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Journalism in the Current Era

The actions of journalists today point to a different conclusion than previously arrived at (Meltzer, 2010). In my first book, I tracked how, across the decades, journalists have been initially resistant to change, slow to adapt, but eventually come around out of necessity. But now, we are in an era of hacker journalists and computer scientists, engineers, tech gurus and pioneers doing journalism, so it seems that the historical behavior patterns of journalists are changing. Journalists are doing the evolving, pushing the envelope, coming up with the new formats and technologies (Usher, 2016). One of the ways journalists have been adapting recently is in their coverage and behavior with regard to politics and government.

While the recent increase in opinion, commentary, and incivility was underway before the last election cycle, in the lead up to the 2016 election, and since his election to the presidency, Donald J. Trump has wielded inflammatory rhetoric in speeches, tweets, and debates. But as Nancy Gibbs observed, and Trump has acknowledged himself, "Conflict commands attention, attention equals influence" (Gibbs, 2017). Gibbs has observed that "[Trump] is a human algorithm, perfectly engineered to say or do whatever we are most likely to watch . . . Donald Trump is not at war with the press, nor it with him. This is a much more complex relationship. His presidency has been great for ratings, in ways that are bad for journalism and bad for the country." As Jameel Jaffer (2017) said, "President Obama's transparency record was not what we had hoped it would be, but unexpectedly it now seems relevant that President Obama didn't routinely question the value of the First Amendment, demonize the press, or deliberately undermine the public's confidence in it."

How Journalists Dealt with the Rhetoric of Trump
and Others during the 2016 Election Cycle

Words matter. They can wound. They can heal. And they are what we hold our elected officials accountable to. At least that was the conventional wisdom prior to the 2016 Presidential election. But millions of voters showed that words, Trump's in this case, either did not matter to them, or expressed their own shared thoughts. Uncivil, divisive, and—at times—violence-inciting words. Trump's words were directed at his opponents, journalists, and members of the public.

How journalists dealt with Donald Trump and his competitors in the 2016 election cycle leading up to the primaries is an important subject for discussion in this book about opinion and civility in public media discourse. Throughout his run, up to the presidential final election, Trump dodged and refused to answer journalists' questions, and fought in interviews only to stay on message and further his own agenda. This prompted many critics to call out the press for being too easy on Trump and responsible for giving him free coverage which aided his rise to become a contender. In a *Washington Post* article, "Donald Trump's secret for avoiding hard questions: too many interviewers aren't asking the follow-up," media scholar Todd Gitlin wrote about what he believed journalists needed to do (Gitlin, 2016). In March 2016, after Trump's Super Tuesday wins, Ted Koppel, while a guest on "The O'Reilly Factor," publicly decried the lack of "substance" in the news coverage of the then-presidential primary winner and told Bill O'Reilly he was partly responsible (Moyer, 2016). Koppel said:

> You have changed the television landscape over the past 20 years—you took it from being objective and dull to being subjective and entertaining. And in this current climate, it doesn't matter what the interviewer asks him. Mr. Trump is going to say whatever he wants to say, as outrageous as it may be.

Journalists who did try to ask Trump serious questions and hold him accountable incurred Trump's wrath. In August 2015, then-presidential candidate Trump publicly criticized Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly through Twitter and other venues for what he claimed was unfair questioning at the presidential primary debate (Chavez, Stracqualursi, & Keneally, 2016). That began a feud with Kelly that would last throughout the remainder of the election season, and which elevated Kelly's public status. Although Kelly attempted to strike a conciliatory tone with Trump in a subsequent interview, she posed more challenging questions to him in a later debate. In December

2015, when Trump tried to avoid answering Joe Scarborough's questions on his live MSNBC program "Morning Joe" about Trump's call for "a moratorium on Muslim immigrants," Scarborough responded by announcing to viewers that he would go to commercial break rather than allow Trump to prevaricate (Borchers, 2015). Scarborough followed through by cutting Trump off and ordering producers to cut to commercials, and when the show came back on, Trump was still on the phone line, now more willing to answer Scarborough's questions. Callum Borchers (2015), a *Washington Post* reporter writing about the incident concluded,

> The lesson for the press is that this might be the most effective way of dealing with Trump. He seems to respect—and actually respond to—a level of pushback that journalists would generally consider overly assertive or even rude.

Borchers suggested that journalists must rise to the occasion with interviewees who are either uncivil or refuse to engage the issues and questions in a substantive way, and match the toughness of their interview subjects or shut them down.

But by March 2017, much had changed. In a *Washington Post* column, Margaret Sullivan discussed Scott Pelley of CBS not being neutral in reporting about President Trump anymore (Sullivan, 2017a). Pelley was taken off of the CBS Evening News broadcast in spring 2017, but CBS said it was due to low ratings and not Pelley's critical reporting on President Trump (Koblin & Rutenberg, 2017).

What Journalists Said after the 2016 Election

If almost half of Americans (minus roughly two million) voted for Trump, that is a strong indicator of those voters' feelings about civility. That journalists and news organizations got their election predictions wrong and were totally surprised by the election outcome has been attributed to several reasons, including tunnel vision, insularity, and echo chambers on the part of the press, bias, lack of restraint, and faulty poll results. Or, as others have suggested, perhaps the press and polls didn't actually get it wrong, and the surprising results were a product of a flawed electoral college and gerrymandering of voting districts (Barnes, 2017), or Russian hacking of the election (Jamieson, 2018).

