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Preventing plagiarism and fabrication in news publishing

May 9, 2013

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Thank You

Harnisch Foundation

- **For funding our Webinar equipment**

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- **For its support of News University**

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Today's presenter

Teresa Schmedding

Deputy managing editor/digital, Daily Herald Media Group

American Copy Editors Society, president

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Today's agenda

- Defining the problem
- Key findings of research, summit
- Solutions
- The book

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Defining the problem

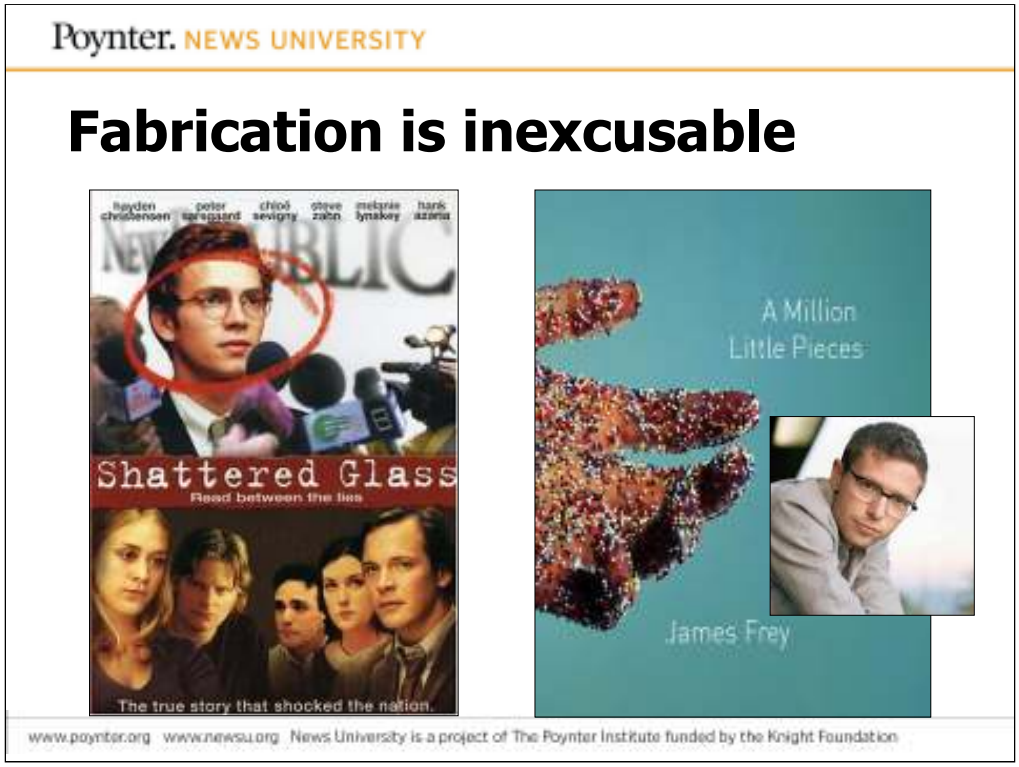
Plagiarism and fabrication are not the same

Plagiarism

Nonfiction; copying sans attribution

Fabrication

Fiction; making up people, facts



Stephen Glass, James Frey's "A Million Little Pieces," Greg Mortenson's Three Cups of Tea, Jonah Lehrer fabricated Bob Dylan quotes

Polling Questions

Have you ever fabricated content?

- **Never**
- **Yes**
- **Just a little bit**

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Plagiarism is gray

Questions to consider

- **Was it intentional?**
- **How much plagiarized?**
- **History of author?**

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NYTimes Jayson Blair, Jonah Lehrer, Jane Goodall, Senate Majority Floor Leader Vicente Sotto III accused of plagiarizing JFK speech, Harry Potter and Willy the Wizard

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Polling Questions

What should the punishment be for plagiarism?

- **Re-education**
- **Termination**
- **Suspension**
- **Loss of pay**
- **A mixture of the above**

