TEXTBOOK NEWS VALUES: THE DISCOURSE OF WHAT JOURNALISTS "HAVE" TO
COVER AND "CAN'T" IGNORE

By

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ABSTRACT

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Journalists each day make countless selective news judgments that determine what kinds
of stories get reported, what elements of those stories are emphasized, and how those stories are
presented. Although the U.S. Constitution and a robust professional ethos help construct an
environment in which American journalists express and defend extensive autonomy to make
such judgments, they also hold themselves and their peers to an array of unwritten standards for
what constitutes valid or essential news. In this dissertation, I examine one discursive means of
constructing the conditions under which journalists define the types of people and events that
they *must* cover, and *can't* ignore: the news values implicitly and explicitly introduced in
journalism textbooks. Such texts, often taught in introductory journalism classes, embody an
interpretive synthesis that offers a window into prevailing journalism values and practices in a
given era. Textbooks are many journalists' first encounter with the criteria that reporters and
editors use to rationalize what is and is not newsworthy, including key concepts such as
timeliness, proximity, prominence, unusualness, impact, conflict, and human interest. Textbooks
also introduce journalism students both to a culture of explicitly celebrated professional
autonomy to define the news, and to a system of explicit and implied constraints on that
autonomy under written law, institutional norms, and varyingly viscous socio-cultural
conditions.

Through close reading of 75 textbooks published from 1894-2016, I highlight the
enumeration of key news judgment criteria and map both consistency and change in the

treatment of such criteria over nearly 125 years of journalism instruction. Analysis focuses on several areas of interest: identification and definition of key news values, with special attention to the affective elements of human interest and contradictory rationalizations for emphasizing conflict; an exploration of rhetoric that veers paradoxically between defenses of autonomy and justifications for disciplinary restraint; and application of the discipline-autonomy paradox to the special case of presidential news coverage. I present the analysis through the lens of social theorists Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, who both studied how individuals are implicated in power relations influencing behavioral patterns that cannot be explained solely by rational or self-interested choice, even when these individuals are not directed to act in a particular way. Specifically, I draw on Foucault's concepts of *discipline* and *governmentality* and Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and professional *fields* to explore how naturalizing patterns of thought and action artificially limit journalists' perceived choices in reporting and presenting news, even when no formal constraints intervene.

This study provides a rare long-range view of news values, which are more frequently studied in contemporary snapshots to inform content or framing analyses. By bringing Foucault and Bourdieu to bear on the interaction of news values and the more commonly studied concept of "objectivity," this analysis offers new insights into the discursive conditions favoring news decisions that influence the course of U.S. representative democracy. The dissertation concludes with a review of three non-traditional frameworks for news, with an emphasis on non-representational approaches that might help expand possibilities for conceiving and presenting news in the future.

To Amy
My adviser in everything

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This dissertation culminates five years of intellectual exploration facilitated and enhanced by everyone and everything I've encountered in my lifetime, not to mention everyone and everything encountered by my ancestors going all the way back to some protozoan somewhere, not to mention the lifespan of matter and energy and all its entanglements. Just as journalists have to select which elements of infinity to arrange into any given story, however, I here will use my best judgment to identify the human individuals who have contributed most essentially to the conception and completion of this document, knowing it's a hopelessly abridged acknowledgement.

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Webb, John Kupetz, John Reque, Tom Warhover, and Dennis Hartig; and the late Ronald L. Speer, Mason S. Peters III, and Cole C. Campbell.

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INTRODUCTION

NBC News correspondent Katie Tur's (2017) memoir describes her harrowing 500 days covering the presidential campaign of Donald Trump in 2015-16. On many occasions, Trump explicitly belittled and publicly humiliated Tur, calling her "Little Katie," accusing her of lying, and characterizing her reporting as "third-rate." His supporters took Trump's behavior as license to threaten her at rallies; the Secret Service escorted her away from one of them. Trump also kissed Tur, without consent, before a television appearance:

> "Before I know what's happening, his hands are on my shoulders and his lips are on my cheek," Tur writes. "My eyes widen. My body freezes. My heart stops." Her immediate reaction is telling. "F—. I hope the cameras didn't see that. My bosses are never going to take me seriously." (Lozada, 2017)

Tur's response, as chronicled in *The Washington Post's* book review, *is* telling: not simply as evidence of Trump's debased character, objectification of women, and sense of untouchable privilege, but also as a revelation about journalistic discipline. Tur is less concerned about a violation of her body, or that such an act by a presidential candidate might be newsworthy, than she is about the appearance it might create that she is too familiar with Trump, and therefore insufficiently detached to fairly cover him (Gross, 2017). She is mortified that it happened, but also petrified that a journalistic peer might have seen it. Her first internal question is, "Was I being watched?"

Tur's story is emblematic of reporters' experiences covering the Trump campaign. The press corps was routinely humiliated, threatened, mocked, and lied to and about (Mazza, 2016; "The Guide…", 2016) by a candidate who on paper possessed not a single notable qualification for the presidency, whose rhetoric was unprecedented in its populist bombast and divisive language since at least George Wallace, and whose candidacy even prominent leaders of his own

party had maintained was disastrous for the country. And yet, those same reporters, ever mindful of their presumed professional obligations and the omnipresent gaze of their judging peers, bestowed Trump with extraordinary press attention during the early stages of the campaign (Confessore & Yourish, 2016), helping him to establish momentum and legitimacy far beyond what his policy proposals, campaign organization, or institutional support would justify. Those same reporters, and their editors, continued to amplify Trump's every claim, verified or not, hateful or not, relevant or not, right down through election day – even as he labored to delegitimize them as contributors to the electoral process.

At least twice during the campaign, I engaged in Facebook discussions with former classmates and students regarding the extensive news media coverage afforded to Trump. In these conversations, I suggested that a way to dismantle Trump's potency would be for the mainstream news media, which served as witting props and targets of mob vitriol during his frenzied rallies (e.g. Corasaniti, 2016), to stop showing up at his events and stop putting him on television. Two working journalists, contributing to separate threads in separate months, responded to these suggestions in nearly identical terms. One wrote of Trump, "He's the front runner, though. You *can't* ignore him." The other, three months later: "You *can't* deny he's news. … you *can't* stop covering" (emphasis added).

This imperative language from American journalists, expressing an uncategorical requirement of mysterious provenance, establishing an object of newsworthiness they simply are *not permitted* to treat outside the boundaries of disciplinary common sense, is the foundational object of study for this dissertation. In a nation whose original law and underlying principle establishes nearly untrammeled autonomy for the press, and whose professional ethos carves out substantial autonomy for individual actors (e.g. Deuze, 2005; Gans, 1980, p. 96; Glasser &

Gunther, 2005; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014; Singer, 2007), what are the conditions under which journalists self-impose apparently arbitrary, unbreachable restrictions defining certain things they *must* cover, things they *can't* ignore? And, what would it take to lift those restrictions, unleashing journalists' judgment and imagination in ways that could broaden political possibilities for a bewildered, frustrated, and epically divided citizenry?

Journalists and News Values

The focus of this dissertation is on *news values*: sets of criteria for newsworthiness that are established in the journalistic field; passed on through textbooks, teachers, and trainers; internalized by apprentice reporters; and enacted through both conscious choice and instinct every time a story is conceived, a source interviewed, a lead composed, or a top story selected. News values are integral to every facet of journalistic decision-making practice: Cotter (2010) calls them "one of the most important ideological factors in understanding the shape of news stories and the decisions of journalists" (p. 8). Yet they are examined, particularly in the U.S., in less scholarly detail than the more abstract concept of *objectivity*, or journalists' perceived obligation to be neutral purveyors of a pre-existing reality, betraying no allegiance or ideology of their own. Both objectivity and news values are conduits of disciplinary power enacted through reporters' habits of practice, and they interact in each moment as journalists negotiate the work of conceiving, gathering, and presenting news. Through this dissertation I hope to make the complementarity of these forces more apparent.

News values represent the principles of story selection that influence journalists to habitually recognize stories in certain kinds of events and not in others – trained tendencies that shape the reported world as an iterating morass of unsolvable dilemmas, irreconcilable

differences, and ubiquitous disasters while rendering invisible those people and events that do not meet explicit or implicit standards of newsworthiness. As Brighton and Foy (2007) write:

> In its purest sense everything that happens in the world is a new event, and somebody, somewhere, will have some level of interest in that occurrence. But what takes it from being new to becoming news? ... Some form of matrix system is needed to prioritise those events, to filter them into levels of applicability and relevance to the audience. (Brighton & Foy, 2007, p. 1)

News values are explicitly, and effectively (Atwood & Grotta, 1973), taught in introductory U.S. journalism courses, typically through how-to texts that first distinguish news writing from high school English and then introduce young reporters into the decision-making culture of journalistic practice (Hardin & Preston, 2001; Hopper & Huxford, 2017). By the time they are professionals, the labels for these values have often faded as the criteria for news becomes natural, common-sensical and inevitable, to the point where "[w]orking journalists tend to become uncharacteristically inarticulate when asked for their own philosophy of news values. Answers tend to be like the one quoted by Bourdieu … 'It's obvious' or 'You just *know*'" (Brighton and Foy, 2007, p. 14). Tuchman (1973) similarly notes that, "[a]sked for definitions of their categories [of news stories], newsmen fluster, for they take these categories so much for granted that they find them difficult to define" (p. 113).

The principles of news selection favor the outsized, the extreme, the loud, the violent. These same principles shun the everyday, the gentle, the still. "All news is an exaggeration of life," the journalist Daniel Schorr said ("Thoughts on…", 1999). And most of the news as presented is bad (Brighton & Foy, 2007; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). There are numerous laments about the current state of reporting that flows from these values – how it overemphasizes conflict (e.g. Patterson, 2013), deprives audiences of agency and efficacy (e.g. Cappella & Jamieson, 1996; Nisbet & Fahy, 2015), confuses and stultifies with bland facticity (e.g. Stephens, 2014), or

all three (e.g. Parks, 2006). Trump's rise is the embodiment of these flaws: News organizations supplied a megaphone for his bombast; responded to his unprecedented anti-democratic behavior with sedate, routine fact-checks; and perpetuated a sense of electoral inevitability that may have depressed turnout and rendered much of the nation in shock when he won the electoral vote (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018). During this period, some therapists counseled their patients to avoid the news to avert psychic meltdowns (Wise, 2016). And following news of Trump's campaign literally made some women sick (Bassett, 2016).

One could argue that news coverage was not to blame for the dysfunction and despair wreaked by the 2016 presidential campaign, that journalists merely reflected the reality of a bizarre campaign featuring at least one candidate who instilled existential fear in many Americans. But such an argument evacuates the agency of journalists and buys into the notion that reporters, photographers, producers, and editors are simply conduits for the self-determining essence of reality rather than co-constructors and shapers of the worlds that news audiences inhabit (Bennett, 2003; Lippmann, 1922). As noted above, election-year analysis demonstrated that Trump received substantially more news media attention in the early going than his experience and party support warranted (Confessore & Yourish, 2016), helping to fuel a campaign based on bluster and entertainment value that provided substantial benefits to media companies even as it made a mockery of the democratic process (Bond, 2016). The interesting question is not: Do journalists share the blame for this phenomenon, but rather: Why didn't they do more to stop it?

