

Ethical Reflections on the 9/11 Controversy: The Responsibility of the Media to Tell the Truth

Do Information Science and Media Professionals Have a Duty to Provide Evidence-Based Information to a Questioning Public?

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Abstract:

While it is recognized that through the use of meta-analysis and randomized controlled trials the standard of excellence in evidenced-based medicine (EBM) stands alone on a pinnacle, there is nonetheless an evidence-based methodology that can be applied across the board in other decision-making areas. Though research into the events of 9/11 has not yet attained the rigor achieved by EBM, it is still possible to rank the research in this field according to evidence-based principles. This article explains the principles, points to sources that exemplify them, and argues the ethical obligation of librarians and journalists to advance those sources .

Nine-eleven has done more to change the world's political landscape than any other event since World War II.

And 9/11 is far from over: it triggered what Western leaders have declared an "endless" or "generational" war on terror. Even President Obama stated in March 2009 that the Afghan-Pakistan border region "has become the most dangerous place in the world" for the American people.[1]

Increasingly, however, the official account of its cause has come under rigorous scientific scrutiny and doubt. In Europe, strong media coverage followed the unchallenged 2009 discovery of high-tech military explosives in the World Trade Center dust.[2]

Given the enormous international expense, suffering, and death that continue to hemorrhage from the wound of 9/11, it is vital that librarians and media professionals acquire the knowledge and ethical support to perform their part in addressing the rising tide of doubt.

1. Is there good reason to doubt the official account of 9/11?

Though the imagery of the events of September 11, 2001, is profoundly etched in the collective human memory, there is a growing body of scientific evidence suggesting that these events were not brought about in the manner described by The 9/11 Commission

Report of 2004.[3i]

Harper's magazine referred to the Commission's report as:

"a cheat and a fraud. It stands as a series of evasive maneuvers that infantilize the audience, transform candor into iniquity, and conceal realities that demand immediate inspection and confrontation." [4]

The 9/11 Commissioners themselves reported the obstruction of their mandate by the C.I.A., in a New York Times editorial:

"What we do know is that government officials decided not to inform a lawfully constituted body, created by Congress and the president, to investigate one of the greatest tragedies to confront this country. We call that obstruction." [5]

Indeed a vast body of evidence refuting the official account has been compiled in the encyclopedic work *The New Pearl Harbor Revisited*, which was awarded Publishers Weekly's "Pick of the Week" in November, 2008.[6]

Its author, Dr. David Ray Griffin, was nominated in 2008 and 2009 for the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on 9/11.

Dr. Griffin is controversial in the press, however. In September 2009, the *New Statesman* cited him as number 41 of "The 50 People Who Matter Today," complaining that his books had given "a sheen of respectability" to "one of the most pernicious global myths." [vii] The impact of the growing evidence - as revealed through 9/11 conferences, demonstrations, and public opinion polls - caused Guardian columnist George Monbiot to bemoan that "the anti-war movement has been largely co-opted in many places by the 9/11 Truth movement." [8]

Though controversial, the persistent questions about the 9/11 Commission findings show that the matter is far from settled - indeed thousands of professional people are calling for a transparent re-investigation into 9/11, with full subpoena power.[9]

2. Why is it important that the events of 9/11 be properly understood?

The September 11th attacks have done more to shape world conflict in this century than any other event. More resources are being committed to the resulting "war on terror" than to the foundational issue of the survival of our eco-system. Additionally, the "war on terror" is being waged in the oil-rich Middle East, whose promise of vast oil supplies is delaying the development of alternative energy sources.

As we saw above, in the past year new scientific information has pointed strongly to the use of a high-tech military explosive (nanothermite) in the vertical free-fall collapses of the Twin Towers and Building 7. Many firefighters heard explosions in the basements, and nine years later, organized firefighters are strongly urging a new investigation.[10] The cell phone calls from the airliners are now seriously in doubt,[11] and it has recently been demonstrated that Osama bin Laden probably died in December 2001.[12] The FBI, in any case, offers no evidence for his responsibility in the attacks.[xiii] The two 9/11 Commission heads, and its senior counsel, have declared that the Commission was lied to.[14]

It is therefore imperative that the truth about 9/11 be established with certainty. It is urgent and essential that all professionals who convey information about 9/11 to the public be equipped with the best possible evidence, so that decision-making about our most pressing issues is based on sound knowledge.