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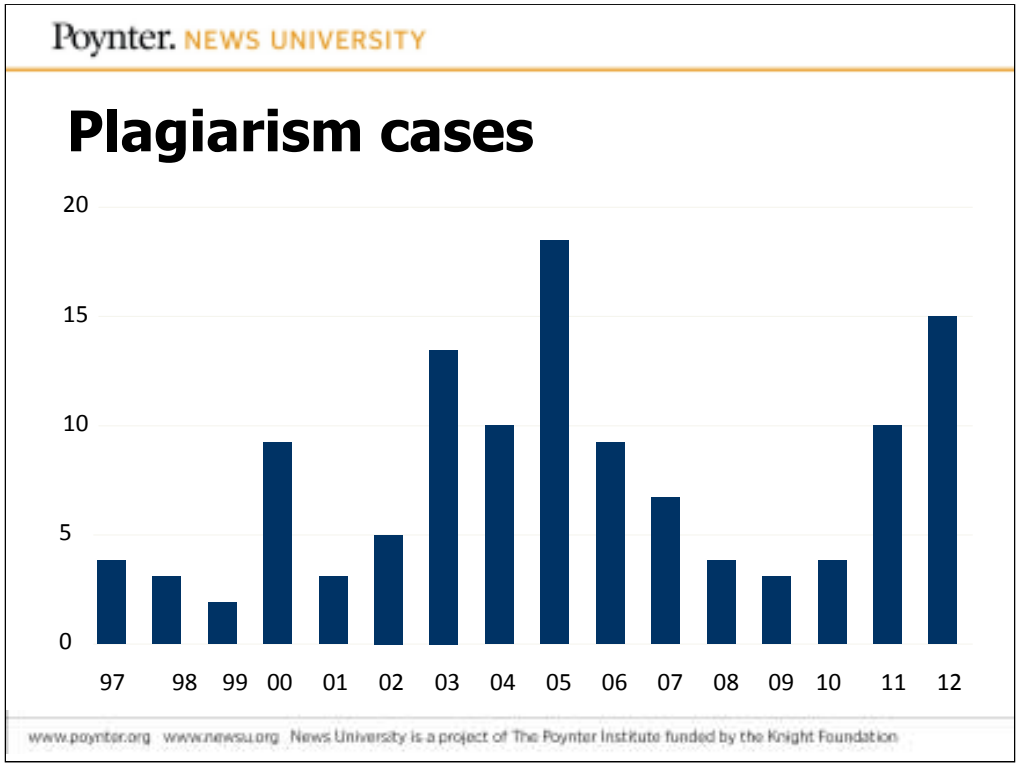
Plagiarism is serious, not common

Only 4% rise to the level of Jayson Blair

Editor of a major metro daily, 2005

"We believe plagiarism is among journalism's most serious professional breaches, if not the single most grave thing."



At daily, professional news organizations from 1997-2012 as compiled by Norm Lewis of University of Florida

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Polling Questions

What are common excuses are given for plagiarism and fabrication?

- **Mistake**
- **Job pressure**
- **Didn't know was wrong**
- **Everyone does it**
- **All of the above**

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Key findings

Of committee research cases

- **Plagiarists blame pressure**
- **Plagiarists at big papers blame competition**
- **Inadequate rules a problem**
- **No evidence problem is greater among inexperienced v. veteran or small v. large organizations**

No. 1 solution

Attribute everything!

- **Use caution when cutting/pasting**
- **Adjust note-taking to ensure sourcing survives notes/drafts**

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Online

- Linking to original source isn't a courtesy, it's attribution
- Links to sources online profiles, websites helps verify real
- Absence of links should be a flag
- Fear of leaving site no excuse
- Look at workflow so digital not afterthough
- Look at web tools like Storify or Spundge

Polling Questions

Should press releases be attributed?

- **Yes**
- **No**

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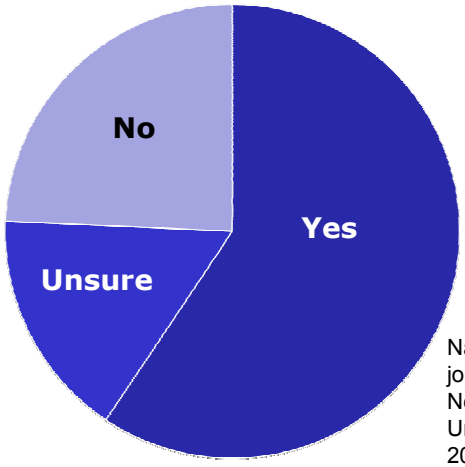
Polling Questions

Should press releases be attributed?

- **Yes**
- **No**



National survey of journalists by Norman Lewis, University of Florida, 2011

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Newsroom policies

Often clear that plagiarism is wrong, but *do not*

- **Outline prevention steps or policies on sourcing and attribution**
- **Spell out how the news organization will deal with an incident or discipline an offender**

