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Some reporters say, however, that they are discouraged by the prospect their articles will be "lawyered." Mar-

one another with warnings. "Journalists should make the determination of what is newsworthy," said an article in A.P.M.E. News, the monthly magazine of The Associated Press Managing Editors' organization. "But in doing so," the article went on, "they must realize that their judgment may be subject to second-guessing by plaintiffs, lawyers, judges and jurors. The chilling effect of this, through self-censorship, is obvi-

Steven J. Helle of the University of Illinois, who teaches law as it applies to the news media, said he frequently told editors the law was basically on their side. But he said, "They would rather believe that they have a real problem on their hands.

Even without legal problems, investigative journalism is more expensive

#### **Initiative Over Routine**

For small newspapers, a bill for a

"News directors feel the pressure of the bottom line when a reporter works three months on something that lasts six minutes and is followed by a lawsuit," said Mackie Morris, who, as chairman of the broadcast department of the University of Missouri School of Journalism, keeps in touch with many television journalists.

## Investigative Journalism Is Found Shifting Goals

By JONATHAN FRIENDLY

tigative journalism is changing some

To many journalists and their critics, the shift is a retreat into low-risk news-gathering by a "chilled" press unwill-ing to stand up to adverse libel ver-dicts, public hostility and economic pressures in the industry. The journalists and critics warn that the change hurts the public, which expects the

press to be its watchdog.

To others in the field, the shift is a welcome evolution. They say some articles that pass as "investigative" journalism are "adversary" journalism in which charges of personal or institu-tional wrongdoing are based on suspi-cion rather than evidence.

They say the press is as enthusiastic and active as ever in disclosing corruption and that the difference is the toughening of internal standards to assure fairness and accuracy.

#### Attitudes More 'Judicious'

Howard Simons, managing editor of The Washington Post, said reportorial attitudes were more "judicious" now than they were 10 years ago, when The Post won a Pulitzer Prize for its Watergate reporting. Reporters and editors no longer "want to turn over a rock just to see what sort of dishonesty is under it." he said.

In recent interviews, journalists and their critics said the shift could not be measured directly in terms of stories not pursued or articles not published, because reporters or television news directors do not openly discuss the chances they do not take. But it is widely felt.

"Journalism is getting to be a cautious business," said Jerry Uhrham-mer, a reporter for The Press-Enterprise in Riverside, Calif., former chairman of Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc., a 1,200-member organiza

What has become known as investigative journalism traces its roots at least to the exposés of Lincoln Steffens, Upton Sinclair or Ida Tarbell. In the 1950's and 1960's it was the province of a relatively small number of reporters intent on disclosing venality and willing to spend time poring over records or searching out informers.

The publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971 and the Watergate disclosures that began a year later led to new support for journalistic investigations in general and in particular for confrontation with government. Many newspapers and television stations organized teams of reporters who were freed from routine to concentrate on

#### **Loss of Public Support**

In the last three years, over-quotation of unidentified sources in articles and lapses like the publication of manufactured or plagiarized reports have cut public support for the press. Many newsrooms became more eager to adhere to standards of fairness that had sometimes been set aside in the rush to reveal wrongdoing.

Libel suits or the fear of libel suits is repeatedly described as the darkest cloud hanging over investigative jour-nalism. But the effect of the suits cannot be precisely measured. Editors and reporters interviewed said unanimously that they had never killed a news accountthey believed was true and important only because they feared that publication might lead to a

The increase in litigation has led to more internal policing. News organizations retain lawyers to check controversial articles and to warn of areas of possible trouble. Editors say they make the final decision on what the article says and how it says it. They note that the lawyers often show them ways to report facts they might otherwise have omitted.

ion Goldin, a senior producer for ABC News, said that having lawyers constantly in the newsroom checking for areas of potential trouble in scripts made "a dramatic difference," with reporters asking themselves whether it is worth it to pursue a story they know would create time-consuming legal

#### Effect of Self-Censorship

In any event, journalists bombare

than routine chronicling of local events. Months of digging may produce nothing that can be published or broad-

few hundred dollars to copy public records is enough to derail an investigation. Somewhat larger organizations that can afford it sometimes conclude that the reward is too small.