Journalistic Autonomy – And Discipline

Independence and autonomy are key values journalists internalize and aggressively defend (Deuze, 2005; Glasser & Gunther, 2005; McDevitt, Gassaway, & Perez, 2002; Schudson,

2005; Shoemaker & Reese 2014; Singer, 2007). This autonomy has always been subject to challenges – contemporary journalists' self-reported sense of individual freedom has diminished in recent decades (Willnat & Weaver, 2014), and their decision-making authority is increasingly contested by audiences (Anderson, 2013) – but the ethos of autonomy is longstanding and clear. As a matter of principle, reporters don't like being told where they can go and what they can cover. Professional journalists proudly declare that theirs is the only profession explicitly protected by the U.S. Constitution ("Congress shall make no law … abridging the freedom … of the press"). Fox News anchor Chris Wallace pointedly told Trump's chief of staff on air, "You don't get to tell us what to do" (Wade, 2017). Despite their obligation to routines and deadlines, "[s]omething about the way news production is learned and enforced gives reporters a great deal of autonomy in choosing which rules to apply and how to apply them" (Ryfe, 2006, p. 203). In fact, "journalists measure themselves and their independence against the Kantian ideal of wholly autonomous agents whose legitimacy and authority require complete isolation … from any pressure or influence that might compromise the presumably 'pure' judgments they can and should make" (Glasser and Gunther, 2005, p. 388).

And yet, in 2015-17, reporters did not behave as though they prized or possessed such autonomy. Instead, they repeatedly submitted to physical and verbal abuse by Trump and his supporters at campaign rallies specifically staged to present the press as a prop and a foil through which to aggrandize the candidate. They dutifully reported, often without pushback or contextualization, every rumor, lie, insult, and exaggeration that passed his lips. They bypassed other candidates' actual speeches in order to speculate on when Trump might speak next (Douglas, 2018), and continued to carry his speeches and rallies live during the first months of

his presidency even as they knew that many of his assertions were provably false and even as he called the press "the enemy of the American people" (Grynbaum, 2017).

Journalists did all these things against their ethos of autonomy, favoring a countervailing sense of obligation within a discourse of deeply ingrained news values professing that prominent and powerful people – epitomized by the office of the U.S. presidency – are worthy of boundless attention. They were stymied by a lack of tools to handle Trump's skillful manipulation of these very values to his own ends, setting up a political environment in which he and House Speaker Paul Ryan "have completely dissolved the norm against dishonesty ... You just say whatever you want, and dole out favors to your friends — moving at such a rapid pace that the country's ability to process what's happening gets overwhelmed" (Yglesias, 2017). As an example of journalists' feckless acquiescence to norm breaching, in December 2017, Trump responded to Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand's call for him to resign over sexual assault accusations with a tweet that said: "Lightweight Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, a total flunky for Chuck Schumer and someone who would come to my office 'begging' for campaign contributions not so long ago (and would do anything for them), is now in the ring fighting against Trump. Very disloyal to Bill & Crooked-USED!" Journalists' response was not to independently evaluate this statement for its accuracy, decency, or civic value, but rather to (1) unreflectively report and repeat Trump's insults and insinuations, and (2) fall back on traditional he-said, she-said constructions in characterizing them. The headline on the Associated Press story, for instance, was "*Dems say* Trump's tweets about Gillibrand sexist, crude" (Benac & Lemire, 2017, emphasis added) as though there were an alternative, non-Democratic way to interpret Trump's language.[1]

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[1] There are nearly always exceptions to generalized media behaviors – in this case a scathing USA Today editorial in response to Trump's tweet, declaring that "President Trump has shown he is not fit for office" (Editorial Board, 2017). But the exception also proves the rule: Despite omnipresent evidence that Trump is not fit for office by virtually any normative standard of American civil society or democratic principle, supposedly autonomous

Generally, instead of maintaining their Constitutional and moral authority to use personal judgment and professional conscience in confronting Trump's behavior, journalists instead appear bodily regulated by Trump's tweets and lies: He emits a falsehood, and reporters and editors are *required* to spread it.

Here's an example of how manipulating media norms works: Early in his presidency, attempting to justify his first, sweeping travel ban on predominantly Muslim countries, Trump spoke at an Air Force base. He not only evoked the Pavlovian fear-baiting issue of "radical Islamic terrorists," but also aligned the news media with these terrorists by claiming that "[i]n many cases, the very, very dishonest press doesn't want to report it" (Wagner & Rucker, 2017). This was not a time of intensive discernible terrorist activity in the United States, and the travel ban had already been blocked in federal district court and temporarily held in stasis by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals (Helsel & Hanrahan, 2017). Meanwhile, the fledgling Trump administration had been under scrutiny for rampant nepotism, a botched military operation, flagrant ethics flouting, deteriorating international relations, and capitulation to Russian interests, among many other unprecedented presidential horrors (see Siskind, 2017). But the news media, first, fulfilled their normative duty to magnify Trump-uttered claims, pouring out headlines echoing his fear-mongering. Second, journalists leapt into fact-checking mode to respond to Trump's assertion that they hadn't adequately covered terrorism. The *Washington Post* published a full list of the 78 domestic and international incidents the Trump administration claimed had been undercovered over the preceding three years (Wagner & Rucker, 2017). The BBC's U.S. and Canada edition rehashed its extensive coverage of each incident ("Did we cover it? Yes."), including a couple dozen video clips of traumatizing scenes ("Trump says…", 2017). The *New*

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mainstream news reporters and editors act as if they have no license to declare this fact on their own authority. It can only be raised in the realm of "opinion."

York Times, similarly, ran Trump's full list complete with links to the newspaper's reporting on each attack (Fisher & Bennett, 2017).

In other words, in response to Trump's schoolyard taunt, the national and international press thrust dozens of terrorist attacks, some years old, back into the headlines, regurgitating a catalog of past horrors that distracted both journalistic and public attention from present-day White-House-engineered assaults on democratic norms. The tone of some of these stories was undisguisedly smug, as though the news organizations had won by demonstrating Trump's mischaracterizations. In fact, they gave Trump exactly what he wanted: The press and the country were talking about terrorism again, instead of his administration's misdeeds. When I pointed this out on social media, the response from journalists was predictable. "You *cannot* expect the media to let these lies go unanswered," a reporter who had covered the 2015 Orlando massacre wrote (emphasis added). A former *Washington Post* editor wrote, "I don't think the best way to react to Trump's accusations that the media is not publishing news is for the media not to publish news." The implication, of course, is that the news is whatever Donald Trump wants to talk about, irrespective of journalists' constitutional authority to choose news for themselves. Even New York University Professor Jay Rosen, one of the most outspoken advocates for journalistic independence, had his limits:

> I don't agree with those who say: Pay attention to what he does, not what he says! For the American president, there are many ways in which words are deeds. What he says matters. You *cannot* not cover that. (Rosen, Wemple, & Downie, 2017, emphasis added.)

Some journalists openly wrestled with their role in elevating Trump over the course of the 2016 campaign, a demonstration of "disdaining the news" they nonetheless felt obligated to report (see Levy, 1981). *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow (2015), for instance, pledged early in the primary season to cover Trump only "as he addresses issues with specific policy

prescriptions and details," and to otherwise avoid him. But even while attacking the orthodoxy of inflating Trump's celebrity, Blow used the refrain that Trump "can't be ignored." By the eve of the Indiana primary, in which Trump all but clinched the Republican nomination, Blow (2016) was peppering a column with his name. And by October of the general election, nearly every Blow column featured Trump in its headline. Blow's *Times* colleague, Frank Bruni, anticipating a Trump loss, nonetheless extended the implied mandate to stenograph him, declaring two weeks before the election: "We *can't* outright ignore [a defeated Trump], because there are important post-mortems to be written, because he's a central character in the drama of where the G.O.P. goes from here, and because he has captured the imaginations and vented the frustrations of tens of millions of Americans" (Bruni, 2016, emphasis added).

The Dissertation: Purpose and Scope

In this dissertation, I examine the news values implicitly and explicitly introduced in journalism textbooks. Such values represent one aspect of power relations and disciplinary practice through which journalists come to believe in, and hold themselves to, standards of news judgment that help define the types of people and events that they *must* cover and *can't* ignore. Through close reading of 75 journalism textbooks, I highlight authors' enumeration of key news judgment criteria and map both consistency and change in the treatment of such criteria over 122 years of journalism practice and instruction. Analysis will focus on several areas of interest: identification and definition of key news values, with special attention to the affective elements of "human interest" and contradictory rationalizations for covering "conflict"; an exploration of rhetoric that veers paradoxically between defenses of autonomy and justifications for discipline; and application of the discipline-autonomy paradox to the special case of U. S. presidential news coverage.

Textbooks are both tools of pedagogy and windows into the discursive patterns of a given profession at a given time (Mari, 2015). They "establish orthodoxy in a field" and "are uniquely suited to establish occupational norms" (Vos, 2011, p. 437). For many journalists,[2] the textbooks taught in introductory journalism classes will be their first encounter with the criteria that reporters and editors use to determine what is and is not newsworthy, including key elements such as timeliness, proximity, prominence, impact, conflict, and human interest. The texts also introduce journalism students to both a culture of explicitly celebrated professional autonomy to determine what news is and how to present it, and a system of explicit and implied constraints on that autonomy through written law, institutional norms, and cultural mores.

Textbooks since the beginning of institutionalized journalism education, then, have both reflected and reproduced dominant professional practices in constructing subjectivities for journalists as news decisionmakers; they constitute a key site of journalism's "body of knowledge" (Mirando, 1992). Studying these texts offers insight into the professional ethos (see Mari, 2015) that informed political journalists' behavior during the 2015-16 presidential campaign and that underlies implicit and explicit news rationalizations in general. Such an argument does not suggest a direct causal line between the language in a given text and any specific news decision, but rather locates textbooks as important synthesizers of and contributors

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[2] One survey found that about half of practicing journalists with college degrees were journalism or communication majors, with about 37 percent majoring specifically in journalism (Willnat & Weaver, 2014). These are the people most likely to directly encounter journalism textbooks in their apprenticeships. The survey does not account for an unknown proportion of journalists with other degrees who took journalism classes outside their majors or as minors, who learned the journalistic ropes through student media experiences under the advisement of journalism faculty or journalism majors trained by such faculty, or who independently read or studied instructional journalistic literature. There is a complex interplay among the observed and perceived professional values that are written into journalism textbooks; the students who take lessons directly from such texts; and the students or neophyte journalists enculturated into value systems informed and inspired by such texts and the cultures from which such texts emerge. I do not attempt to untangle these threads in this study. I accept as propositional, within the flow of a substantial body of literature, that journalism textbooks are a fruitful site for investigating journalism norms and cultural priorities. (See Chapter 3).

to the discourse in which such decisions are made. Nor is this an argument that textbooks are the sole (re)producers of news values, or that news values are the sole factor in journalists' decisionmaking. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) identify five interacting levels of influences on journalists' work: the role of the individual, routine practices that inform individuals' actions, organizational structures and policies, the social institution of the media field, and the broader social system of ideologies and power relations. News values are constructed, contested, and reified in multiple ways at all of these levels, distilled into journalism textbooks (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014) and reinterpreted within changing socio-cultural conditions. Factors such as institutional economic demands, tighter or looser managerial controls, and macro political and social shifts all work with news values to influence journalistic decisions, and textbooks shed light on the discursive conditions that make news judgments under these influences possible. My primary concern in this finite study is to examine the discourse of news values as promulgated in textbooks to lend insights into the individual and routine decisions journalists make each day within the boundaries of their felt sense of autonomy, and to suggest that journalists frequently act less autonomously than they are capable of doing.