On November 9, 2016, the day after the election, in his televised address to the nation, President Obama said, "That presumption of good faith is essential to a vibrant and functioning democracy."

Throughout his campaign, and into his presidency, Trump has attacked the news media, going so far as to call them the "enemy of the American people" (Grynbaum, 2017a), and brought into common conversation the term "fake news" to refer to any unfavorable coverage he receives from even long-standing reputable news outlets. The term "fake news" has morphed to mean anything that is critical or in opposition (Sullivan, 2017b; Gertz, 2017). Two other terms, "post-truth," and "alternative facts," the latter coined by Trump advisor Kellyanne Conway, have emerged as destructive forces to the information environment (Wang, 2016; Todd, 2017). At a February 24, 2017 press briefing, Trump's administration barred selected media outlets who had not covered Trump favorably from participating in the briefing (Fabian, 2017; Borchers, 2017) leading many to compare his actions to those of authoritarian regimes elsewhere in the world, and in direct conflict with the First Amendment. Trump's attempts to discredit the press and make them the enemy are strategies that can be traced to well-known propaganda techniques from decades past. Leading many to draw a comparison with the Nixon administration, these general and widespread attacks on the press undermine the foundational role of the press as the Fourth Estate and the fundamental rights of citizens and the press enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

"These are moves that governments around the world make when they are less sophisticated and they want to block the press from doing its job, and it's sad to see that it's a tactic that the Trump White House is employing," CNN Worldwide President Jeff Zucker told NPR (Folkenflik, 2017), "[i]t has no impact on our commitment to reporting and the story. If anything it only further motivates us to make sure we ferret out all the facts."

Well-known journalists and leaders of news organizations have publicly responded to Trump's attacks on American news outlets. Some of these responses included those of Marty Baron, editor of *The Washington Post*, Jeff Zucker, CNN Worldwide president, and Christiane Amanpour of CNN, in the weeks leading up to Trump's inauguration through the first few months of his presidency between January and April 2017. During this span of time, Baron, Zucker, and other prominent journalists gave interviews and spoke on the record at events about the President's assault on journalists and how their organizations will continue to operate in this era. Baron (2016) said,

> This is a time we are compelled to fight for free expression and a free press—rights granted us under the Constitution, yes, but also the very qualities that have long set us apart from other nations.
>
> We will have a new president soon. He was elected after waging an outright assault on the press. Animosity toward the media was a centerpiece of his campaign. He described the press

as "disgusting," "scum," "lowlifes." He called journalists the "lowest form of humanity." That apparently wasn't enough. So he called us "the lowest form of life." In the final weeks of the campaign he labeled us "the enemies." . . .

Donald Trump said he wanted to "open up" libel laws. And he proposed to harass unfriendly media outlets by suing them, driving up their legal expenses with a goal of weakening them financially.

With respect to *The Washington Post,* he ordered our press credentials revoked during the campaign, barring us from routine press access to him and his events, because our coverage didn't meet with his approval. Even before we were subjected to his months-long blacklist, Donald Trump falsely alleged that our owner, Jeff Bezos, was orchestrating that coverage. And he openly hinted that, if he became president, he would retaliate. . . .

The ultimate defense of press freedom lies in our daily work.

Many journalists wonder with considerable weariness what it is going to be like for us during the next four—perhaps eight—years. Will we be incessantly harassed and vilified? Will the new administration seize on opportunities to try intimidating us? Will we face obstruction at every turn?

If so, what do we do? The answer, I believe, is pretty simple. Just do our job. Do it as it's supposed to be done.

Christiane Amanpour received the Committee to Project Journalists' Burton Benjamin Memorial Award for "extraordinary and sustained achievement in the cause of press freedom." In the speech she gave after accepting the honor, Amanpour (2016) said,

I never in a million years thought I would be up here on stage appealing for the freedom and safety of American journalists at home.

Ladies and gentlemen, I added the bits from candidate Trump as a reminder of the peril we face. I actually hoped that once President-elect, all that would change, and I still do. But I was chilled when the first tweet after the election was about "professional protesters incited by the media."

But postcard from the world: This is how it goes with authoritarians like Sisi, Erdoğan, Putin, the Ayatollahs, Duterte, et al.

As all the international journalists we honor in this room tonight and every year know only too well: First the media is accused of inciting, then sympathizing, then associating—until

they suddenly find themselves accused of being full-fledged ter-
rorists and subversives. Then they end up in handcuffs, in cages,
in kangaroo courts, in prison—and then who knows?

A great America requires a great and free and safe press. So
this above all is an appeal to protect journalism itself.

Recommit to robust fact-based reporting without fear nor
favor—on the issues. Don't stand for being labeled crooked or
lying or failing. Do stand up together—for divided we will all fall.