3. Sound knowledge: What is evidence-based practice?

Evidence-based practice is a methodology for clinical medical practice whose application has expanded, since it first appeared in the early 1990's, to guide professional decision-making in many other research-based fields.[15]

Evidence-based medicine (EBM) is “a way of providing health care that is guided by a thoughtful integration of the best available scientific knowledge with clinical expertise.”[16] It integrates three streams of evidence: patient reports, physician observations, and current research that is continually updated into clinical practice guidelines.

EBM offers the medical community a point-of-care gold standard of consensus on the diagnosis and treatment of each condition. Where it is readily available, there is no longer any reason why a physician should claim ignorance of the best available information in the treatment of his or her patients.

Evidence-Based Practice in the Library Setting

Information specialist Andrew Booth defines evidence-based library practice as

“an approach to information science that promotes the collection, interpretation, and integration of valid, important and applicable user-reported, librarian-observed, and research-derived evidence. The best available evidence moderated by user needs and preferences, is applied to improve the quality of professional judgments.”[17]

The journal Evidence-Based Library and Information Practice is now in its fifth year of publication, and is reporting advances in everything from the peer review of electronic search strategies to critical appraisal checklists[xviii] that test the validity of study design, data collection, and outcomes.

The Fifth International Evidence Based Library & Information Practice Conference declared:

- that “information literacy is a fundamental human right,”
- the need to address “ineffective comprehension and use of information that continue to plague human society,”
- the profession’s responsibility “to remain in touch with the evidence base for library and information practice,”
- “a professional imperative - a need to demonstrate that by making our services more evidence based we can make a difference.”[19]

Librarians thus strive to operate in the real world, using evidence-based librarianship (EBL) as applied science. And science is a state of mind: questioning, open, balanced, respectful of

evidence, and on the alert for bias.

Evidence-Based Practice in the Media Setting

Newspapers are facing bankruptcy[xx] in the wake of the Internet and social media revolutions, and must adapt or die. This is particularly true with regard to the resounding silence about the 9/11 controversy in the American press. In the face of vigilant on-the-spot citizen videotaping and wiki-leaks of official wrong-doing, it no longer suffices to simply hand off government and corporate newswire releases as the dominant source of reality.

A paternal top-down corporate-owned press no longer constructs the political reality. The global Internet brain, with its synapses firing through Google, YouTube, Facebook and a host of other social media, is gutting the media monopoly over our collective sense of reality.

A monumental correction is in progress, and deservedly so.

The media has failed to ask the tough questions in time: about 9/11, the illegal Middle East wars, Katrina, and the banking scandals.

The media underestimated its truth-hungry consumers – insulted them by withholding analysis and historical context – and now the hunt for reality on serious issues has led to grassroots sources that go far beyond the old “he said, she said” and “yellow journalism” models that have been offered up as good enough.

Philip Meyer, Professor Emeritus of Journalism at the University of North Carolina, and author of “The Vanishing Newspaper,” foresees the newspaper of the future as a virtual textbook model of evidence-based practice:

“The newspapers that survive will probably do so with some kind of hybrid content: analysis, interpretation and investigative reporting in a print product that appears less than daily, combined with constant updating and reader interaction on the Web.”[xxi]

Richard Sambrook, director of the BBC’s World Service and Global News, states, “I maintain we need evidence, fact-based reporting more than ever in a world awash with information, rumour, and opinion.”[22]

In summary: To address the sensitive issues of national security and foreign policy, society requires, from its library science and media professionals, reliable evidence-based information that will satisfy the public responsibility to judge and act upon the critical issues at hand.

4. Public interest in 9/11 information: What do the polls show?

There have been dozens of reputable polls, in the United States, Canada, and other countries, measuring public beliefs about responsibility for 9/11.[23]

These polls consistently show that 30-40% of people either doubt the official story, or believe that the US government allowed the attacks to happen, or that the government was directly complicit.