I undertake this analysis through the lens of social theorists Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, who both examined how individuals are implicated in power relations influencing patterns of behavior that cannot be explained by rational or self-interested choice, even when they are not directed to act in certain ways. Specifically, I use Foucault's concepts of *discipline* and *governmentality* and Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and professional *fields* to explore how naturalizing patterns of thought and action artificially limit journalists' perceived choices in reporting and presenting news, even when no formal constraints intervene. The analysis will demonstrate the confusing and contradictory ways journalists are invited to exercise their

responsibilities as news decision-makers: the formative philosophy behind common-sense

judgments of what journalists *must* cover and *can't* ignore.

While news media may not have the mass influence they perhaps did in the 20th century

days of finite, physical newspapers and limited broadcast channels (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001;

Parks, 2017), the assumption behind nearly all journalism research is that news affects people,

directly and indirectly. Precisely how and to what extent people are affected, and the extent of

their agency in interpreting and responding to media messages, is debated among and within

epistemological paradigms, but I'm not aware of any paradigm that suggests news reports simply

slide off people like Teflon or bounce off them like Superman. I think Annie Lang (2013) gets it

about right when she first acknowledges the limited effects reported in most traditional media

research but then goes on to say, "I see media influencing people's behavior everyplace I look. I

see society changing fantastically as a function of media and media content" (p. 23). Though

Lang's argument for a psychologically driven paradigm is ultimately dismissive of the critical

and cultural approaches informing my analysis, it is significant that we both start from the same

proposition. From this first proposition it is a short leap to my second, which is that how news

content is chosen, reported, and presented is an important factor in democratic processes and

outcomes, and therefore worthy of extensive study. As Buozis and Creech (2017) put it:

> In Foucaultian terms … news is an artifact of a productive truth, one that may be unfixed
> but is no less powerful for the ways it abets other forms of social activity and cultural
> practice. What the audience knows about places they have never been to, or people they
> have never met, depends, to some degree on what news narratives they have consumed…
> (Buozis & Creech, 2017, p. 7)

While the scholarly literature is rife with studies examining the construction of

journalistic subjectivities – the tools traditionally assumed to be available to and withheld from

reporters and editors as they engage in professional practice – news values themselves are not

typically examined in this context. Many thousands of words have been devoted to unpacking the development of "objectivity," the ritual of depersonalizing the news and negating the journalist's subjective authority, and that ritual's impact on journalistic practice (e.g. Mindich, 1998; Schudson, 1978; Tuchman, 1972). But news values, while hardly overlooked (e.g. Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Brighton & Foy, 2007) have not been explored as deeply or expansively. Cohen and Young (1973, p. 11) lamented a lack of scholarly attention to news selection, and, while enclaves of emphasis on this subject exist within certain international niches (e.g. Reinemann & Schulz, 2006), as a matter of proportion little appears to have changed over the past half-century. (A Google Scholar search for *journalism objectivity* yielded 82,200 results; *journalism "news values"* returned 16,000.) News values and objectivity deserve analytical parity, because they interact as principle and practice to help constitute the conditions under which journalists make decisions. Carlson (2017) suggests that adherence to news values is actually the *enactment* of objectivity: "While newsworthiness entails judgment, journalism's norms proscribe subjectivity so that the external attributes of a story are held up as determining newsworthiness" (Carlson, 2017, p. 11).

Journalism textbooks have been the object of previous study (e.g. Mirando, 1992; Mari, 2014, 2015; Vos, 2011). News values have been an explicit, though second-class, object of journalism study since at least the 1960s (e.g. Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Brighton & Foy, 2007, Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill 2001, 2017). Foucault and Bourdieu have been applied to journalism studies – particularly Bourdieu (see Benson & Neveu, 2005), who himself used the field of journalism as an object of study (e.g. Bourdieu, 1998). But few studies have taken a longitudinal or historical view of news values, have looked closely at news values as enumerated in journalism textbooks, or have partnered Foucault and Bourdieu to consider in detail how

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normative instruction begins constructing the boundaries around journalists' sense of freedom even as that freedom is introduced as bedrock to the field. While objectivity has often been studied as a phenomenon that develops and changes within broad historical contexts, research on news values is usually a snapshot, driven by content analysis of a segmented sample of news organizations in a particular place at a particular time. The present study reviews the development and promulgation of news values over more than a century, shedding light on both the stability of stated news values and fluctuations in how such values have been applied to practice in the course of modern journalism. These news values developed in conjunction with the rising symbolic, policymaking and military power of the U.S. presidency (Schudson, 1995), which is important for the particular question of how journalists applied their news judgment to the Trump phenomenon.

Before turning to the textbook study which constitutes the empirical analysis for this dissertation, I present a literature review summarizing Foucault and Bourdieu's relevant concepts and examining both the historiography illuminating the development of news values over centuries of journalism and the contemporary scholarly work explicating news values for academic purposes. Following the empirical analysis, I conclude with a chapter suggesting non-traditional frameworks for news, with an emphasis on non-representational approaches that might help expand the ethos detailed in the preceding chapters.

This dissertation is in no small part autoethnographic, because I am a creature of the journalistic habitus and a habitual practitioner of the editorial disciplines I describe. Autoethnography "relies on the author's experiences 'for the purposes of extending sociological understanding'" (Amaya, 2007, p. 196, quoting Sparkes, 2000, p. 21); it also "makes evident my subject position" for the reader (Amaya, 2007, p. 196). If my language slips into asserting how

journalists might "feel" in a given situation, that can be read as a self-report drawing on three decades of informal participant-observation in newsrooms (both physical and virtual) and journalism classrooms – as a reporter and editor, and as a student and teacher. As Lindlof and Taylor (2011) write, "social processes are not just *something [researchers] study in others. These processes can also be *something they personally experience, so they can better understand the experience of others*" (p. 134, emphasis in original).

The orientation of my argument flows from the poststructural theorizing of Foucault and Bourdieu, who reject the outright determinism of Marxist structural thinking or the fatalism of Frankfurt School scholars of the mid-20th century. Yet I am not above the sense of having awakened from a state not unlike false consciousness, in which I was "hailed" (see Althusser, 1971) to make journalistic choices and arguments that appeared to me completely natural, inevitable, or beyond my control even absent direction from my editorial superiors. Of course, a damning critique of false consciousness is how do I know I haven't emerged from one ideology only to stumble into another, thus rendering my analysis now as suspect as my doxic practice then? This is one reason I am cultivating a broadly generative ontological stance, recognizing social tendencies toward structural constraints, but in the context of an under-recognized, under-utilized human agency that could be more fruitfully tapped if we paid more attention to the fluidity of power, to affective forces, and to spontaneously arising possibilities. Giddens (1984) considers structure to be "always both constraining and enabling" (p. 25). Even Max Weber, who tends toward a pessimistic, deterministic structuralism in describing bureaucratic societies (e.g. Baehr, 2001; Weber, 1994), nonetheless "sees fragmentation, tension, open conflict, and the exercise of power as frequent, and considers the clearly formed society with delineated boundaries as a hypothetical case only" (Kalberg, 2005, p. 19).

I will thus wrestle in this text with the part of myself that perceives humanity as helplessly chained to hegemonic forces and the part that seeks to perform, as Foucault did, a discourse that implies no mandate, a "theory of power … much more open-ended than structuralist theories of power" (Fendler, 2010, p. 195). I attempt throughout this work to restrain my own habitual normative instincts, avoiding words such as "should," "need," and "must." From the limiting constructions of journalistic imagination defined by existing news values explored in the body of the study, I wish to move in the conclusion to the liberation hinted at through Foucault's critiques and described by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) when they distinguish between the centralized, rooted lines of possibility offered by the tree and the zig-zagging, infinite potential of the rhizome: "The tree imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and. . . and... and. . .' This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb 'to be'" (p. 25).

I don't seek merely to show what is, because that might leave us stuck in place. I seek to open up a chorus of ands that might make room for something new.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2: Foucault, Bourdieu, and News Values

In this chapter, I review the literature regarding three interrelated themes that set up my interpretive study of news values in journalism textbooks. First, I summarize several socio-cultural concepts from Foucault and Bourdieu as they relate to the naturalizing of journalistic routines and self-constraints. These concepts include Foucault's (1982, 1991) explication of *discipline* as connected with panopticism: the idea that certain norms emerge that people identify with past any point where those norms make sense; and *governmentality*, a related concept played out at a more macro level between individuals and broader social discourses. Key

concepts from Bourdieu (1977, 1992, 2005) include *habitus*, a socially learned structure of behavior that is re-created and reinforced each time it is practiced; *doxa*, or the taken-for-granted beliefs and practices employed by people within habitus; and *field*, a constantly contested, fuzzily bounded collection of beliefs and practices, the members of which adhere to the same set of conscious and unconscious rules of conduct and criteria for inclusion/exclusion.

The second part of the literature review examines the historical contingencies that helped produce and inculcate certain news values in the field of journalism. To do so, I delve into secondary literature covering the emergence of Western journalism; the development of news reporting as an occupation distinct from printing or "publicizing" (Chalaby, 1998); the early articulation of journalistic responsibilities, privileges, and judgment; the shift in the United States from a largely partisan to a largely commercially oriented press; the rise of professionalism; and the development of contemporary news values. The historical literature tends to refer not explicitly to news values but rather obliquely to criteria for judging the relative worth of events and prospective news stories, often as a secondary consideration in the context of concepts such as objectivity or commercial competition. Therefore, many of my conclusions about the development of news values are inferential. Chapter 2 concludes with a review of the explicit social science literature on news values, the seminal approach to which is credited to Galtung and Ruge (1965). This review focuses on how scholars have defined and studied news values over roughly the past half-century and the implications of dominant research approaches for news values' usefulness in theorizing journalism practice.

Chapter 3: News Values in Journalism Textbooks

This chapter begins my interpretive analysis of how journalism textbooks have defined and deployed news values, implicitly and explicitly, from a seminal 1894 text through the

present day. The analysis is grounded in the literature review from Chapter 2. This first empirical chapter starts with a review of the academic literature on journalism texts, lists the research questions guiding my analysis, and lays out my methods in selecting, reading, and analyzing the 75 texts in my sample. The results shared in this chapter answer the baseline question of what terms and definitions textbook authors used to identify and describe news selection criteria from 1894 to 2016. The four subsequent chapters then address the most compelling dimensions of the expression of these news values. While each analysis chapter is grounded in the social theory of Foucault and Bourdieu, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on evidence-based descriptive and interpretive analysis of how textbooks have used news values to prescribe and proscribe various aspects of journalistic practice, and how certain of those practices have changed against a relatively stable background of news value articulation. As summarized below, Chapter 6 draws heavily from Foucault's theory of discipline to explain and contextualize the practices outlined in the preceding chapters, and Chapter 7 explores a particular application of discipline in practice.

Chapter 4: Human Interest: The Anti-News Value

Chapter 4 is a deep dive into one specific, consistently referenced, and uniquely flexible news value: human interest. Human interest is unique in that it is the only value to focus on human emotion and the idea of universal affective experience. Human interest held privilege as a central news value in early texts and gradually moved to the periphery as more hard-news values became dominant. A study of human interest helps illustrate the stark duality in news conception by which affect and emotion – both the reporter's and the reader's – are purged from stories deemed serious news and reserved only for this category of stories considered largely to be frivolous and entertainment-oriented. Because human interest's primary criterion is that it evokes an emotional response – laughter, tears, rage, etc. – this value also provides a back door for

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journalists to define *any* story, however distant from other news priorities, as newsworthy so long as it tickles their fancy. The chapter concludes with a case study on how journalism textbooks have handled coverage of suicides, to illustrate that while human interest has remained nominally stable as news value over nearly 125 years, application of that value in practice has changed substantially.