Jeff Zucker actually had a close relationship with Trump in the past. He was
the head of NBC entertainment who was responsible for putting Trump's
show "The Apprentice" on the air, which some have argued paved the way
for his presidential run. When asked about the President calling CNN "fake
news," Zucker said, "It's just unfortunate that the most powerful person in
the world is trying to delegitimize journalism and an organization that plays
such a vital role in our democracy. I think he's entitled to his opinion, but
it's—to use one of his favorite words—sad." (Sherman, 2017).

Chris Satullo (3/14/16), former Vice President of News and Civic Engage-
ment, WHYY; former editorial page editor at the Philadelphia Inquirer, now
a media and civic engagement consultant, said, "journalists are now thought
of as lower than used car salesmen." Satullo said there have been people for
40 years like Richard Mellon Scaife and the Koch brothers today, trying to
discredit mainstream journalism. Since most journalists don't go into it to
make money, most are ideologically liberal, he said, but he believes most do
try sincerely (if not always effectively) to keep that from affecting their work.
Satullo also said that after Iraq, liberal critics of the media sprang up saying
the media were asleep at the switch and in bed with corporate interests. So
now the media are squeezed from both sides and trust declines.

Two critical intertwined issues that have emerged since the 2016 elec-
tion cycle are conservative political party-sponsored organizations being
credentialed as press by the new administration, and attacks on credible
journalism organizations as "fake news." In March 2017, the conservative
Heritage Foundation-sponsored Daily Signal was chosen to have its reporter
represent the entire White House Press Corp as the press pool reporter (Farhi,
2017), and controversial and conservative outlet Infowars, whose host Alex
Jones has questioned the occurrence of the Sandy Hook shootings, was given
a temporary press credential in May 2017 (Andrews, 2017). While partisan
outlets are being credentialed, long-standing reputable news organizations are
denigrated as providing "fake news."

Perhaps "fake news" is opinion and commentary taken to the extreme.
It's been weaponized and used strategically, like propaganda. Dr. Claire Wardle

(2017) has created a typology she and First Draft News use for identifying different types of misinformation and disinformation online and through social media (Wardle, 2016a; 2016b). There are important differences between misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation comes from ignorance, not possessing the knowledge or accurate information, and mistakes. Disinformation is disseminated deliberately and knowingly with the intent to deceive. Disinformation is a propaganda strategy that can be traced back to WWI and WWII and even earlier. The motivation of the information-provider is a significant factor to consider in cases of "fake news."

Before and after the election, experts from several sectors (policy, journalism, etc.) have affirmed the crucial roles of journalists amidst changes. Tom Glaisyer, Managing Director, Public Square Program at the Democracy Fund (9/9/15, Council on Foundations Nonprofit Media event) said, "We're in a moment of profound transition in media." Peter Bale, then-CEO, Center for Public Integrity (9/9/15, Nonprofit Media Discussion at Newseum) discussed making connections across the traditional boundary between journalism and advocacy in the form of "solutions journalism." Chris Satullo (3/14/16) also sees the need for solutions journalism, as a corrective to reporters' tendency to dump complex problems in the lap of their audience, shrug, and walk away.

Mike McCurry, former Co-Chairman of the Commission on Presidential Debates (now a member of the CPD) and former White House press secretary under President Bill Clinton (12/7/15, session with Monash University at Dirksen Senate Office Building) said, "the press's questions and even the anticipation of questions, drives policy forward." At the same event, Angela Greiling Keane, formerly *Bloomberg News* White House correspondent who was President of the National Press Club (now at *Politico*), said that asking critical questions is an important defining factor of journalism.

Even after being attacked and called fake news by the Trump administration, a television news correspondent (2/9/17) said journalists must "keep doing their work," and that "the nature of my job is not to have too much opinion."

These quotes from journalists illustrate that in response to Trump's attacks on the press, journalists plan to hold steadfast and continue to carry out their critical roles, while some feel journalists need to invoke more aggressive tactics—even crossing the boundary into advocacy. In August 2018, more than 300 news organizations published editorials reaffirming the role of a free press in our democracy. Jacobs (2017) categorizes these statements by journalists as articulating strategies to move forward. However, Gibbs's (2017) point that covering Trump's rhetoric has been good for ratings but bad for democracy and the country, has proven to be a difficult dilemma for the press to solve. Perhaps the press shouldn't constantly cover everything that Trump tweets

or says, but isn't everything the President says and does newsworthy? While journalists are quick to criticize Trump's treatment of them, they are slow to call attention to the ways in which they have benefitted.

Less than ten years ago, the political and news landscape looked drastically different from today. Back in 2008, there were other reasons to be concerned about the news. Newspapers had declined and many news organizations had cut back their operations due to financial constraints largely brought about by Internet news.

Throughout 2009 and 2010, the FCC, FTC, and New America Foundation held sessions in Washington, DC, about the future of news. The focus at these sessions was on the decline of newspapers, rise of Internet news sites and citizen journalists, and concern about the ability to provide information that the public needs. The sessions brought together thinkers from several walks of life: news executives, government agency officials, academics, and interested others. Considering the shake-up of the newspaper industry, the focus was reasonably on newspaper and Internet journalism. Throughout those particular discussions, TV news and the shifting formats and qualities of news on television were hardly mentioned in more than passing. TV news was not raised as a potential antidote or safety zone for journalism, nor as a cause for concern on par with that of newspapers. Only the IFC's Make Media Matter Panel at the Newseum in May 2009 included TV journalists such as Greta Van Susteren, John King, George Stephanopolous, Tucker Carlson, and Juan Williams. And they did talk about what was happening on TV (Meltzer, 2010: 113).