Price shouldn't just be to person, but should explain impact on individual and

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Prevention

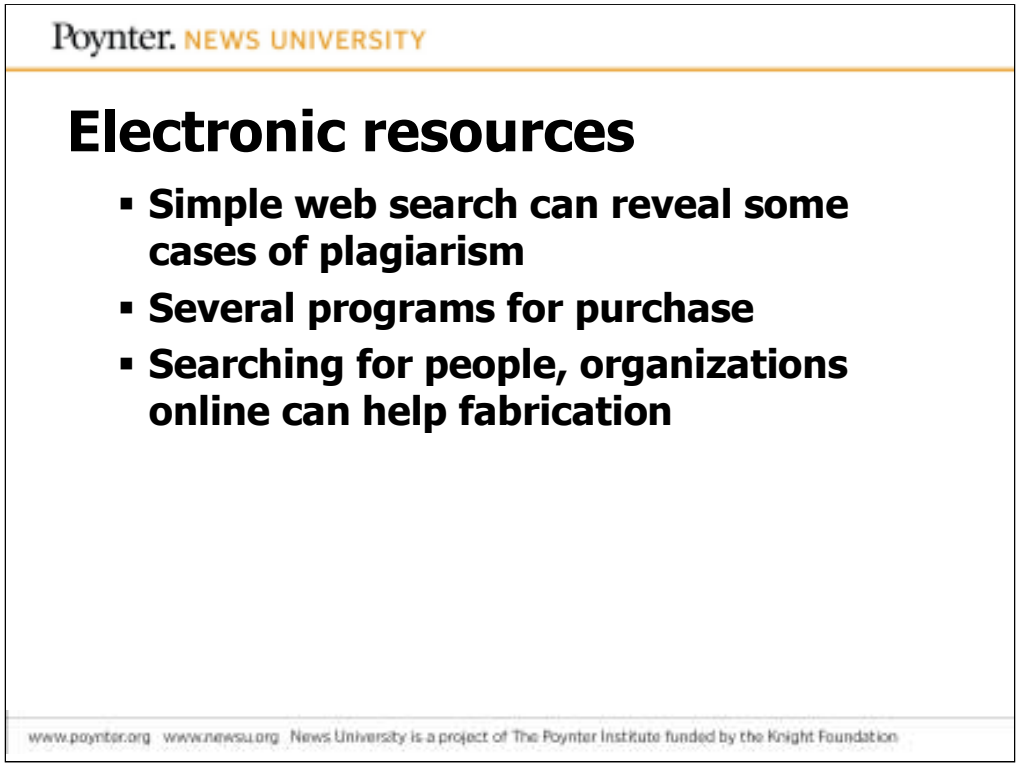
Companies should

- **Encourage video or audio of interviews**
- **Require reporters to discuss unnamed sources with at least one editor**
- **Make digital reporters link to material that will confirm sources' identities**
- **Editors should challenge and check digital material**

Hints there's a problem

Good editing can catch some cases

- **No or sparse attribution**
- **Change in voice**
- **Writing beyond skill level**
- **Perfect source, perfect quote, perfect detail**



LK note: perhaps touch on electronic resources for newsrooms/educators for detecting plagiarism?

TS: If you don't think it will be a problem, I'd rather not. I can say there are various companies selling anti-plagiarism software, but I really don't want to advocate one or list anything because I'm not an expert in this area.

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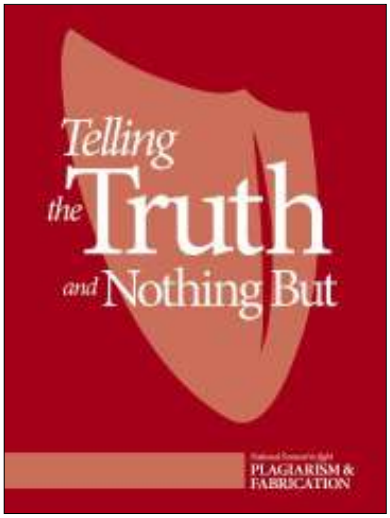
The book

Download the book free at www.rjionline.org/newsbooks



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In Summary

- What: Plagiarism and fabrication not the same
- Why: Pressure to produce a key issue
- How: Adjust workflow, add checks and balances, strong editing, good policies
- More: The book

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Thank You

We'll be going to Questions shortly

We want to tell you about some other training

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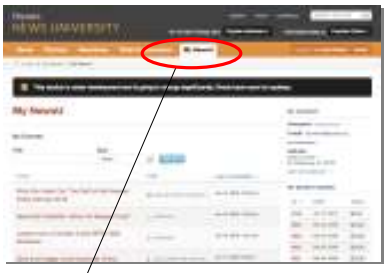

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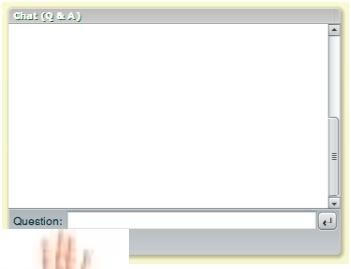
Questions? Fire Away!

Use the special Q&A pod to submit questions

- **Questions are not posted to the public**



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