Chapter 5: Naturalizing Crime, Conflict, and "Bad" News

In this chapter, I examine how journalism textbooks have justified, rationalized, or critiqued the predominance of crime, conflict, and disaster in news reporting. Most texts pay some lip service to complaints about journalists focusing primarily on negative news. They then proceed to defend this propensity as a fact of human nature or a common sense outcome of news values such as unusualness (thousands of planes land safely every day; news is the plane that crashes). With this analysis I draw briefly on media effects literature demonstrating how such news priorities promote a distorted worldview that contributes to fear, contraction, cynicism, and helplessness**,** even as they allow for occasional rays of sunshine. I also show how some early 20th century textbooks promoted a form of "constructive" journalism, which obligated journalists to cover crime through a moralistic frame that would deter copycats and encourage upstanding citizenship. This conception of constructive journalism exhibits interesting similarities to and differences from a contemporary movement to frame news to encourage positive outcomes (e.g. Gyldensted, 2015; McIntyre, 2015).

Chapter 6: The Discipline-Autonomy Paradox

In this chapter I return to Foucault to discuss how disciplining language in journalism textbooks undermines, confuses, and contradicts explicit claims to, and celebrations of, journalistic autonomy. Most texts assert sweeping freedom for journalists while simultaneously

imposing substantial legal, social, and moral constraints. These contradictions reflect and reproduce a professional culture that vigorously defends its independent authority against outside influences while policing journalistic decisions through enforcement of normative news values and ethical standards, as described in Chapters 3-5. Hence, journalists assert substantial freedom of judgment, even as they govern themselves in restrictive ways that are so common-sensical they are rarely recognized as limitations.

Chapter 7: The U.S. Presidency: The Ultimate News Value

In the final analysis chapter, I return to the theme of this introduction by zeroing in on a specific manifestation of the discipline/autonomy paradox: journalistic norms surrounding coverage of the U.S. presidency and presidential campaigns. The chapter shows how journalism textbooks construct the president as the *supreme* news value – the most prominent, impactful, conflict-oriented and humanly interesting subject of public attention and journalistic duty. Constructing the president as ubiquitously newsworthy disciplines journalists to attend unerringly to her[3] every statement, action, movement, or the absence of these. It renders the president, and prominent candidates for the presidency, as entities that *have to be covered*. The idea of ignoring an aspect of the presidency does not exist in journalistic discourse (even though there are examples of it taking place), creating favorable conditions for what might have been existentially fatal coverage of Donald Trump through the 2015-16 campaign.

Chapter 8: Conclusion: Toward Non-Representational News Values

The preceding analysis chapters show how textbook news values introduce many beginning journalists to a narrow and limiting sense of what constitutes news, based on authors' observation and synthesis of professional discourse and practices. In the conclusion I discuss

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[3] The pronoun is aspirational

three frameworks for thinking about news judgment that illuminate the constructed and non-inevitable nature of dominant Western news values: "existential journalism" (Merrill, 1996), Buddhist news values (Gunaratne, 2009), and non-representational theory (NRT). My focus is on the last approach, a style of research that embraces affective influences on bodies in the moment and does not privilege pre-existing conceptual categories in considering what might make a difference. A non-representational method, according to Ingold (2015):

> is not a set of regulated steps to be taken towards the realization of some predetermined end. It is a means, rather, of carrying on and being carried – that is, of living a life with others, humans and non-humans all – that is cognizant of the past, finely attuned to the conditions of the present, and speculatively open to the possibilities of the future. (p. vii)

In the conclusion I draw on relevant literature (e.g. Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Fendler, 2016; Parks, 2017; Parks, in press-b; Thrift, 2008; Vannini, 2015a) to argue how non-representational theory might dissolve the bonds of pre-determined news values and free journalists to follow affective leads toward potentially novel approaches to news.

CHAPTER 2
FOUCAULT, BOURDIEU, AND NEWS VALUES

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the historiography and social science that best describes academics' conceptualization of the news values that have guided journalistic decision-making over the past several centuries. News, Schudson (1995) argues, "is a historically situated category rather than a universal and timeless feature of human societies" (p. 38), and news decision-making criteria are products of this historical contingency. Paralleling Foucault's conception of thresholds of discursive formation (Fendler, 2010) whereby ideas and practices become thinkable and formalized, news values were disorganized and largely implicit through the end of the 19th century, became explicit in journalism textbooks early in the 20th century (see Chapter 3), and became a subject of scholarly research in the middle of that century. Stephens (1988), while disputing Schudson's view that news itself is a recent phenomenon, links articulated news *values* with the modern phenomenon of widespread literacy:

> Preliterate societies seem to employ the same basic standards of newsworthiness used by modern news organizations; nevertheless, the process of *explicitly* rating and organizing occurrences according to some imposed hierarchy of newsworthiness – deaths before injuries; six-column headline for earthquake, one column for fire – appears to be a construct of the literate mind. (Stephens, 1988, p. 52-53, emphasis in original)

News values over the past century have suffused the field of journalism so completely that journalists who highly prize autonomy (Glasser & Gunther, 2005; McDevitt, 2003; Singer, 2007) also aggressively police the limits of what they are entitled to regard or disregard as news, what they are "permitted" to attend to or ignore. Conventions such as news values, which are "recent innovations" but "so obvious they seem timeless, ... help make culturally consonant messages readable and culturally dissonant messages unsayable. … [They] shape and narrow the range of what kinds of truths can be told" (Schudson, 1995, p. 55). Because the values appear "obvious" and "timeless," decisions derived from them are largely automatic, which means

unreflective choices end up playing an important role in the public consciousness. "[T]he press, in fact, is crucial to the social construction and demarcation of the contentious public arena. Its coverage defines and sanctions or, in the phrase of Pierre Bourdieu, 'performatively constructs' which issues and which views should properly enter into the public sphere" (Kaplan, 2002, p. 26; citing Bourdieu, 1991).

Journalism in the United States is (as of this writing) an unregulated profession – there are no licensing or educational requirements, and in fact no codified restrictions as to who is fit or unfit to practice. Journalism, rather, is a self-monitoring discipline, ruled with powerful normalizing effects by what Foucault (1991) termed *governmentality*, or culturally enforced norms and values so deeply embedded and naturalized that practicing journalists are virtually unable to consider alternatives. As Ryfe (2006) put it, "Some kinds of actions are not taken in journalism, not because they are not possible but because they are not recognizable" (p. 210). Governmentality, which emerged in Foucault's later lectures (Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991) as a revision and extension of his concept of *discipline*; along with Bourdieu's companionable concepts of *habitus*, *doxa*, (Bourdieu, 1977) and the social *field* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), provide a useful framework for understanding journalists' seemingly paradoxical behavior as autonomous decisionmakers.

In this chapter, I first summarize the relevant concepts from Foucault and Bourdieu, then examine the key literature dealing either explicitly or implicitly with news values, both historically and in contemporary social scientific analysis.

Journalism, Foucault, and Bourdieu

I use the theories of Foucault and Bourdieu in this dissertation to argue that people in general, and journalists in particular, come to understand their way of being in the world, or in

the circles they travel, through socially and culturally constructed conceptions of what's possible. These constructions tend to narrow the spectrum of people's behaviors, even in the absence of direct coercion or enforcement of their individual acts. The most useful concepts for making this argument include Foucault's (1995 [1975]) explication of discipline as connected with panopticism, the idea that certain norms emerge to which people voluntarily adhere past any point where those norms make sense. Closely related are several concepts from Bourdieu, namely habitus, a socially learned iterating structure of behavior that is recreated and reinforced each time it is practiced; doxa, or the taken-for-granted beliefs and practices employed by people within a certain habitus; and field, a constantly contested, fuzzily bounded collection of beliefs and practices, the members of which adhere to the same set of conscious and unconscious rules of conduct and criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

These concepts all operate within historicized contexts. Wilder (2012), discussing the historiography of colonialism, writes: "This current round of globalization has revealed that the territorial national state flourished under particular historical conditions that are undergoing a decisive shift. It has also reminded us that the discipline of history, whose genesis was bound up with that national object, developed under those same conditions" (p. 741). This observation on the contingency of historiography as an epistemological coincident of the nation-state offers a much broader lesson regarding the constraints that social worlds can place on what members of a given field, including scholarship or journalism, are able to imagine as practical or possible – in Foucault's terms, what is or isn't in discourse. The field of journalism, and the academic field of mass communication, emerged and co-developed with the technological and social conditions of mass communication over the 19th and 20th centuries. Because journalists and communication scholars are embedded within these contingent circumstances, it remains difficult to grasp the

"decisive shift" in historical conditions brought about by the digital age (see, for instance, Carlson, 2017) and to respond with more generative conceptions of newsworthiness that are untethered to pre-digital orientations.

Although some prescient scholars have raised questions about the future of "mass" communication (e.g. Chaffee & Metzger, 2001), much scholarship of present-day media proceeds through the same theoretical positioning that emerged from a pre-social media, mass communication society. And journalists maintain an illusory perception that they write for pre-assembled publics who habitually seek and attend to the news of the day (Anderson, 2013). Dicken-Garcia (1989), in her examination of shifting journalistic standards through the 19th century, argues that such shifts can only be observed longitudinally, because "change in practices is always gradual – it takes at least a generation to *begin* to change an older generation's way of doing things – but also because lag times occur between changes in society at large and accompanying adjustments in its institutions" (p. 27). It might be fair, however, to assert that changes in the digital era are likely to travel in shorter wavelengths, as Pamela Crossley suggests in Akyeampong et al. (2015). As Pettegree (2014) writes of the digital era in his history of the development of news in Europe, "[I]n this context, the age of the newspaper seems comparatively fleeting, rather than, as it was when the first histories of the news were written, the natural order of things" (p. 371).

Recent events suggest the traditional news values that emerged with the age of the newspaper have outlived their social and political – if not commercial – usefulness. A generational shift in news values might now be called for – a shift that will rupture the journalistic habitus articulated through decades of historical studies, social science research, and textbook teaching. An undercurrent of agency runs through both Foucault and Bourdieu's

theories of social constraint – agency that makes such a shift possible. As Foucault states, "It would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination which, by definition, are means of escape" (Foucault, 1982, p. 794).