However, elsewhere, discussion was growing about the increasing number of political talking heads on TV news programs, and the opinionation of news on TV. The backdrop to all of this was the mortgage and banking crisis-caused economic recession and the political gridlock in Congress. Amidst all of this, Oprah Winfrey decided to end her syndicated talk show in May 2011, and a slew of TV personalities rushed to try to take her place. Then, in 2012, the focus on TV news formats reached a fever pitch with the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in Tucson, Arizona, which was largely related through public figures and the media to uncivil discourse and polarized politics. The shooting, and subsequent coverage, then spurred the founding of dozens of civility initiatives across the country.

On the "Colbert Report" on April 9, 2014, Andrew Sullivan, founder of The Dish, said that people need to be able to get along with people with whom they disagree. Sullivan said that the founder of Mozilla shouldn't have lost his job. This was in regard to the Mozilla founder who was forced to resign after it was found that he donated money to support an anti-gay marriage proposition in California in 2008. By the winter of 2014, the four most high-profile news/talk shows on TV that had been launched since 2011

had all failed and been canceled. Still, other personalities were being tapped to launch new shows.

Few of the people in those sessions between 2008 and 2010 could have imagined the ways the news ecosystem would change and how quickly that change would occur over the next eight years. What it means to watch "television" in today's informational and technological environment has changed over the past decade with the development of "second screen" usage—simultaneously using television and another information device—and social media, which may actually be reinvigorating the TV experience in some ways. "TV" content, including news video, also became available online, streaming live to devices of the user's choosing, for a fee in some cases (Kirsner, 2014; Alvarez-Monzoncillo, 2013). According to Pew Research Center data, "momentum around digital news video picked up in 2013. More than six in ten U.S. adults now watch videos online—and roughly half of those, 36% of all U.S. adults, watch news videos" (Olmstead, Mitchell, Holcomb & Vogt, 2014). The growth of digital videos online—both professionally- and user-generated—was made possible by technological developments, including mobile devices, and major investments in digital news production on the part of news organizations, including local news (Olmstead, Mitchell, Holcomb & Vogt, 2014). Non-television news organizations, such as the *The Washington Post*, *Huffington Post* (HuffPost Live), and *New York Times*, have been among those making these investments to compete (Adler, 2014). Other inventions, such as Amazon's Fire TV, made it possible to view online content through the television (Tsukayama, 2014). Since "TV" can be viewed through many types of devices, some question whether there still are defining qualities of television, but a television screen is still the platform that the largest number of Americans turn to for news and prefer (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel & Shearer, 2016).

Pressured by the abundance of information providers, the Tow Center for Digital Journalism's report on Post-Industrial Journalism called on journalists to change "not just tactics, but also self-conception" (Sonderman, 2012):

> The authors can foresee a world where 90 percent of news reports are written by computer algorithms that convert data into narrative structures and where many newsworthy events are first described by connected citizens rather than journalists.
>
> The result: The journalist has not been replaced but displaced, moved higher up the editorial chain from the production of initial observations to a role that emphasizes verification and interpretation. . . . Working between the crowd and the algorithm in the information ecosystem is where a journalist is able to have most effect, by serving as an investigator, a translator, a storyteller.

This sounded much like what Jeremy Bowers, news application developer for NPR, said at the panel on "Data-Driven Storytelling: Present and Future," at the 2014 Journalism/Interactive Conference. Bowers said journalists should use and program robots to automatically track data and notify the human journalists of things worthy of reporting, and that journalists who are not using robots will be scooped by journalists who are using them. Robots do well what humans don't, which is tracking data 24-7, all night long, and detecting deviations from the norm. He gave an example of a robot that monitors the U.S. Geological Survey and sends automatic messages to human journalists of significant activity using templates written by editors and programmers.

Hybridity

Another way of thinking about the transitions in the format and content of news is through hybridity. Baym (2005; 2010) and others have written about the blurring of genres into hybrid ones. This view proves useful for thinking about the blurring of elements of reality and fiction, the scripted and unscripted, and news and entertainment. We may also think about the blending of news and talk into a hybrid mode that can be scripted, unscripted, or both, and results in more talk in news and news in talk. Or rather than viewing these blendings or blurrings as novel phenomena, we might take the approach that all media, and things in culture for that matter, are combinatorial and generative, in a postmodern, pastiche-like way (Jameson, 1983).

Over the past decade, I have observed five trends in journalism and technology: 1. Initial resistance to change by journalists and news organizations, and eventual adaptation; 2. Blurring of genres, hybridization; 3. Moving away from objectivity; 4. Remixing, collective production, multiple contributors; and 5. Flattening of the hierarchy of journalistic authority (Meltzer, 2009). The issues of chief concern in journalism today are many. They include:

- Opinion, partisanship, polarization, lack of objectivity, lack of accuracy/facts, transparency, the public good, media literacy
- Incivility
- Echo-chambers, selective exposure, attention and retention; lack of common ground, partisan gridlock; inability to have productive deliberations; confirmation bias
- Cult of personality/focus on individual notoriety/celebrity/brand of individual journalists
- Diluting/broadening of definition of news to include talk shows, entertainment

- Vetting of information and sources; fact-checking; fake news, misinformation, disinformation

- All of this could lead to loss of credibility/authority of journalists.

