

Ethics Paper

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Investigative journalism has led to many unknown events being brought into the public's eye. Whether it's a politician's past love affairs, or unveiling years of corruption within a large-scale company, investigative journalism has paved a way in shedding light on topics that remained hidden behind closed doors. This form of journalism has led to many different questions concerning the integrity of these investigations. Does the public have a right to know everything? Where is the line drawn between privacy and public knowledge? Is it okay to break the law to expose something inherently harmful? There are many different sides to these questions as everyone's moral compasses regarding the topic differ from one another. Yet, investigative journalism has helped shed light on many corrupted and harmful groups. The Boston Globe's *Pulitzer Prize Series on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* has proven just as much. Not only showing the public the harm that the Catholic Church has caused, but also helping in giving justice to the many victims of these predators. This goes to show, that investigative journalism is required especially when people are in danger, or being harmed.

Within the year 2001, Cardinal Bernard Law filed a response to a multitude of allegations against one of his former priests Father John Geoghan. According to The Boston Globe, " Since the mid-1990s, more than 130 people have come forward with horrific childhood tales about how former priest John J. Geoghan allegedly fondled or raped them during a three-decade spree through a half-dozen Greater Boston parishes" (*Church allowed abuse by priest for years*). At this time, the discussion of sexual abuse towards minors within the Catholic Church was not as

widespread as it currently is. Cases at this time in regards to sexual abuse conducted by priests were viewed as isolated events and often swept under the rug. This all changed though, through The Boston Globe's *Pulitzer Prize Series on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church*. By searching documents and speaking to victims and lawyers, they had discovered evidence suggesting that many priests, perhaps dozens, had abused children and that the church had not only attempted to conceal their crimes but had also enabled them to commit more. This series of hundreds of articles shed light on a line of sexual abuse committed by priests and hidden by the church.

(Reporting an Explosive Truth: the Boston Globe and Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church).

According to an interview with Michael Rezendes, a member of the Globe's Spotlight investigative team and lead writer on the first story in the paper's series, "There's no question in my mind that our work was the spark. We were the forerunners. Given that Boston is the largest Catholic city in America, it was quite courageous of the editors – we could have alienated a lot of readers. But the court cases we won, the church documents we got released, became precedent; they encouraged other papers and other lawyers in other cities to follow suit" (*How the Boston Globe exposed the abuse scandal that rocked the Catholic church*). The church's protectiveness of its reputation led to it protecting hundreds of predators from facing justice.

According to a former priest interviewed for The Boston Globe, "In Geoghan's case, the church defied its own most basic values of protecting the young and fostering celibacy" (*Church allowed abuse by priest for years*). These articles were a match to the tinder, as they sparked a rise in bringing justice to priests who took advantage, and preyed on young children.

As stated previously, these articles were the metaphorical match for the tinder that was the multitude of sexual abuse cases within the Catholic Church. The Boston Globe not only

sparked the need for action to be made but also for other news sites to report on these sexual abuse cases. No longer were these cases isolated and ignored. According to an article from The Guardian, “Within two years of the first of the Globe's 800 articles on the scandal appearing in January 2002, Rezendes notes, Cardinal Law had resigned, 150 priests in Boston stood accused of sexual abuse, more than 500 victims had filed abuse claims, and church-goers' donations to the archdiocese had slumped by 50%” (*Reporting an Explosive Truth: the Boston Globe and Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church*). To say that these articles barely affected the Catholic Church community in Boston is a staggering understatement. This community had created walls to protect the history of abuse and violence was finally getting torn down. Boston as a whole was greatly affected by these cases, and it was only the start. Across the entirety of the country, more than 450 priests had resigned. Not only this but several states, including Massachusetts, introduced new laws obliging clergy to report any knowledge of child sex abuse to the civil authorities. These articles did not just affect the Catholic Church as a whole, but also affected the lives of victims.

With the abuse of the Catholic Church becoming a worldwide topic, hundreds of victims were able to get a voice that they had never had before. According to the article from The Guardian “The Globe reporters were also quietly told of many dozens of cases over the previous decade or so, in which the church had settled claims against molesting priests privately, often including a clause that barred the victims or their families from ever talking about it” (*Reporting an Explosive Truth: the Boston Globe and Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church*). The creation of these articles not only lead to a multitude of resignations, but also of people coming forth with their personal stories regarding the Catholic Church. Often during times of abuse of power, the victims are unable to report said abuse due to the power imbalance between the abuser and the

victim. These cases regarding the Catholic Church are no different. Most of the victims were either ignored or shunned due to speaking out before these articles. It was not until this line of abuse was finally brought to the public to allow the victims to finally get justice.