Foucault, Discipline, and Governmentality

Foucault's life's work, on its face, could be regarded as the antithesis of modern journalism. If journalists in the model that emerged in the late 19th century are charged with uncovering and delivering the "truth," then any confrontation with Foucault, whose "philosophy strikes at the normalizing, limiting, disciplining effects that the search for truth has imposed on human creativity and imagination" (Fendler, 2010, p. 6-7), will be unsettling. What interests me in this examination is Foucault's approach to the manner in which individuals feel compelled to regulate their behavior due to the perception that they are under constant surveillance and social obligation. This is outlined in detail in *Discipline and Punish* (1995 [1975]), in which Foucault traces the emergence of disciplinary practices across numerous social venues – the prison, the military, the school system, the hospital – as the human body came to be seen as a site of knowledge that could facilitate control. The concept of panopticism[4], that inkling that one is constantly being watched because the mechanisms of watching are always available, is a helpful way to think about why journalists act as they do (Allen, 2008; Andrejevic, 2008). Journalists, of course, *are* always being watched, or at least their work is: Attracting eyeballs and eardrums to

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[4] The Panopticon is Jeremy Bentham's prison design, arranged with multiple stories of cells encircling a central tower, from which guards could view all activity without being seen. Foucault argues the resultant effect is constant self-monitoring, because eventually the prisoners stop guessing whether they're being watched and simply behave at all times as though they are. Interestingly, Schudson (1995) implies that the press produces this same panoptic discipline among public officials: "So long as information is publicly available, political actors have to behave *as if* someone in the public is paying attention. … Contemporary American journalism presumes that the public is eavesdropping; even if the public is absent, the assumption of the public presence makes all the difference" (p. 25). Similarly, Stephens (1988) argues: "Reporters in the field, like sergeants in the barracks, can be placated only by order and tidiness. They force those they scrutinize to prepare, to organize themselves. Adjustments must be made not only in explanations but in actions" (p. 251). As with so many normative assumptions, the foregoing may need to be reconsidered in light of 2015-17 U.S. politics.

content is a key objective of journalistic storytelling and presentation. But journalists are also aware that their work is rarely evaluated simply on its merits; in addition to being asked why they did what they did, journalists are constantly prepared to be challenged on why they didn't do what they didn't. The easiest way to avoid this scrutiny is to do the same thing other journalists do: "[T]he reporter is haunted by the professional necessity to validate his news sense – to demonstrate that his antennae are as good as the next man's – by making the same judgments about news as his professional colleagues make" (Cohen, 1963). To facilitate this harmony, journalists follow established routines (Tuchman, 1973; 1978) and tacitly agreed-upon criteria for news judgment – criteria so taken for granted that "newsmen … find them difficult to define" (Tuchman, 1973, p. 113). As Mirando (1992) put it in his examination of journalism textbooks:

> The most enduring anecdotal description of news has been a tendency to equate it with a special, almost mystical 'sixth sense.' In this way authors could justify why news is so difficult to define even though working journalists daily make their livings by defining news so quickly and so automatically that they hardly need to spend time thinking about it. (p. 107.)

Such naturalizing and automatizing helped journalists defend their ubiquitous attention to Donald Trump by arguing first that he was a compelling presidential candidate, and then that he was the presidential front-runner, and then the party's nominee, and then the president. Because of these characteristics, Trump is definitionally newsworthy; therefore, "We *have* to cover him" (see Chapter 7).

Foucault's dualistic concept of power-knowledge is operative here: Journalists assert the power of knowing both what defines news and how to get it, which distinguishes them from other actors. But journalists also are always known – their decisions are always legible, their critics (both internal and external to the field) always armed with the knowledge of what the

journalist covered, whom she quoted, the order in which she arrayed her information, etc. –

which confers power to the critique (Carlson, 2017). The ever-present anticipation of being

accused of falling short of pledged journalistic standards such as accuracy or "objectivity"

(Singer, 2007) leads the journalist to constant pre-emptive behavior to ward off charges of

unprofessionalism – self-imposed behavior that favors the hegemony of dominant values and

practices:

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for
> the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in
> himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the
> principle of his own subjection (Foucault, 1995 [1975], p. 203).

Foucault (1995 [1975]) describes the discipline that arises from legibility as "operat[ing]

four great techniques: it draws up tables; it prescribes movements; it imposes exercises; … it

arranges tactics" (p. 167). Journalists, of course, have worked to timetables since the halting

beginnings of the periodical press in the early 17th century (Pettegree, 2014), and increasingly so

since the invention of the steam press and the growth of daily newspapering in the early 19th

century (Dicken-Garcia, 1989), the rise of broadcasting in the early 20th, the introduction of the

24-hour cable news cycle in the 1980s, and, now, the perpetual deadline of the Internet age.

Journalists' movements are inscribed in the routines that have stationed them at various

official outposts – city hall, police headquarters, legislative offices, etc. – where trustworthy

official sources reside and news events reliably occur (Tuchman, 1978). Journalistic exercises

include the daily source checks for news tidbits, the display of "balance" in obtaining the "other

side" of any story, and the ritualistic production of stories, pages, broadcasts, blog posts, and

social media promotions. These processes are all filtered through countless judgments informed

by news values, the categorizing lens through which journalists consciously or unconsciously

assess the relative relevance of each incoming fact or opinion. News values are deployed through

"tactics[:] the art of constructing, with located bodies, coded activities and trained aptitudes, mechanisms in which the product of the various forces is increased by their calculated combination … no doubt the highest form of disciplinary practice" (Foucault, 1995 [1975], p. 167). Lippmann (1922) defines news itself on the basis of the state's mechanisms of legibility, to which journalists are constantly attuned:

> Wherever there is a good machinery of record, the modern news service works with great precision. There is one on the stock exchange… There is a machinery for election returns… In civilized communities deaths, births, marriages and divorces are recorded. … It will be found, I think, that there is a very direct relation between the certainty of news and the system of record. (Lippmann, 1922, p. 342, 343).

The regimentation and normalization of particular values and practices regulates journalistic behavior in the absence of any formal law or regulation establishing what or who should be covered, when, or how. For instance, Breed (1955) found that mid-century publishers' content preferences were not directly imposed on reporters due to the taboo against interfering with their editorial autonomy. Instead, a new reporter "discovers and internalizes the rights and obligations of his status and its norms and values. He learns to anticipate what is expected of him so as to win rewards and avoid punishments" (Breed, 1955, p. 328). Shoemaker and Reese put it, "Whenever media workers deduce what their supervisors want and give it to them, de-facto control has been exercised" (p. 159). Foucault describes such a relationship of power, in which one acts based on anticipation rather than decree, as "a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions" (Foucault, 1982, p. 789).

Foucault extended his ideas on discipline in subsequent lectures regarding "the art of governance," or *governmentality* (Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991). "Government as an activity," Gordon (1991) writes, "could concern the relation between self and self, private interpersonal relations involving some form of control or guidance, relations within social

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institutions and communities, and, finally, relations concerned with the exercise of political sovereignty" (p. 2-3). Responding to Marxist critics who argued his concept of discipline was too local, Foucault countered that governmentality allowed for analysis of large-scale relations between institutions and actors, but not in a way that totalized the state or fixed it in place. Gordon (1991) summarizes Foucault's position as: "Political theory attends too much to institutions, and too little to practices" (p. 4). It is the emphasis on disciplinary practices that makes governmentality a fruitful concept to apply to journalism and that helps link Foucault to Bourdieu (1977), for whom practice is both the product and generator of fluctuating structures that define and describe behavior in distinct contexts, tying individuals to social classes as discipline ties them to genres of legibility.

Foucault's interest in intertwining levels of governmentality, from the government of the self to the political organization of a state, bears on the relation between the political journalist and her treatment of political subjects, even dubious ones like Donald Trump. Journalists' authority is protected by the state, which binds their legitimacy to the legitimacy of the state and its processes. This renders the notion of deeply questioning the outcome of a state process, such as the presidential nomination of a major party, outside discourse, or essentially unthinkable. To delegitimize the state's electoral process, however aberrant or dangerous the process may become even to the state itself, would be to risk the delegitimization of one's own journalistic authority. This largely unconscious connection between state legitimacy and journalistic legitimacy – unregulated by fiat or official censorship – is a bug in a system that runs on assumptions of normative behavior and is vulnerable to extra-normative assaults. It helped to discipline journalists' normalization of Trump, not because he was normal but because he was sanctioned by normalized political processes. "Even when the 'multitude' became 'infatuated,

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possessed, maddened' by some 'strange prejudice,' some 'unwarrantable persuasion,'" Dicken-

Garcia (1989), quoting Frothingham (1884) writes, "must not journalists still 'be careful how

they run counter to the tide?'" (p. 209).

Bourdieu, Habitus, and Fields

As noted above, there are clear connections between Foucault's concept of discipline and

Bourdieu's of habitus. Foucault writes of the normalizing extra-legal forces that impose tables,

movements, and exercises on the body, enacted through tactics. Bourdieu, in *Outline of a Theory

of Practice* (1977), writes of "the collective enterprise of inculcation tending to produce habitus

that are capable of generating practices regulated without express regulation or any

institutionalized call to order" (p. 17). This habitus, like Foucault's discipline and

governmentality, seeks to foreground the backgrounded grooves of personal history, social

custom and "common sense" that circumscribe the possibilities of action and response among

members of particular groups. For Bourdieu, habitus both structures actions and is continually

structured by them; among other definitions, it is "the durably installed generative principle of

regulated improvisations" (1977, p. 78) – that is, it defines the boundaries in which a social actor

is permitted to respond to events, and those responses help to reshape the boundaries. Cohen

(1963) neatly illustrates this self-iterating set of practices by noting how foreign affairs reporters

begin their days by scouring the previous day's news for clues as to how to proceed: "[T]hus

each of them is shaping both his news sense and his working day by examining the output of his

professional colleagues, all of whom are simultaneously doing the same thing" (Cohen, 1963, p.

58-59). Habitus, then, lies somewhere between structural determinism and human agency;

individuals are free to act as they wish, but they are guided consciously by prescribed custom

and subconsciously by doxa, "that which is taken for granted" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 166), or a

dimension of "journalistic 'gut feeling'" (Schultz, 2007). Doxa is so internalized that we don't realize there are alternatives: "The adherence expressed in the doxic relation to the social world is the absolute form of recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 168). This misrecognition of arbitrariness is the mechanism for the common-sense deployment of news values: They are invented, yet they appear too natural to question.

Habitus and doxa can play out within *fields*, relational social groups whose members police boundaries and share ideas of the "stakes" of membership, acceptable and signifying terminology and practices, and criteria for recognition of good and bad conduct (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu's historical account of the emergence of fields presents another similarity to Foucault, who situates the advent of discipline in the nascent days of modernity, the transition from the absolute power of the sovereign to the growth and mobility of capitalism, the need of state institutions to collect and regulate individuals to power the machinery of capital and attendant social institutions. Bourdieu, similarly, argues that "[t]he concentration of these different species of capital – economic … military, cultural, juridical and, more generally, symbolic, goes hand in hand with the rise and consolidation of the various corresponding fields" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 114).

The journalistic field is host to a set of inclusionary and exclusionary criteria, defined by professional norms, values, and logics of behavior that are constantly negotiated at the edges but largely stable across decades. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) refer specifically to the field of journalism in highlighting objectivity as a standard established in part to define boundaries between serious newspapers and reckless tabloids. Because fields are relational, both internally and externally, individuals are subsumed within them. That is, one cannot be defined as an actor in a given field (art, journalism, politics) without the pre-existence of that field (Bourdieu &

Wacquant, 1992). And because people within fields compete for symbolic and cultural capital that empowers them to further define and shape that field, analyzing it "involves thinking of it as a space of struggle, for example, the struggle to define good journalism. What is the mark of excellence: the largest audience? The precise and pugnacious questioning of a head of state?" (Neveu, 2005, p. 208).

Broersma (2007) argues that newswork "is mostly based on unnoticed and undisputed conventions and professional routines" (p. ix), what Bourdieu called habitus. Gaye Tuchman is the exemplary researcher on this habitus of journalistic routine. In one historical example of rationalized performance within the journalistic field, Tuchman (1973) described journalists' reaction to Lyndon Johnson's 1968 announcement that he would not run for re-election. According to Tuchman, journalists have a routine way of accounting for cases in which their expectations for how a story will play out are thwarted – a move she terms "what-a-story." In such cases, journalists have to shift gears in a hurry, as with Johnson's surprise announcement in an otherwise pre-released speech:

> It would be impossible to describe the amount of revision accomplished in a remarkably brief time as telephoned reporters, volunteering editors, and mounds of wire service copy poured into the newsroom. But the comments of editors and reporters are telling. Lifting their heads to answer telephones, bark orders, and clarify them, the editors periodically announced, "*What* a story!" (Tuchman, 1973, p. 127).