With the proliferation and rise in popularity of niche media outlets and online news sites (Stroud, 2011), this new mediascape has been hailed as liberating with news that caters to individuals' interests, but there is also concern that this climate of hyper-fragmentation means that people can selectively attend to only the versions of news that are consistent with their existing ways of thinking, therefore never having to be exposed to divergent views (Chalif, 2011; Katz, 1996). Some believe this latter situation taken to the nth degree leads to the "Echo Chamber" (Jamieson & Capella, 2008)—the polarized political and media environment we see in some ways today.

However, the dissatisfaction with journalism and politics today should come as no surprise. People have almost always been dissatisfied with the state of the news media and politics. We tend to think that eras that have come before were better—such as the golden era of television news between the 1950s and 1990s. But research I and others have done has found that there have always been criticisms of news. However, the character of the criticisms in each era reflects the unique context of the media and political environment at that time. This is true today.

This book is neither prescriptive nor normative. It describes and analyzes journalists' perspectives to understand how the people within the field who are enmeshed in the craft and controversy think about the situation from the inside. My analysis of journalistic discourse takes up all of the issues mentioned above.

Why Examine Journalistic Discourse?

Focusing on the perspectives of actual working journalists enables us to understand the ways that journalists think about the work that they do. This is an established approach that has been employed since the 1950s with seminal sociology of news studies (Tuchman, 1978; Breed, 1955; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1980). Contemporary scholars (Jarvis & Han, 2018; Boczkowski, 2010; Usher, 2012, 2016; Anderson, 2013; Ekdale et al., 2015; Hellmueller, 2014) have reinvigorated this subfield with new research and advances in methodology that have evolved from these earlier works from the 1950s through the 1980s.

Continuing in this methodological tradition, this study collected and analyzed two types of data: Semi-structured, in-depth, in-person and phone interviews conducted with journalists, and published journalistic discourse

including popular, trade, organizational publications and proceedings, and broadcast transcripts. I conducted interviews with journalists from March 2014 through March 2016. Additional interviews and content from journalists were collected in-person and face-to-face at events through April 2017. I employed purposive and snowball sampling, making use of preexisting contacts I had. In total, original material from interactions with over 30 journalists is included. The published journalistic discourse analyzed spanned January 2004–June 2017, and farther back in some cases. Like Serazio (2014: 746) and Kreiss (2009: 282, in Serazio), I "conducted interviews with key actors complemented by press articles and online material." I used a grounded theory approach to analysis to identify themes present in the discourse (Lindlof and Taylor 2011: 250–252; Glaser and Strauss 1967, as discussed in Holton 2008).

The data and analysis capture journalists' thinking prior to, and after, the 2016 election, and also consider changes over time in journalistic thinking, both through the interviews and published discourse (since 2004).

The rationale for the two main research methods used in the book—qualitative textual analysis of media discourse and personal interviews with journalists—also responds to the words of former FCC commissioner Michael Copps who implored journalists to make their ideas and voices heard in policy conversations that affect news. In February 2014, Copps wrote a letter to journalists that was published on the Columbia Journalism Review website (Copps, 2014). In it, Copps said:

> I have heard the arguments about the need to keep reporters from becoming part of the story and being tainted by involvement in public policy formation. But journalism, like government, is not a purist's redoubt. . . .
>
> An old axiom has it that decisions without you are usually decisions against you. Journalists can refuse to be part of the story, but that means they won't be part of the solution either.

The rationale for the research methods used in the book also comes naturally from the underlying theoretical framework. My previous book and much other work have employed Zelizer's (1993) theoretical framework of viewing journalists as interpretive communities. In light of changes in the structure of how journalism works due to technological, economic, cultural, and political shifts, in this book I advance the similar but distinct framework of communities of practice and apply it to journalists. In doing so, I also consider whether looking at different journalistic communities, or subcommunities, as "communities of practice" could be useful (Wenger, 1998). For the people who are the subjects of the case studies in this book, it is of particular use

and interest to see which subcommunities each looks to and is regarded as being part of. Because American journalists tend to engage in conversations about their norms, values and boundaries through articles published in the popular and trade press, at organizational proceedings and organizational blogs and on their broadcasts, these are the materials that are analyzed for evidence of their thoughts about the move toward talk. This is investigated in the interviews with journalists as well.