A 2006 Time Magazine article reported:

“A Scripps-Howard poll of 1,010 adults last month found that 36% of Americans consider it “very likely” or “somewhat likely” that government officials either allowed the attacks to be carried out or carried out the attacks themselves. Thirty-six percent adds up to a lot of people. This is not a fringe phenomenon. It is a mainstream political reality.”[24]

A 2008 World Public Opinion poll of 17 nations outside the United States found that majorities in only nine of the countries believe Al Qaeda carried out the attacks.[25]

In contrast to this widespread public skepticism, very little of the scientific literature on 9/11 (which is listed in Part 6 below) has been reviewed in the mainstream press. The public has thus had minimal access to research materials in libraries (owing to the absence of reviews) or to balanced media investigations into the emerging evidence.

The demand for such information may be seen by searching the Google News Archive for “9/11 truth”.[26] The top-ranked article for 2010 dealt with 18 case studies of objective European, British and Canadian mainstream treatments of 9/11 during the past year.[27]

I turn now to the question of the ethical responsibility of media and information professionals to offer an evidence-based approach to the 9/11 debate that is rumbling along below the radar.

5. The ethics of delivering evidence-based journalism and library services on the events of September 11

On the home page for the American Library Association (ALA) “Code of Ethics is written:

“Ethical dilemmas occur when values are in conflict.”[28]

Indeed, values come into sudden grim conflict when a person looks squarely, for the first time, at the (largely unreported) evidence surrounding the 9/11 attacks.

Doubts about September 11th, which bears the hallmark characteristics of a false flag operation,[29] constitute precisely the sort of dilemma that codes of ethics were designed to handle.

The ALA ethical statements provide guidance:

- We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.
- We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.
- We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.[30]

Similarly, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) states that “respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.”[31]

The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) states that:

“the primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time.”[32]

ASNE adds that:

“freedom of the press belongs to the people. It must be defended against encroachment or assault from any quarter, public or private. Journalists must be constantly alert to see that the public’s business is conducted in public. They must be vigilant against all who would exploit the press for selfish purposes.”[33]

The IFJ defines press freedom as:

“that freedom from restraint which is essential to enable journalists, editors, publishers and broadcasters to advance the public interest by publishing, broadcasting or circulating facts and opinions without which a democratic electorate cannot make responsible judgments.”[34]

The IFJ “Clause of Conscience” even seeks to protect journalists, by stating that:

“No journalist should be directed by an employer or any person acting on behalf of the employer to commit any act or thing that the journalist believes would breach his or her professional ethics...No journalist can be disciplined in any way for asserting his or her rights to act according [to] their conscience.”[35]

Thus we see that librarians and media professionals have both the responsibility and the ethical support of their associations to seriously question 9/11, especially if that responsibility is the public wish – and the polls indicate that it is.

To recap: A parallel can be drawn between evidence-based medicine, which provides a standard of information for human health, and evidence-based library science and journalism, which could equally provide a standard of information for democratic and political health.

Using the scientific method, EBM ranks various types of evidence according to their freedom from bias. In reporting on controversies relating to the events of September 11, library science and journalism could equally draw on types of evidence that are free from bias.

Whether or not these professionals have a realizable ethical responsibility to provide the best evidence to their clients can only be gauged by determining whether they have access to such evidence.

I turn now to an examination of the available sources of evidence-based knowledge on the events of September 11.

6. Evidence-Based 9/11 Literature Sources

The literature of 9/11 can be divided into US government documents, which support the official account of 9/11, and the body of literature that has emerged from the professional research community through dissatisfaction with this account.

Government Documents Advancing the Official Story of September 11th

A 9/11 investigation was resisted by the White House[36] and only granted under pressure from the surviving families nearly two years after the event. The 9/11 Commission was a low-budget affair (costing a fraction of the Monica Lewinsky investigation) and tightly controlled by a White House insider, Philip Zelikow.[37]

Commissioner Lee Hamilton said the 9/11 Commission was “set up to fail.” Commissioner Timothy Roemer was “extremely frustrated with the false statements” coming from the Pentagon, and former commissioner Max Cleland resigned, calling it a “national scandal.”[38]

Among 115 other omissions, [39] The 9/11 Commission Report failed to mention the sudden straight-down collapse at 5:30 PM of nearby WTC Building 7, an enormous steel-frame skyscraper 47 stories high that was not hit by an airplane.