Some newspapers and stations leave

## The activity loosely defined as inves- | investigative work largely to the initiative of the "beat" reporters, allowing them to drop routine duties for the spe

cial project. Others make the effort more formal. The Washington Post, The Philadelphia Inquirer and Newsday say they normally have a dozen staff members assigned to investigative projects, and some television stations designate "Iteams." The networks concentrate their investigations on particular pro-

grams such as CBS News's Minutes" or ABC News's "20/20." As a matter of philosophy, many news organizations have turned away from disclosures of individual corruption or exposés of private business and now focus on how such public agencies as prisons or mental hospitals are run.

Reg Murphy, president and pub-lisher of The Baltimore Sun, said that investigative journalism had lost energy and impact as reporters concentrated on intellectual issues. "We put too high a value on sociology and

too little on raw human data," he said. But many editors and reporters say those topics are more sophisticated and socially useful than pursuing personal wrongdoing. They argue that that is the responsibility of law-enforcement igencies.

There are exceptions, like The Wall Street Journal's recent articles about privately owned "slave labor" camps in Louisiana, or the inquiry by The Kansas City Star and The Kansas City Times into the collapse in 1981 of walk-ways at the Hyatt Regency Hotel there. This year more than 80 percent of the submissions for the Pulitzer Prize for local investigative work dealt with governmental functions and functionaries.

#### Libel and Courts' Attitude

Articles about public agencies pose little risk of a libel suit, compared with exposing individual dishonesty or corporate corruption, because court decisions have overwhelmingly protected almost any discussion of issues of pub-lic controversy. Journalists have also found that they can head off problems by working from the start of a project with a sympathetic public official, such as a prosecutor.

Last year reporters at television station KSL in Salt Lake City wanted the Utah Attorney General's opinion, so they would not be prosecuted, of their planned undercover test of how easily an unqualified applicant could get food stamps and unemployment compensa-tion. Attorney General David L. Wilkinson cleared the project, and the tape the reporters made is now being used as a training film for new employees in state offices concerned.

David Protess, a journalism professor at Northwestern University, said such "orchestrated journalism" minimized public impact because the officials were already on record as promis-ing to "reform" the abuse that the news account detailed.

Some journalists say cooperating with the authorities risked making the press an arm of the government, at

east in appearance. Then there is the "investigative reporting" that is simply reporting about an investigation conducted by someone else, usually a prosecutor. That process has become so common that Mr. Uhrhammer's group, Investigative Resuch reports from consideration for its annual awards

#### Misrepresentation as a Ploy

Like lawyers, doctors and other groups, journalists have been questioning whether their work meets standards of fairness and honesty. They have been particularly concerned with the question of whether a reporter may misrepresent his or her identity if the reporter believes misrepresentation is the only way to unearth an important

James P. Herman, editor of The Traverse City Record-Eagle in Michigan, said he hesitated for weeks before deciding to publish an article saying a newly opened escort service was offer-ing "adult entertainment" as well as social companionship. The reporter had signed a statement for the escort service saying she was not a reporter.

The fact that journalism is increas ngly perceived as a business also contributes to the caution, says Ben H. Bagdikian, journalism professor at the University of California at Berkeley. In a new book, "The Media Monopoly," tracing links between the major communications companies and other large enterprises, he says newspapers have become bland and timid "for fear that strong news and views pleasing to one part of the audience might offend another part and thus reduce the circulation on which advertising rates de-

The recession has cut newsroom budgets and in some cases eliminated newsrooms in mergers. In the last three years jointly owned newspapers in more than 30 medium-size cities have been consolidated into single publications or single news staffs, ending competition that spurred enterprise in reporting.

In larger cities, newspaper owners may have other financial interests to protect. "How much credibility can newspaper conglomerates have in exposing City Hall when another arm of that very organization may well be lobbying commissioners in an attempt to gain a cable franchise?" asked John McMullan, who recently retired as executive editor of The Miami Herald.

In the search for ratings or circulation and the advertising dollars that come with them, many news organizations have devoted their energies and staff to relatively "soft" features such as food or "style" pages.

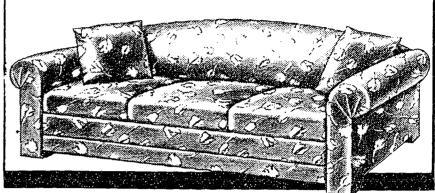
"Our principal mission is to cover the news," said Kenneth P. Johnson, the editor of The Dallas Times Herald. "People spend more time talking about look how well-packaged we are." He said other editors had told him, "Take some of the buzzwords out and I might as well be working for McDonald's.'

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