalists.

⁷⁴ In the films, other archetypes appear as well. Baron is an ideal/catalyst hero but also behaves as a Mentor for others. Mary may be described as a victim in terms of a “witch hunt” against her and in terms of experiencing the death of her ideals. Sacha may be considered as a Good Mother regarding her gentleness; she gives comfort to the victims and encourages them to

speak up about all they had been through. However, this article is limited to analyzing three main archetypes.

⁷⁵ The choice of using characters’ first or last names in this article is based on how they are usually addressed in the films. For example, Marty Baron is generally addressed as “Baron” by other characters.

⁷⁶ He says in the meeting, “Whether Mr. Garabedian is a crank or not, he says he has documents that prove the Cardinal knew,” and, “The fact remains we have a Boston priest who abused eighty kids, we’ve got a lawyer who says he has proof Law knew about it, and we’ve written all of two stories on this in the last six months.”

⁷⁷ Cardinal Law says, “If I can be any help, Marty, don’t hesitate to ask. I find that the city flourishes when its great institutions work together.”

⁷⁸ Mike appears in a kind of “bribery” scene at the court archive when he offers payment for a document. However, it is shown that he has to do this act to prevent the document from being swept under the rug. So, the film legitimizes his action. Also, Robby had missed uncovering the scandal previously. The film shows that he compensates for his mistake this time.

⁷⁹ In that scene, the newsroom of Boston Globe is quiet, and the secretary Linda tells Robby and Mike that the “phone has not rung once. Marty sent two of [my calls] down to Spotlight.” When Robby and Mike rush to the Spotlight office, they see there are non-stop calls; the team cannot cover all of the phones, and the callers are mostly victims.

⁸⁰ The exceptions are Mike’s small “bribery” and Robby’s past mistake, as mentioned in note 77.

⁸¹ Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 30.

⁸² In the scene, Mike says, “You think Viacom might need the administration on their side? You think they might be desperate to make it up to [Bush] right now? Make up for CBS running stories on Abu Ghraib, the President, and Vietnam, and all the other shit that isn’t part of your scheduled programming? Of course, everyone wants it to disappear. There’s a fucking election at stake! You’re supposed to question everything. That’s your job. We are supposed to question everything, and, what, you won’t even question this? . . . [Do you] know when the FCC repealed cross-ownership laws . . . a single company could own forty-five percent of the national market share? Forty-five percent of the national market share. People fucking flipped. They lost their shit. They actually sat down and wrote their local congressmen. So in the 2003 appropriations bill, guess what: Congress overturned it. Woo-hoo! Hooray for democracy, right? Nope. The president wouldn’t sign it. Bush threatened to veto the bill unless a compromise was found at thirty-nine percent. And why thirty-nine percent? That’s the exact percent Viacom wouldn’t have to sell off any of their stations. The president of the United

States was ready to take down the entire federal budget so that Viacom wouldn't lose any money!”

⁸³ Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Chapter 1.

⁸⁴ Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 8.

⁸⁵ Peter Dahlgren, Introduction to *Journalism and Popular Culture*, edited by Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (London: Sage, 1992), 1; Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Introduction.

⁸⁶ Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Introduction.

⁸⁷ Zynda, “The Hollywood Version,” 23.

⁸⁸ Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 179.

⁸⁹ When detectives knock on his door and want to come in, he seems childishly happy, for someone finally has come to his home.

⁹⁰ See Good, *Outcasts*.

⁹¹ See Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Chapter 3.

⁹² Mark Ruffalo looks like a white male American in the film although his real-life counterpart is Portuguese.

⁹³ S. Ruken Öztürk. *Sinemada Kadın Olmak: Sanat Filmlerinde Kadın İmgeleri*. (Istanbul: Alan Yayınları, 2000), 221.

⁹⁴ See Joe Saltzman, “Sob Sisters: The Image of The Female Journalist in Popular Culture,” 2003, available at <http://www.ijpc.org/uploads/files/sobsessay.pdf>. Saltzman (p. 2) indicates that editors used female reporters to cover the human angle or color sidebar of a story: “If somebody accused of a crime happened to be a woman, a female reporter might be assigned to play up the emotional aspects of the story. Or, if the accused was a man, he might have a wife, girlfriend or mother whom the female reporter could interview and play up any heart-tugging angles, any emotional aspect of the story.” Such emotional pieces became known as “sob stories” and female reporters in the movies became known as “sob sisters.”

⁹⁵ See Ofa Bezunartea Valencia, María José Cantalapedra, César Coca García, Aingeru Genaut Arratibe, Simón Peña Fernández, Jesús Ángel Pérez Dasilva, “So What? She’s a Newspaperman and She’s Pretty: Women Journalists in the Cinema,” *Zer* 13.25 (2008): 221-42.

⁹⁶ Donna Born, “The Image of The Woman Journalist in American Popular Fiction 1890 to The Present,” 1981, 24, available at <http://www.ijpc.org/uploads/files/Donna%20Born%20--%20The%20Image%20of%20the%20Woman%20Journalist%20in%20American%20Popular%20Fiction.pdf>.

⁹⁷ Maurine Beasley. “Washington Women Journalists: Fact vs. Fiction,” *The IJPC Journal* 5 (Fall 2013-Spring 2014): 111, available at <http://ijpc.uscannenberg.org/journal/index.php/ijpcjournal/article/view/42/68>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 89, 113.

¹⁰⁰ Vogler says, “In the tragic mode, heroes die or are defeated, brought down by their tragic flaws. Yet there is learning and an Elixir brought back from experience. Who learns? The audience, for they see the errors of the tragic hero and the consequences of error. They learn, if they are wise, what mistakes to avoid, and this is the Elixir that they bring away from experience.” See Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 222.

¹⁰¹ Schock, “Hollywood’s Four Classic Narrative Types.”

¹⁰² See Devan Coggan, “Oscars 2016: Spotlight Producer Addresses Pope Francis in Best Picture Speech,” *EW.com*, February 28, 2016, available at <https://ew.com/article/2016/02/28/oscars-2016-spotlight-best-picture/>.

¹⁰³ Kellner, *Cinema Wars*, 12.

¹⁰⁴ For more on this subject, see Bariskan Unal, “Narratives, Politics and Myths in American Journalism Movies: Amerikan Gazetecilik Filmlerinde Anlati Yapisi, Donemsel Yansimalar ve Ozgur Basin Miti,” *İletişim Kuram ve Araştırma Dergisi* 47 (Güz 2018): 111-40, available at <http://iletisimdergisi.hacibayram.edu.tr/site/index.php/IKAD/article/view/559/486>.

¹⁰⁵ Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies*, 175.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 161.

¹⁰⁷ Ehrlich and Saltzman, *Heroes and Scoundrels*, Conclusion.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Introduction.