Journalists as Communities of Practice*

Over the past decade, journalism has experienced significant changes, including the rise of news through social media, citizen journalism, opinion and niche journalism, and data journalism, and the decline of legacy journalism outlets. That is why I considered the usefulness of looking at different journalistic communities, or subcommunities, as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Originally coined by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in 1991, "communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 2006). A community of practice is constituted by "a domain of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a community of people who care about this domain; and the shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain" (Wenger & McDermott, 2002). In evaluating the feasibility of applying communities of practice to journalism, I considered other theoretical frameworks that have been used for examining journalistic groups, including interpretive communities, professions, and organizations, and I discuss how all of these groups take part in boundary work and metajournalistic discourse. Whereas community is often attached to the idea of discourse communities or interpretive communities, I find that focusing on the collaborative learning aspect and development of shared practice through the lens of communities of practice enables us to more fully understand the nature of skill- and practice-building among specific subgroups of journalistic practitioners. I also find the concept of boundary work useful in this exploration. Because journalism is a wide and varied field with unstable boundaries, some journalists explicitly address their identification with the community by developing and maintaining boundaries of practice, while others maintain and police interpretive rules.

Applying community models to professions with unstable or fluid boundaries—such as journalism—may assist rather than hamper scholarly thought

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on that profession. The widespread emphasis on community as a renewed way of thinking about what collections of people do largely began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, following the publication of various articles on the topic.

Until the early 1990s, consistent with the reigning Piagetian, constructivist, and information processing paradigms, the individual learner was the essential unit of instruction and analytic concern in research. This slowly changed when, following publications such as *Cognition in Practice* (Lave, 1988) and *Situated Learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), many educational researchers and practitioners "switched to the idea that knowing and knowledgeability are better thought of as cultural practices that are exhibited by practitioners belonging to various communities" (Roth & Lee, 2006). An even earlier example of this paradigm was exhibited by Stanley Fish in 1976, when he introduced his theory on interpretive communities.

In his article "Interpreting the Variorum," Fish (1976) first defines interpretive communities as entities "made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions." It was originally conceived as a theoretical concept in the field of literary studies as a way to explain variances in reader-response criticism. Essentially, Fish argues that readers, or people in general, group themselves into unique communities based on their internal schema, collectively interpreting a text or the world around them in a loosely structured way. The boundaries of these interpretive communities are fluid, growing and declining as members move from one to the other. However, determining the exact size of any given community is nearly impossible, as any evidence of membership would itself be an interpretation; according to Fish, "The only 'proof' of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a third party: 'we know.'"

This origin in literary studies markedly differs from that of communities of practice, which began as a framework for studying professional organizations. The term community of practice became popular following the 1991 publication of Situated Learning by scholars Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave, where it was first defined as a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It was developed as a framework to explain channels of learning outside the classroom environment (e.g., apprenticeships; Weiss & Domingo, 2010). It became popular among scholars of anthropology and the other social sciences before exploding onto the business and management scene (Weiss & Domingo, 2010). "The number of companies launching initiatives on communities of practice is increasing

so rapidly, we have no way of keeping track," wrote Wenger and co-author Richard McDermott in their application-minded book *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (2002). They are quick to point out, however, that a community of practice is not a recent development in the academic or professional world:

> They were our first knowledge-based social structures, back when we lived in caves and gathered around the fire to discuss strategies for cornering prey, the shape of arrowheads, or which roots were edible. In ancient Rome, "corporations'" of metalworkers, potters, masons, and other craftsmen had both a social aspect (members worshipped common deities and celebrated holidays together) and a business function (training apprentices and spreading innovations). (Wenger & McDermott, 2002)

With such a wide range of applications—from the schoolroom to the boardroom—it is not surprising that definitions or explanations on what constitutes a community of practice are so varied. According to John Seely Brown, a former VP and Chief Scientist at Parc Xerox, a community of practice consists of "peers in the execution of real work. What holds them together is a common sense of purpose and a real need to know what each other knows" (Allee, 2000). Communities can be small or large—ranging from a few specialists to global membership numbering in the hundreds or thousands—and "regular" interaction among their members could mean weekly face-to-face meetings or scattered phone and email conversations (Wenger & McDermott, 2002).

Despite the wide variety of forms a community of practice can take, and the differing professional opinions on what defines such a community, one basic structure of three central elements is universally agreed upon: "a domain of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a community of people who care about this domain; and the shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain" (Wenger & McDermott, 2002). Organization around a clear domain creates group accountability to a body of knowledge and the development of a practice; a domain is not a fixed set of problems that can be addressed and dismissed, but a key issue that evolves with the growth of the community (Wenger & McDermott, 2002). Likewise, the community element of a community of practice "is not just a Web site, a database, or a collection of best practices. It is a group of people who interact, learn together, build relationships, and in the process develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment" (Wenger & McDermott, 2002). As for practice, Wenger and McDermott define this element as "a set of socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain: a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a basis for action, communication, problem solving, performance, and accountability" (Wenger & McDermott, 2002).

In addition to this basic structure, communities of practice generally follow five development stages, which include the following: Potential, Coalescing, Maturing, Active, and Dispersing (Allee, 2000). These stages define a community of practice at every level of its existence, from its beginning as a "loose network of people with similar issues and needs" to its inevitable end as a function that has "outlived its usefulness" (Allee, 2000). Of course, no stage has a set time limit, meaning that it is more than possible for a community to stall in the Potential stage or idle at its height in the Active stage, which is characterized by its creation of a new way to sustain community energy, educate novices, and gain influence (Allee, 2000).