Once stories are recognized within the journalistic culture, they "spread horizontally, from news organization to news organization, as they spread vertically *within* organizations. A critical mass of attention heaps up; then it 'cannot be ignored'" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 100).

The constraining yet flexible social formations described by Foucault and Bourdieu run intermittently through the foreground and background of the following literature review of historiography on modern journalism and social science on news values, as well as the empirical

analysis of journalism textbooks in the chapters that follow. Two key questions guide this chapter's review:

1. Where did news values, and the autonomy to apply them, come from? How did they become part of journalistic discipline?

2. How have scholars defined and described news values through historical and socio-cultural research?

News Values in Historiography

There are few explicit or detailed references to news values in histories of the pre-20th century press. Most historians (e.g. Broersma, 2007; Dicken-Garcia, 1989; Kaplan, 2002; Mindich, 1998; Schudson, 1978; Stephens 2014) are more concerned with the concept of "objectivity," an abstraction that helps govern how the journalistic field defines and conducts itself against other fields such as politics, whereas news values are more of an intra-field concern. One argument of this dissertation, however, is that news values play as big a role in daily journalistic decisions as the discipline of objectivity, and they deserve more scholarly attention.

While news values – meaning categorized story selection criteria as defined in the introduction – may have been vaguely rendered before the 20th century, such value judgments were nonetheless entangled with journalistic choices of what to collect and print in the earliest days, and what to report and present in the modern era. For Stephens (1988), the desire for news – delivered orally, in print, electronically, or otherwise – is intrinsic to human nature. Stephens argues that news values recorded in modern journalism textbooks – "impact, emotional appeal, conflict, timeliness, proximity, prominence and the unusual" (p. 32) – are evident even in anthropological studies of oral news sharing among pre-literate societies from the 19th century.

The choices made in determining what news to share, extending social awareness beyond what people can directly observe, are therefore central to the meaning of journalism and as significant as more venerated and analyzed concepts such as ethics. Craft (2017), following Waisbord (2013), argues for instance that the function of professionalism in journalism "is primarily aimed at controlling news – what counts as news, how it is gathered and distributed – and only tangentially aimed at the ethical principles that might pertain to how journalists go about creating and disseminating news. Put simply, *news values supersede ethical values*" (p. 265, emphasis added). If this is the case, news values warrant more explicit historical explication than they have, to date, received. This brief review of historiography of modern journalism, then, will highlight references to larger trends in journalistic content that hint at news values as they intertwined with changing government, economic, and social structures that helped shape journalistic judgment in each era.

Early English Newspapers

Implicit news values are evident even in histories of the earliest Western newspapers. In his *The Beginnings of the English Newspaper, 1620-1660,* Frank (1961) describes how early editors negotiated the vicissitudes of varyingly censorious and solicitous sovereign and Interregnum rule while feeling out the content desires of reading publics. Autonomy in these times was capricious and fleeting (Stephens, 1988, p. 144), not a right confidently asserted and vigorously defended. Content in early 17th century European newspapers was not characterized by reported stories gleaned from observation or interviews; it comprised "mostly collections of short, paragraph-length news items," letters, and tidbits picked up from other newspapers (Stephens, 2014, p. 2-3). News selection included an ebb and flow of government action and military maneuvers to accommodate the strictures of those in authority (e.g. Frank, 1961, p. 219;

Slauter, 2015), in addition to substantial foreign news and a wide assortment of crime and

human-interest stories. Commercial interests dominated, as "[f]rom the start most newspapers

were set up and maintained to make money" (Frank, 1961, p. 269). The early newspapers

competed with other printed forms, including political tracts and journalistic ballads artfully

describing sensational current events:

> Presumably … the newspaper reader of 330 years ago was not very different from his
> descendant today. The ballads hawked on the streets of London featured accounts of
> crime, violence, and magic … and these ballads, rather than the newsbooks of the period,
> were the true forerunners of modern yellow journalism. (Frank, 1961, p. 17)

For Stephens (1988), the nature of these single-story ballads and newsbooks helped shift

people's conceptions of news from spoken tales of everyday experiences among communities

and neighbors to the kinds of extreme occurrences that could attract mass audiences of the time:

> It might not always be necessary to advise a king, become a witch or commit a murder to
> make news, but it is necessary to do something out of the ordinary – even today, even by
> the standards of our most responsible news organs. And we will be repeatedly frustrated,
> or led into error, if we look to the often-freakish world of news for a reflection of the
> world most humans experience. (Stephens, 1988, p. 135).

But the news ballad, which lingered in England through the 1800s, "has an important place

historically as a device that made reading fascinating to the demos and encouraged the habit"

(Hughes 1981 [1940], p. 149). Such habit-building facilitated a transition to literate publics

equipped for broader civic participation:

> The newspaper printed not only the kind of reading matter they had enjoyed in the
> ballads, but it also brought them some news of public affairs, and as much about political
> issues as they would give their attention to. This is, in the end, an accompaniment of
> expanding democracy… (Hughes, 1981 [1940], p. 149)

While the earliest newspapers did not indulge in the same level of sensationalism as the

occasional ballads they had yet to replace, they sometimes did "compete with them by means of

juicy crime stories or detailed descriptions of an execution" (Frank, 1961, p. 17). Frank's account

includes many references both to crime stories and "human interest items, ranging from the weird and gory to the local and poignant" (p. 269). Among such stories was "the account of a girl who disguised herself as a soldier so she could stay near her lover" (p. 30), "two exciting pages on a London murder trial" (p. 81), "the anecdote of the postman who got so drunk he mistook Wales for Ireland" (p. 82), and the tale of a child killed by a bear (p. 245).

News presentation itself was often haphazard rather than values-based or rationalized, with one editor "fill[ing] his sixteen pages with items probably in the order in which they came to his desk or pocket, only being careful to eliminate anything offensive to the government" (p. 223). Rudimentary news values played a role in some choices, however, as the same editor "select[ed] foreign news with an eye to its relevance to England" (p. 226). Another editor "intermittently showed a nose for news that would qualify him to be a feature-writer on a tabloid" (p. 239). In making their content decisions, Frank argues, the period's editors and publishers

> made three assumptions about the public. One is that people were interested in news. Another is that they could be influenced by how that news was presented. A third … is that the dissemination of news was itself good. (p. 270)

Modern Journalism and the Journalistic Field

Western journalism in its modern sense took hold in the 19th century (Chalaby, 1998; Schudson, 1978; Stephens, 2014), as sovereign power gave way to nascent democratic systems and newspapers grew in size, speed, frequency, and circulation to serve burgeoning markets in fast-growing cities, where the spread of news by word of mouth ceased to be practical and the demand for information about recent events became more urgent. The *Oxford English Dictionary* locates the first connection between the term "journalism" and newspaper work in an English translation of a French article in the *Westminster Review* in 1833 (Stephens, 2014). This article

defined journalism as "the intercommunication of opinion and intelligence," with "intelligence"

acting as a synonym for *news* (Stephens, 2014, p. 31-32).

Before this time, according to Stephens, the modern idea of newspapers as a venue for

professional reporters to file observational accounts of local and global events did not exist.

Rather than reporting original information, 18th-century American newspapers, as exemplified

by James and Ben Franklin's *New-England Courant,* had been sites of opinions and ideas,

"unabashedly subjective arguments" (Stephens, 2014, p. 6) that provided the raw materials for

Habermas' (1991 [1962]) conception of the public sphere. American newspapers became

robustly political in the Revolutionary era, beginning with the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765

(Slauter, 2015). The post-Revolutionary era was characterized by partisan and party-attached

news organs that focused on public affairs (Adelman & Gardner, 2015; Hughes, 1981 [1940];

Stephens, 1988). Overall, at the turn of the 19th century, "discussions of the press reflected

perceptions that it existed to inform about and debate political issues" (Dicken-Garcia, 1989, p.

16).

The concept of news itself through the early 19th century was amorphous at best and

disconnected from the interests of the average citizen still used to sharing local gossip in social

settings. Content decisions in American colonial newspapers left researcher Stephen Botein

(1975) "bewildered as to what these papers were up to. Their contents seemed a miscellany, and

their assortment of news appeared to be far from anything that could possibly have been of

interest to the colonists" (Schudson, 1995, p. 45-46). Botein concluded that an economics-driven

desire to avoid controversy meant "the object in news selection was incoherence" (Schudson,

1995, p. 46). John and Silberstein-Loeb (2015) agree that "the paucity of local news in early

newspapers" was due to a reluctance to "ruffle feathers" and add that "routine coverage of local

political events was little sought-after, since readers could be expected to have already learned by word-of-mouth about events that occurred in their immediate vicinity" (p. 239).

Meanwhile, most reports in European papers during the pre-Revolutionary period concerned only the decontextualized activities of elite classes, indicating news values focused on "ships arriv[ing] in port, dignitaries arriv[ing] at court, share prices ris[ing] and fall[ing], generals … appointed and relieved of command" (Pettegree, 2014, p. 366). The nature of such reporting "must have been completely baffling" (p. 364) to readers unaccustomed to a daily parade of official affairs and more used to buying only the occasional news pamphlet "filled with disasters, weather catastrophes, heavenly apparitions, strange beasts, battles won, shocking crimes discovered and punished" (Pettegree, 2014, p. 365). "Now with the newspapers they were offered an undigested and unexplained miscellany of things that scarcely seemed to concern them at all" (Pettegree, 2014, p. 365).

Content became more routinized as the 18th century matured, and colonial papers began to carry more news from the North American continent in addition to reprinting information from London. Reports included "discussions of crime, disease, religion, the role of women, and the danger of slave revolts and Indian raids" (Slauter, 2015, p. 38). As access and censorship rules relaxed in England, reportorial coverage of Parliament grew in significance (Slauter, 2015, Stephens, 1988). During this time, people grew more accustomed to the artificial periodicity imposed by regularly published news, so that, even as pamphlets and other printed matter remained in circulation, "by 1775 the newspaper had become the primary means of packaging news and selling it to customers" (Slauter, 2015, p. 19). This shift, along with the increasing urgency and ability to get news in front of people as quickly as possible, accelerated timeliness as a salient factor in publishers' news judgment (Stephens, 1988, p. 232).

Most scholars agree that in the U.S., the spread of capitalism and urbanization began a transition around the 1830s from politically controlled, opinion-centered, elite-oriented newspapers toward the practice of actively reporting and disseminating a wide range of facts through cheaper newspapers to more readers in a bigger hurry – a specialization which grew more complex and profitable through the 19th century. This shift was led by the "middle-class penny papers … spokesmen for egalitarian ideals in politics, economic life, and social life through their organization of sales, their solicitation of advertising, their emphasis on news, their catering to large audiences, [and] their decreasing concern with the editorial" (Schudson, 1978, p. 60). This era was also marked by bold assertions of journalistic autonomy, exemplified by penny paper pioneers such as James Gordon Bennett, who aggressively separated himself from partisan control, monied elites, and social violence born of ideology (Mindich, 1998). Chalaby (1998) frames the modernizing break as a distinction between pre-journalistic "publicists," who made public the public's business such as the shipping and military personnel cycles described by Pettegree (2014) above, and "journalists," who produce news for readers of profit-seeking organizations. Some old-style newspaper workers, such as Richard Grant White, lamented the turn, "dismissing it as 'almost purely mercantile and clerical'" and preferring "a journalism 'practiced by men who are wise and well informed' and who 'aspire' to the role of 'teacher and guide'" (Stephens, 2014, p. 37).