A case of ethics can be brought up in regards to the privacy of those being investigated when it comes to journalism. With a community as closed off as The Catholic Church, it's apparent that the priests involved did not allow for this investigation to be taken place. Is it ok to expose what's behind the curtain of secrecy in a closed organization? Although everyone has a right to have privacy and respect the privacy of those around them. That respect should be taken away if you inflict or cause harm to others. If someone is ignorant or cruel enough to abuse another, no matter whether it's sexual, physical, or emotional, they should face the consequences. The Boston Globe's *Pulitzer Prize Series on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church*, lead to many horrible people finally facing the justice they deserved. Not only that, but investigative journalism has helped bring justice to those avoiding it countless times. *The New York Times* has also proven this through their story uncovering the sexual assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein. These cases not only helped solidify the endless abuse that Weinstein had inflicted onto women but also played a central role in the Me Too movement. Formerly a film producer, Weinstein, much like the multitude of priests, was in a position of power. Making it incredibly difficult for women to come out with their accusations. During a speech done by The New York Times's Rebecca Corbett, she stated that "The #MeToo movement, which exploded after the Weinstein story, provided a forum for women around the world to express a grievance, to speak out, to expose people they claimed had done them harm. Many of those accounts were compelling and provoked action by employers, investigations by governments, attention by

reporters. But they were not acts of journalism —constrained by tough standards, including getting a response from the accused— and they weren't pretending to be” (*Harvey Weinstein story made it easier for women to speak out*). This case, much like The Boston Globe, was the spark needed to ignite a movement.

Not only were both of these cases the beginning of worldwide movements, but they also helped give a voice to those who felt trapped. This is why investigative journalism is so important. While discussing the countless interviews that had to be conducted for the Weinstein case, Corbett stated that they “learned about a young assistant who had suddenly disappeared from Weinstein’s business more than two decades earlier. After trying to contact her and getting no response, Megan decided to go to the assistant’s mother’s house in a New York suburb. When she arrived, the former employee was there. ‘I’ve been waiting for this knock on the door for 25 years,’ she said” (*Harvey Weinstein story made it easier for women to speak out*). Not only is this a showcase of how much of an extent these communities will go to silence the victims, but also how victims require support. These articles that came out in regards to the Catholic Church and Weinstein, gave a voice to those that were always being silenced. These two cases were incredibly impactful. Both reports brought to light hidden harm. They provided a path to accountability. They gave people in need a chance to be heard.

As much as I would like to say that all sexual abuse in regards to the Catholic Church has been put to an end. That is incredibly unrealistic and incorrect. Many people who have sexually abused children in the Catholic Church remain protected and hidden. Just recently in 2018, *The New York Times* looked into a line of covered-up child sexual abuse within Pennsylvania by the Catholic Church. “The report, which covered six of the state’s eight Catholic dioceses and found

more than 1,000 identifiable victims, is the broadest examination yet by a government agency in the United States of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. The report said there are likely thousands more victims whose records were lost or who were too afraid to come forward” (*Catholic Priests Abused 1,000 Children in Pennsylvania*). Although it is very disheartening that this is still a very prevalent problem within thousands of communities, it is important to acknowledge the impact that The Boston Globe’s *Pulitzer Prize Series on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* has made.

According to an interview done on N.P.R., one of the reporters for The Boston Globe Michael Rezendes stated “ I think the new cardinal, Cardinal O'Malley, has done a lot to prevent future sexual abuse by priests. Just about everybody who works for the archdiocese now has a criminal background check, and all priests and all laypeople who work for the archdiocese, they're all trained in how to recognize signs of abuse and what to do if they encounter abuse” (10 Years On, Clergy Abuse Scandal Still Reverberates). Throughout this interview, Rezendes discusses the impacts that this case had created ten years after its debut. Boston as a whole has put more emphasis on preventing and acknowledging abuse. Yet, as much change has happened there are still endless lawsuits. With countless lawsuits still active, there is still much more to do in regards to holding the Catholic Church and abusers accountable.

Having grown up in a Catholic household, I find it very important for the Catholic Church and priests to be held accountable for the endless abuse they had inflicted. I would not say that I am a very religious person, but the fact that I grew up with catholic family members makes me a strong supporter in shedding light on the abuse that these communities can create. This is why I believe investigative journalism is so important. People need to be held

accountable for their actions, and if there is no one willing to discuss these issues they will be swept under the rug. This subject is one I am very passionate about, I have looked into these reports countless times. I believe it is important to support and help victims of abuse, and bringing abusers to justice can help the victim immensely.

In conclusion, investigative journalism is very important. The Boston Globe's *Pulitzer Prize Series on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* had brought light to a large-scale issue that was constantly being avoided by the public. Cases like these, look into well hidden and private communities and bring justice to those avoiding it. Although people can bring up important topics through other means, investigative journalism has led to many different worldwide movements.

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