Not all communities or practices fit the description of a community of practice—regardless of how wide that description may be. Project teams or working groups, for example, are too strictly focused on a particular task to qualify as a community of practice, which has looser bonds between members and focuses on overall development in a field of expertise (Allee, 2000). Furthermore, communities of practice are completely self-selecting, with members participating because they personally identify with the enterprise of the community and not because they were assigned to a task (Allee, 2000). Considerable "stretching" of the basic structure is permitted, however, as demonstrated by the "distributed community," which is essentially any community that cannot rely on face-to-face interaction between its members as a primary connector; ". . . in an era of globalization and worldwide communication networks, distributed communities are increasingly the norm" (Wenger & McDermott, 2002).

Boundary Work and Journalists as Interpretive Communities,
Professions, and Organizations

Journalists have alternately been viewed as members of interpretive communities, professions, and organizations, all of whom monitor and maintain their group's boundaries. An international collection of scholars has recently applied boundary work in case studies of journalistic struggles (Carlson & Lewis, 2015). With boundary maintenance (Gieryn, 1983; Lewis, 2012), the journalistic community works to demarcate good from bad practices and content, and legitimate versus illegitimate members and contributions. I view the framework of boundary work as a compatible, complementary conceptualization to communities of practice and interpretive communities. As discussed in Carlson and Lewis's edited volume (2015, p. 9), the communities framework is useful for understanding how journalists interact while they are engaged in the process of newswork, while the boundaries framework helps us see how, when, and why journalists feel the need to demarcate "journalism

norms, practices and participants." Journalists in interpretive communities and communities of practice can and do engage in boundary work.

Much research about journalists to date has employed Zelizer's (1993) theoretical framework of viewing journalists as interpretive communities. Conceptualizations of journalists as interpretive communities tend to envision one all-encompassing community of journalists who discursively articulate, negotiate, and maintain the norms, values, and boundaries of their craft. But given that the actual work of people said to be doing journalism can vary to such a great degree today, the interpretive communities framework is flexible enough to be adapted to consider different kinds of journalists into subcommunities, in the same way that Fraser devised the idea of subpublics (Fraser, 1999). In her 1990 dissertation and later work, Zelizer developed a particular notion of how journalists are tied together as a collective through which they discursively articulate, negotiate, and defend their identity and authority as purveyors of news.

This is in contrast to other scholars who have conceived of journalists through the formal organizations by which they are employed (Blau & Scott, 1962; Born, 2004; Epstein, 1973; Weber, 1947), or as members of a profession (Becker, Fruit, & Caudill, 1987; Freidson, 1984; Henningham, 1985). Other scholars have used the lens of occupations to consider journalistic work (Breed, 1955; Fishman, 1980/1999; Gans, 1979; Klaidman & Beauchamp, 1987; Tuchman, 1978; Tunstall, 1971; Underwood & Stamm, 2001; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986; White, 1950). All of these conceptualizations sought to address how journalists maintain their collective autonomy and authority through self-evaluation, adaptation, and self-control against changing external circumstances.

Viewing these other conceptualizations of journalists as unable to completely capture the nature of the journalistic collective, Zelizer observed their insufficiencies. While journalists do behave like formal organizations by developing and voluntarily obeying procedures of conduct, there are no official rules or designs of a formal organization from which these procedures are derived (other than external government regulation). The formal organizations framework neglects the fact that the journalistic collective establishes and follows norms and practices precisely because of its lack of a recognized governing, rule-making body, and its need for legitimacy. The characterization of journalism as a profession is similarly flawed, according to Zelizer. Journalism does not seem to fit the professional framework's emphases on training, education, and credentialing. The professional framework also ignores the relevance of journalistic discourse in determining what members of the journalistic community do and restricts our understanding of journalistic practice to those aspects of journalism emphasized by its particular view. Although Gans (2003) characterized journalism as a service-oriented field with a certain amount of

independence and a mission to serve its "clients" who are thought to be the American public, these characteristics are not sufficient to achieve professional status. While "professionalizing" journalism may serve to lend status to the journalistic community and give its members a sense of control over their work, "offsetting the dangers inherent in the subjectivity of reporting," the professional and occupational frameworks neglect to recognize the means by which reporters arrive at shared constructions of reality, informally network and depend on narrative and storytelling practices (Zelizer, 1993; Lule, 2001).

Rather than conceptualizing a community as a profession, Zelizer (1993) borrowed from anthropology, folklore, and literary studies in suggesting that a more fruitful way to conceptualize some groups may be as interpretive communities, "united through . . . shared discourse and collective interpretations of key public events" that help members determine what is appropriate practice. Although these organizations may be bureaucratic or corporate by typology, their members still behave as folkloric communities that use their own talk about themselves to keep themselves in line. Although the idea of interpretive communities was originally developed in reference to audience groups and consumers (Fish, 1980; Lindlof, 1988), it has since been applied to other types of groups including producers of cultural products such as news. Interpretive communities are characterized by common modes of interpretation of their social worlds. Interpretive communities act as cultural sites where meanings are constructed, shared, and reconstructed by members of social groups in the course of everyday life (Berkowitz & TerKuest, 1999).