An early enforcer of the new, modern journalistic discipline was Whitelaw Reid (1837-1912), a venerated reporter and editor who wrote and spoke of contemporary journalistic values in the second half of the 19th century. Reid celebrated the capacity of modern newspapers to cram themselves "with yesterday's doings in all continents" (quoted in Stephens, 2014, p. 38) without substantial partisan inflection. Reid observed the emerging field of journalism as a big,

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professionalized business, one that "ceased to be the work of journeyman printers, of

propagandists, needy politicians, starveling lawyers, or adventurers" (quoted in Stephens, 2014,

p. 39). "Independent journalism" became the "watchword of the future profession" (quoted in

Stephens, 2014, p. 41).

Reid's characterizations of the coalescing relational states constituting new practices and

conceptions of the role of journalism resemble Bourdieu's concept of a journalistic *field,* whose

members become representatives of this set of practices when dealing with external social fields

while continually (re)defining these agreed-upon practices by exchanging various forms of

capital in their interactions with one another (Bourdieu, 2005). A young journalist might thus

assert her autonomy from a related field such as politics, but might also align her practices to

accord with expectations set by a prominent journalistic pioneer with immense symbolic and

cultural capital such as Reid. Chalaby uses Bourdieu's field theory to explain the emergence of

active journalistic reporting (as opposed to amorphous "publicizing") in Britain in the second

half of the 19th century, after the repeal of the knowledge tax allowed newspapers to be priced at

a penny, as they had been in the United States for a few decades. By the 1880s, "[j]ournalists

were thus becoming something of a separate class… Journalism had become a specialized realm

that those unassociated with the press would not otherwise know about" (Dicken-Garcia, 1989,

p. 230).

At least one scholar argues that signs of this self-organizing field began as early as the

18th century. Using newspaper prospectuses and statements of journalists from libel trials,

Dooley (1997) argues that autonomy from political influence "was not a slow steady progression

toward more independence; rather … there were periods of advances in legitimacy … and there

were periods of regressions of legitimacy" (p. 130-131). For instance, Dooley argues that

watchdog-style journalism, often portrayed as a product of the late 19th century, might have begun decades earlier: "While early nineteenth-century journalists often were subservient to politicians because of dependence on their economic and social largesse, many of them at the same time engaged in a very public, rhetorical battle with politicians" (p. 131). Other scholars, also bucking characterizations of a linear progression toward journalistic autonomy, suggest that even the rapid commercialization of news and accelerated decoupling from party organizations did not lead to de facto non-partisanship until near the turn of the 20th century. Many newspapers continued to express partisan favoritism right up to the Progressive era (Kaplan, 2002), when broader social forces transformed individuals' relationships with political parties (Schudson, 1995). In the U.S., the tenets of the modern journalistic field became codified in the early decades of the 20th century, as journalism schools launched, associations formed, and codes of ethics materialized (Stephens, 1988, p. 262-63).

Changing News Priorities

Much as opinion-focused newspapers transformed into "objective" news purveyors through the advent of efficient presses, cheap distribution, and the commodification of news to diverse audiences, newspeople's conceptions of what made news transformed as well. Glasser's (1984) distinction suggests that objectivity drives *how* journalists report, whereas news values drive *what* they report. Kaplan (2002) captures the dialectic between the emerging ethic of objectivity and the formulation of articulated news values in his discussion of the rise of objectivity in the Progressive Era: "Instead of the explicit macro-narratives of parties, the reporters' judgments rested upon a flexible array of taken-for-granted social norms and common-sense. The news thus became a fragmented mosaic of stories…" (p. 192).

Logistical and conceptual changes regarding newswork, such as attention to timeliness

and competition, helped bring about shared news values in the early 19th century, leading to

"'scoops,' news stealing, exchanges of insults, and interference with rivals' news distribution. ....

Other news values that were subsequently to emerge included prominence, proximity, and local

and human interest" (Dicken-Garcia, 1989, p. 25). The increasing influence and spreading

circulation of big-city papers drove smaller local outlets to specialize in community news

(Schudson, 1995, p. 44), helping to establish the value of proximity.

Expanding practices of reporting and storytelling in the mid-19th century still did not

include many of the news judgment elements considered conventional and inevitable today:

"[T]he nineteenth-century reporter was not obliged to summarize highlights in a lead, to

recognize the President as chief actor on the American political stage, to seek novelty, to quote

speeches he reported, or to identify the political significance of events he covered" (Schudson,

1995, p. 56). Likewise, Nerone writes:

> [A] quick tour of 19th-century news reveals a landscape quite foreign to the modern
> journalist. Reporters rarely exercised professional judgment, and routinely produced
> verbose and unfiltered accounts that moved from beginning to end, the way ordinary
> people tell stories. (Nerone, 2013, p. 449).

As late as the 1890s, news could be strewn haphazardly across front pages. The *New York Times*

featured a "crowded, chaotic makeup" (p. 11), prompting a well-known British travel writer to

complain about "'the impossibility of finding out what is the important news of the day'"

(Campbell, 2006, p. 12).

Nonetheless, new reporting norms began to emerge with technological changes and

expanding audiences in the second half of the 19th century. Conceptions of news drifted from the

early-century consensus that political activity was the primary topic of public interest to a set of

more populist criteria derived from perceptions of what would attract readers' attention. In England, for instance:

> [P]olitical facts came to be judged on the same criteria as other events and lost their priority over non-political matters. In the media in general, but most distinctly in the popular press, politics had to be as entertaining as cricket and football (Chalaby, 1998, p. 81-82).

The trend among British reporters, Chalaby argues, was away from politics and toward sports, society news, sensational items (including crime, disaster, violent conflicts, and celebrity news, among other categories) and human interest (p. 90). "[E]mphasis on the exceptional was the result of deliberate editorial decisions" (Chalaby, 1998, p. 99). Shaya (2004) observed similar spectacles in the French press during this same period: "We should not suppose that there is one recipe for the making of a mass public, but crime, catastrophe, and crowds figure largely among the ingredients" (p. 46). Reuters in 1883 "instructed its reporters to focus on all types of sensational disturbances '[i]n consequence of the increased attention paid by the press to disaster &c'" (Brennan, 2015).

Chalaby (1998, p. 149-152) argues that sensationalism was a relatively new phenomenon that coincided with increasingly competitive journalism in the late 19th century, disputing many arguments that sensationalized crime news was a staple of early-1800s newspapers, Frank's (1961) evidence that sensational content dates to English papers of the 1600s, and Stephens' assertion that "[s]ensationalism appears to be a technique or style that is rooted somehow in the nature of news" (Stephens, 1988, p. 2). Chalaby's distinction is that, while sensational events such as murders were publicized in earlier eras, they were not hyped or milked in these periods as part of a discursive strategy to lure readers from competitors. When that strategy took hold in the late 1800s, it began to cheapen the public benefits of journalism, pushing "journalists at best to reorganize, at worse to modify reality in line with their need to dramatize and emotionalize

facts and events" (Chalaby, 1998, p. 153). "As sensationalism incites journalists to locate their discourse on the emotional plane, it also inclines them to neglect other purposes of human communication such as the transmission of information or the sharing of knowledge" (Chalaby 1998, p 152-153).

Stephens (2014) takes a different view on how transformations in political economy and news values changed the nature of newspaper content. While Chalaby (1998) argues that news writing grew increasingly entertaining as the press in the late 19th century sought to diversify audiences – "One of the greatest fears of editors was to be told by the proprietor that the journal was boring and tedious" (p. 89) – Stephens complains that newspapers grew increasingly bland as professionalization and facticity overtook journalists' earlier roles as interpreters and provocateurs: "Newspaper writers were once known for their passion, their playfulness, their humor, their fancies, their hoaxes. But journalists had begun to view themselves not as wry observers, but as the most severe and hard-headed of realists" (Stephens, 2014, p. 47). Kaplan (2002) agrees with Stephens, arguing that once newspapers detached themselves from political organs, "[p]olitics no longer held pride of place in the daily columns, and journalism dispensed with the partisan passions that had imbued its narratives with excitement and drama" (p. 2).

Schudson's (1978) *Discovering the News* suggests that conflicting perspectives as to whether the news got more colorful or more straight-laced in the late 19th century are both appropriate. Schudson argues that two competing models of news judgment operated at the time, one favoring Chalaby's sensationalist characterization and the other Stephens' observation of responsible blandness. These were the models of journalism as entertainment, exemplified by the "yellow journalism" of papers owned by Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst; and of journalism as information, exemplified by Adolph Ochs' *New York Times*. "The *Times* wrote for

the rational person or the person whose life was orderly," Schudson writes. "It presented articles as useful knowledge, not as revelation. The *World* had a different feel to it; in tone and display it created the sense that everything was new, unusual, and unpredictable" (p. 119). These two news models duked it out in the 1890s, and by the early 20th century, the balance had tipped in favor of the *Times* (see Campbell, 2006)[5]. The early 1900s marked not the end of sensationalism but the beginning of its marginalization (Nerone, 2013); the emphasis on impartially reported and dispassionately delivered information dovetailed with professionalization and formal journalism education (Stephens, 1988).

The Governmentality of Modern Journalism

The historical literature, then, shows that modern journalistic practices, particularly in English and American contexts, sprouted and spread over the course of the 19th century in the context of urbanization, industrialization, communication technology, the commodification of information, the capitalization of media businesses, and the diminution of political party influence in public life. Amid these changes, newspapers began to seek the widest possible audiences for commercial reasons, prompting a turn from opinionated content that could repel disagreeing parties toward pursuit of facts in a nonpartisan and balanced fashion, and a turn in news judgment from substantive political matters toward showmanship, pageantry, human interest, crime, and disaster. As Broersma (2007) puts it, "*News value* instead of political bias became the basis of selection" (p. xv). As a result, coverage of politics in many instances retreated from substantive matters toward surface-level issues, pageantry, or "the political game itself" (Chalaby, 1998, p. 107). For instance, "[O]n 4 May 1896, the *Daily Mail* informed its

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[5] Campbell's book on the year 1897 adds a third model to the mix, arguing that Lincoln Steffens' "literary approach" at the *New York Commercial Advertiser* offered a competitive alternative to the sensational and rational paradigms.

readers that half-a-dozen MPs came to Parliament by bicycle, but failed to tell them what was discussed in the Houses that day" (Chalaby, 1998, p. 108).

