Journalism: Truth or Dare by Ian Hargreaves
Reviewed by Talia Diers

Whether we watch the TV, surf the Internet or pick up the daily newspaper on the tube, we are almost always consuming vast amounts of information. Hargreaves analyzes and interprets the use of journalism in a new media society and how it affects the personal, political, and social ideas and decisions of life.

"Journalism matters not just to journalists, but to everyone: good journalism provides the information and opinion upon which successful democratic societies depend" (Hargreaves 2003).

It seems we all think that the state of journalism is in crisis—that we find there is more quantity than quality in journalism, with an overload of information that is instantaneous and global. These issues revolve around being able to sort the good from the bad, the quality from the quantity, and the ethical from the immoral. Ian Hargreaves takes a very academic and noble approach to analyzing the issues of journalism today with the position that journalists can still defend themselves. 

Journalism: Truth or Dare explains the ways in which politicians, the public and journalists themselves, attack modern journalism and why ethical journalism is needed more than ever.

Journalism is in more of a crisis than ever before with the onslaught of new media and technology, making news global and instantaneous and “dumbing down”
to the public. Yet, referring back to any other period in history, people have also claimed that journalism during that time was in crisis too. Hargreaves doesn’t look at modern journalism in this completely cynical way, yet tries to explain why journalism has become what it is today and why. The issues of journalism in turn reflect society and our norms—that we as the readers want more and more news. Hargreaves highlights the lack of journalism standards and argues that journalists have sacrificed “credibility for speed, investigation for intrusion, and reliability for entertainment” (Hargreaves 2003). We want to hear about sex, violence, and injustice and this effects how journalists work, by trying to retain the interest of the young.

Modern journalism not only affects those reading the headlines, but it also plays a role in political communications. Hargreaves notes that the Freedom of Press is the most vital key to good journalism, and that without it, governing bodies and tightening censorship laws are going to create an even larger crisis. So what is the truth in this? Journalism’s ultimate goal should be to provide credible and balanced news and information to the public, but if all of it is being censored or dictated by governing bodies or corporation, then what is left? Monopolies and major media owners such as Rupert Murdoch make the average person question what is really true versus what is dare.

It’s also quite obvious that journalism in non-democratic societies is not nearly as powerful or credible as it is in Democratic bodies. There is a higher need than ever for journalism to be less controlled and less censored and Hargreaves notes an alternative to this by turning journalism into its own branch of power. He
does well in noting that journalists are less trusted than before and have the power to do great things, but in contrast promote violence and sex. Even political scandals have lost their heat and intensity since the Watergate Scandal and the Pentagon Papers, because it no longer seems a big deal compared to everything else in the news. Hargreaves draws on multiple case examples to support this, including Bill Clinton and his affair with Monica Lewinski. He also accurately describes how more people vote for reality TV shows than for parliament or government elections. The effect of this is that it is causing politicians to be more like TV to sustain the interest of the public. Hargreaves makes a great point on this, but could have been more cynical and critical, and less neutral and academic.

Ian Hargreaves does a strong job in describing and analyzing the issues of modern journalism while still giving journalists the ability to defend themselves in a complex and increasingly advanced society. Hargreaves could have been more vocal on his stance and more critical on modern journalism, yet he still provides an excellent academic read. *Journalism: Truth or Dare* gives an informative and intelligent approach to journalism and the issues surrounding it in a time of always advancing and changing new media.