Other studies (Meltzer, 2013; 2010; Berkowitz, 2000; Berkowitz & TerKuerst, 1999; Brewin, 1999; Cecil, 2002; Fish, 1980; Kitch, 2003; Lindlof, 1988; Meyers, 2003) have employed the interpretive community framework, exploring the ways in which journalists have understood and articulated their professional and social roles over the years through stories that they tell about their own work, its significance, and its relevance to larger cultural and social narratives. At the heart of such stories is an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining the collective.

Comparing Interpretive Communities to Communities of Practice

The clear contrast between communities of practice and interpretive communities is that communities of practice are focused on learning from others in the domain community and developing and evolving specific practices through interaction, while interpretive communities are chiefly concerned with interpreting news events through discourse, and maintaining and asserting identity and authority through self-criticism. In their own ways, each type of community engages in boundary work.

Both community models are similar in that they began in academia as theories and worked their way into the practical sphere. But while both can be credited with popularizing the professional community framework, their conceptual origins differ widely. It has been suggested that Lave and Wenger's framework deals with practice or action, whereas the interpretive communities framework deals more with interpretation. While the two theories developed roughly around the same time, Zelizer's notion of the community was taken from her dissertation (finished in 1990), so it was a bit earlier and draws on Stanley Fish's (1976) work in literary studies. According to Wenger (2012), himself, the concept of community of practice "has its roots in attempts to develop accounts of the social nature of human learning inspired by anthropology and social theory (Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1980; Giddens, 1984; Lave, 1988; Vygostsky, 1978)" (p. 1). It is interesting that a focus on community would have developed in both journalism and education around the same time, drawing on earlier work produced in the late '70s and early '80s in literary studies, and anthropology and social theory, but we are not able to offer any obvious connections with political or cultural events as the catalysts.

That being said, there are obvious parallels between the two frameworks. One such parallel is communication, which is a necessary element within both interpretive communities and communities of practice. Communication defines the boundaries of a community and brings its members together. The ways in which this communication is apparent, however, differ slightly. Communities of practice largely favor direct communication, with members discussing in person the implications of their practice. Interpretive communities can technically include this type of communication—members undoubtedly speak to each other—but they mostly seem to operate through indirect communication, or by contributing to a body of work that "speaks" for their thoughts on their practice. The use of storytelling as a form of communication and as a tool for learning within the community is a notable exception to the general differences of discourse between the two frameworks; both communities of practice and interpretive communities use stories to understand or articulate their values to new members and to an outside audience.

Another trait the two frameworks share is a tendency toward change. Neither interpretive communities nor communities of practice are static entities. The boundaries and definitions of each change to fit the interests of their members in conjunction with external circumstances. For interpretive communities, this might mean a collective change in how to view the world, or how to view the role of journalism in society. Similarly, for communities of practice, this might mean a change in how work is completed, or a reconsideration of the community's goals. Membership in either community is constantly in flux, though judging membership in an interpretive community is largely

impossible due to the subjectivity of its determining factors. In contrast to the unknowable membership of an interpretive community, membership in a community of practice is more concrete and tethered to the physical world by a specific practice. This disparity in determining an accurate member count is indicative of a larger divergence in community boundary rigidity in the two community models. Communities of practice require a very specific set of qualifications to earn the name, while interpretive communities exist with almost no qualifications. Ultimately, communities of practice present a framework on how we learn, while interpretive communities present a framework on how we view the world.

For what I am calling journalistic communities of practice, Meyers and Davidson (2016) recently came up with a similar conceptualization of "tribes of professionalism:" "We conclude that journalism has lost some of its cohesion and fragmented into tribes of professionalism practiced by a diverse set of actors."

Other work has been done on the news media's self-criticism, but it has not been talked about in the context or framework of interpretive community discussion that discursively maintains and reasserts norms and boundaries. Instead, it is discussed as "self-reflexive news media reporting" (Bishop, 2001, p. 23; Haas, 2006, p. 351), "journalistic metacoverage" (Haas, 2006, p. 352), or "boundary work" and "self-coverage" (Bishop, 1999, 2001). Bishop (2001, p. 23) and Zelizer (1997, p. 17) have contended that journalistic self-reflection is a kind of ritual sacrifice, performed to persuade audiences to have faith in journalism, to sustain ratings and readership, and to deflect potential external criticism. As Schudson (1982) wrote, the talk of journalists is a critical process of consensus-formation. "The group becomes a brotherhood that influences and colors, beyond any individual resistance to prejudice or individual devotion to fact, all of what [journalists] write" (p. 111). Current and recent work continues to employ the interpretive community framework for examining journalistic discourse. Some of that work talks about it in terms of paradigm repair and critical incidents.

In paradigm repair (Bennett, Gressett, & Haltom, 1985; Berkowitz, 2000; Hindman, 2005; Reese, 1990), a specific breach of good and normal practice necessitates action on behalf of the news organization, and the larger journalistic community, to demonstrate that the paradigm is being restored and can remain intact. This is in contrast to a "critical incident" (Zelizer, 1992), a singular event or evolution leads to the reexamination of journalistic practices.

Carlson (2015) most recently proposed pulling together all of the variations in theoretical frameworks involving discursive activities in and around journalism under the umbrella framework of "metajournalistic discourse." While it hearkens to an earlier suggestion made by Haas (2006) to focus on