Thus the Report, which is incomplete, lacks peer review, and has been shunned by its own Commissioners, can hardly be viewed as an evidence-based study.

The other central documents in the official account were prepared over a seven-year period by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), in an attempt to explain the strange vertical, nearly free-fall collapses of the Twin Towers and Building 7.[40] There was no consideration given to a controlled demolition hypothesis, though the attending firefighters and TV anchors (including CBS anchor Dan Rather and ABC anchor Peter Jennings[41]) suggested the uncanny similarity at the time.

The NIST reports were not peer-reviewed. Sixty days were given for public comment on the first draft, but the comments, and many serious concerns that were raised, were almost entirely ignored in writing the final report.[42]

As the building collapse reports were not peer-reviewed, they cannot be judged as evidence-based.

Independent Scientific Research Opposing the Official Story of September 11th

Perhaps the best evidence challenging the official story has been compiled by Prof. Emeritus Dr. David Ray Griffin, who was mentioned above. Griffin taught theology and the philosophy of religion, with a heavy focus on the relation between religion and science, for 35 years, and has written nine carefully researched and documented books that together represent “the known” in relation to verifiable knowledge about 9/11.

At the present time, a website offering Dr. Griffin’s books, videotaped lectures, and online essays is the best single source of online evidence-based knowledge on 9/11.[43]

Published scientific articles include, in addition to the nanothermite study,[44]

- six papers in the February 2010 American Behavioral Scientist, indexed by 67 databases, and published as a whole issue on State Crimes Against Democracy, with 9/11 used as a primary example;[45]
- an article in The Environmentalist, “Environmental Anomalies at the World Trade Center: Evidence for Energetic Materials;”[46]
- a paper, “Extremely High Temperatures during the World Trade Center Destruction;”[47]
- a science article countering popular myths about the WTC collapses;[48]
- 59 peer-reviewed papers on the physics of 9/11 events, published since 2006 in the Journal of 9/11 Studies, and 67 letters between members of the academic community;[49]
- 9 scholarly papers published as a compendium in 2006 by Elsevier Science Press, suggesting US complicity in a false flag operation.[i] The Hidden History of 9-11-2001 was never reviewed in the mainstream press.

Other resources include Morgan and Henshall’s 9/11 Revealed[li] and Flight 93 Revealed;[lii] two books by Prof. Michel Chossudovsky, America’s “War on Terrorism”,[53] and War and Globalisation: The Truth Behind September 11;[liv] and the Complete 9/11 Timeline investigative project.[55]

An association of professional architects and engineers held a worldwide press conference in February 2010, to announce 1000 members calling for a new investigation into 9/11 - based on the way the Twin Towers and Building 7 fell.[56]

In late 2009, Canada’s flagship investigative journalism program, CBC’s Fifth Estate, explored both sides of the 9/11 controversy in depth - the first balanced documentary in North America to do so.[57]

In summary, though the foregoing evidence against the official story has not been distilled into the systematic reviews and practice guidelines that are the products of evidence-based medicine, each claim has been either multiply peer-reviewed or substantially documented. All claims are based on continually updated and ongoing research.

This qualifies the independent research cited above as the best available evidence concerning the events of September 11.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, librarians and journalists face the dilemma that CBS anchorman Dan Rather described to the BBC to account for the failure of journalists to properly investigate 9/11:

“There was a time in South Africa that people would put flaming tires around people’s necks if they dissented. And in some ways the fear is that you will be necklaced here, you will have a flaming tire of lack of patriotism put around your neck. Now it is that fear that keeps journalists from asking the toughest of

the tough questions.”[58]

The words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu offer moral direction for this dilemma: “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”[59]

Librarians and journalists therefore have a solemn duty to their democracies to present the 9/11 issue as a scientific controversy worthy of debate.

Notes

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