Standards of the field that took hold in the mid-19th century U.S., Dicken-Garcia (1989) writes, included an absolutist defense of the press's right to publish without state interference combined with a deep sense of responsibility and self-imposed limits, which we might call governmentality. Dicken-Garcia quotes Editor Melville Stone arguing that "in the conduct of so important an educational force as the daily newspaper, the editor was chargeable with a very high duty … – a duty *he could not escape*" (p. 206, emphasis added). Another editor told the Maine Press Association in 1876 that "there are limits of decent propriety and respect due to individual right and feeling, which every editor understands are not to be passed – and within which he is bound, by moral sense no less than by the strong motive of self-interest" (p. 207). Here we see indications of the apparent paradox of the emerging professional ethos in which journalists are simultaneously rendered free to do as they wish, yet compelled to adhere to certain responsibilities that are more implied than explicit. This places journalism, à la Foucault (1995 [1975]), amid the multitude of sites and functions of post-sovereign societies – armies, factories, schools, etc. – in which ontologically autonomous participants govern themselves according to disciplines of self- and perceived-other expectation. In the second half of the 19th century, Chalaby argues, this discipline was driven substantively by business concerns, but the social interplay of the field redistributes such external influences:

> [I]t is too crude an assumption to believe that the economy *directly* influences journalists' discursive production. … [T]he mediating instances between economy and discourse are the notions of field and of relations of production. … [T]he internal dynamic of the field deflects the influence market forces have upon journalists' discursive production. (Chalaby, 1998, p. 66).

The internal dynamic means that journalists' decisions, like those of most fields that regard themselves as professions, are highly dependent on and regulated by other journalists' decisions. As Bourdieu (2005) writes, "Part of what is produced in the world of journalism cannot be understood unless one conceptualizes this microcosm as such and endeavors to understand the effects that the people engaged in this microcosm exert on one another" (p. 33). Stephens (1988, 2014) illustrates with an inadvertent social experiment conducted by acclaimed turn-of-the century reporter Lincoln Steffens, who decided to report on a New York burglary that typically fell beneath journalistic radar and then observed as his competitors began covering similar burglaries, creating the impression of increasing crime.

Increasing professionalization and specialization resulted in the formation of a field requiring applied skill and knowledge, along with a set of principles and values that helped define and ultimately regulate individual behavior. Schudson (2005), weighing the relative autonomy of the journalistic field, notes that journalists "want to be able to proceed according to their own best lights and in the service of their own best 'news judgment'" (p. 218). As Glasser and Gunther (2005) put it, "Journalists like to think of themselves as loners and skeptics whose detachment and disinterestedness – even their irreverence – enable them to practice their craft without the entanglements that they and others might view as real or potential conflicts of interest" (p. 389). But Schudson complicates this ethos with a succinct use of Bourdieu's theory that helps explain why working journalists maintain that they *had* to cover Donald Trump so ubiquitously in 2015-16, contributing in no small degree to his electoral success:

> Of course, 'news judgment' is not 'their own' individually but their own as the collective construct of the journalistic field or the journalistic community. It is not codified. It is not fully coherent. … [J]ournalists all breathe the same air of their occupation and develop habits of judgment of great, sometimes stultifying uniformity. In this respect, when journalists collectively gain autonomy from state and market, they do not individually gain free expression." (Schudson, 2005, p. 218)

Lingering Modernity and the Potential for Change

Among the barriers to free expression is a concept that strikes at the heart of journalists' professional identity: objectivity. Entranced by this defining principle, most U.S. journalists continue to labor under the impression that news produces them (see Hall, 1981), rather than the other way around. As a consequence of the objective ethos, both Stephens (2014) and Mindich (1998) point out, the journalistic field clings to versions of positivism and realism that fields it grew up with have long since abandoned:

> It is no less than remarkable that years after consciousness was complicated by Freud, observation was problematized by Einstein, perspective was challenged by Picasso, writing was deconstructed by Derrida, and "objectivity" was abandoned by practically everyone outside newsrooms, "objectivity" is still the style of journalism that our newspaper articles and broadcast reports are written in, or against. (Mindich, 1998, p. 5)

Through the routines objectivity imposes (Tuchman, 1972), journalists scramble from deadline to deadline, making snap judgments based on the discipline of their news values that often decontextualize political news, eliding the "invisible structures [that] explain recent events" (Chalaby, 1998, p. 114). As jealous guardians of their autonomy, journalists have a tendency toward thin-skinned-ness, which can render them impervious to most kinds of criticism that might engender changes in practice (Mott, 1962) – *except* claims against their objectivity, which prompt defensive responses and pre-emptive disciplinary maneuvers.

Here Schudson suggests that a less autonomous journalistic field, one shaped and checked by adjacent fields of politics and publics, is better than a journalism that answers only to its insular, fundamentally conservative, self – because, he says, "Journalism has no systematic means for policing its own intellectual narrowness. Journalists collectively do very little to challenge their own governing assumptions" (Schudson, 2005, p. 219). Kaplan (2002) suggests, however, that journalists are overmatched when they submit to policing by external forces.

"Despite this appearance of formal autonomy … the media's selections and interpretations are not a matter of a free choice by the free press. The fourth estate of both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries … is quite weak and easily overpowered by rival political powers" (Kaplan, 2002, p. 3). These external powers can delegitimize newswork by holding journalists to their own impossible standards of perfect objectivity, and they can take advantage of the fact that journalism's very autonomy from licensing and regulation also renders absent any formal agenda-setting authority. Hence:

> [J]ournalism confronts rival public authorities and is unable to establish any technocratic justifications that would allow it to report the news free from external criticisms. … To ensure the acceptability of its news reports to both the mass public and elite alike, the media draw upon the norms of the broader political culture and accede to the views and voices of "legitimate" political representatives in the public arena. (Kaplan, 2002, p. 4)

But this apparent point of stasis is where Bourdieu, whose continually contested habitus contains the seeds of renewal, and Foucault, who sees power as fluid and perpetually up for grabs, allow for the possibility of change. Doxa can be challenged by moments of crisis that inspire heterodoxy: *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow's attempt, described in the introduction, to limit glorifying references to Donald Trump, or the *Huffington Post*'s recurring disclaimer on all pre-election posts about him, complete with exemplary links:

> *Editor's note: Donald Trump regularly incites political violence and is a serial liar, rampant xenophobe, racist, misogynist and birther who has repeatedly pledged to ban all Muslims — 1.6 billion members of an entire religion — from entering the U.S.* (e.g. Levine & Lavender, 2016)

Like these examples of heterodoxy, and compatible with Foucault's epistemology, Schudson's (1978) argument that two competing models of journalism co-existed during a period of upheaval in the late 1800s indicates that our conceptions of news are not natural, inevitable – or immutable. Schudson suggests that the conditions of that period, including the bustling and bewildering lives of working- and middle-class people confronting new urban experiences,

helped naturalize the freewheeling spirit of Pulitzer's *World*: "Life was a spectacle as never before for many, and the *World* spoke faithfully to that experience of the many, as the *Times* did for the more ordered experience of a smaller group" (p. 119). The fact that life grew less spectacular and more orderly for increasing numbers of Americans over the course of the 20th century can help explain the marginalization of the *World* model and the rising hegemony of the *Times*. It is reasonable to posit, then, that the dissolution of many forms of order in the 21st century – the September 11 attacks, the economic meltdown of 2008, the disruption of entire industries (news not the least of them) through the widespread adoption of smartphones and social media, and the collapse of normative democratic institutions in the election of 2016 and its aftermath – could produce new journalistic values and models. As Foucault (1982) said, "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" (p. 785).

But this is not a lesson taken up by most journalists in the most recent presidential election cycle or the beginning stages of a uniquely corrupt, incompetent, and malevolent administration. Rather, the nation's political journalists have largely adhered to the governmentality that prescribes and proscribes news judgment, guided by the disciplining concepts for assessing a potential story's worth we call news values. The following section summarizes how scholars have defined and characterized news values over roughly the past half-century, as a prelude to my empirical examination of how these values have been described in journalism textbooks since 1894.

News Values in Socio-Cultural Research

When contemporary scholars take up news values, they typically begin with Galtung and Ruge's (1965) "The Structure of Foreign News" from *The Journal of Peace Research*. While other scholars had toyed with identifying certain news values within larger research contexts –

Cohen (1963) identified conflict, the involvement of public figures, and the national interest among factors helping foreign correspondents determine what is newsworthy – Galtung and Ruge may have been the first researchers to explicitly and rigorously typologize news values as a project unto itself.[6] A Google Scholar search suggests their 1965 study was a sleeper for a couple of decades, but by the 1980s increasing numbers of scholars were using Galtung and Ruge's categories to test hypotheses regarding editorial judgment and audience behavior (Gunter, 1987) and to make arguments about the social and cultural implications of news selection (e.g. Schudson, 1989; Van Dijk, 1989). Citations have grown dramatically in the past two decades: 2,440 of Google Scholar's 3,470 references to Galtung and Ruge (1965) are from 2010 or later. In their book *The Discourse of News Values*, Bednarek and Caple (2017), while crediting Lippmann (1922) as "the first person to suggest attributes or conventions for the selection of news…," argue that Galtung and Ruge is "the most cited work" on the topic and that "[m]ost of the research since the 1960s has used their work as the starting point" (p. 27). Brighton and Foy's *News Values* (2007) calls Galtung and Ruge "ground-breaking research" and "the core text for the process" (p. 2). Harcup & O'Neill (2001) argue, "Galtung and Ruge's paper has long been regarded as *the* study of news values" (p. 264).

In their seminal study, Galtung and Ruge (1965) address "the general problem of factors influencing the flow of news from abroad" (p. 64). Their content analysis of four Norwegian newspapers' coverage of crises in the Congo, Cuba, and Cyprus seeks validation for a taxonomy of a dozen news decision criteria hypothesized by the authors. Galtung and Ruge conceive their news factors through the metaphor of broadcast transmissions, suggesting that journalists attune

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[6] As the findings of this dissertation show, a good deal of thoughtful discussion of news values, their nuances, and their implications had already appeared in U.S. journalism textbooks by the time of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) explication. Cotter's (2010) is among the rare studies that draw substantially on the richness of textbook news values literature.

to particular types of frequencies when separating the signals of news from the noise of global events. The authors enumerate eight non-culturally-dependent values:

- Frequency, or how closely the event's occurrence(s) aligns with the frequency of the medium's publication
- Threshold, or whether the event is momentous enough to attract interest
- Unambiguity, or whether the event is easy to describe and explain
- Meaningfulness, or cultural proximity and relevance – how accessible the event is to the audience's understanding
- Consonance, or how well the event lines up with expectations
- Unexpectedness, or something that is meaningful and consonant, yet unusual or rare
- Continuity, or the staying power of a news story once identified as such
- Composition, or how well a given story fits with a complete news report

To these criteria, Galtung and Ruge add four values they consider particularly noteworthy in Western news culture. These values include reference to:

- Elite nations
- Elite people
- Persons – that is, specific individuals – as opposed to abstractions
- Something negative

Galtung and Ruge (1965) then posit how such criteria drive decisions through the news production process. They argue, first, that the more of these criteria are inherent in a given event, the more likely it is to be newsworthy – a principle of selection; second, that the more newsworthy aspects of a given event will be emphasized in reporting – a principle of distortion;

and third, that these selection and distortion processes will be repeated at every stage at which the news is passed from reporter to editor, from editor to reader – a principle of replication.

Applying their values and propositions to their newspaper sample, Galtung and Ruge (1965) draw several compelling conclusions. Among them are findings that for an event in distant or less prominent nations to become newsworthy, it will need to be sudden, unambiguous, negative, and fit into previous patterns of expectation. Likewise, for less prominent or less socially valued *individuals* to make news, their actions must typically be negative and unexpected, which means the easiest way for them to appear in the news is by committing a crime, "whereas elite people can have their day-to-day routine reported" (p. 83). These models of judgment criteria regarding individuals and nations imply a set of biases that result in simplification of complex situations and preservation of the global and social status quo. For individuals, "this may easily be a kind of reinforcement of class society in the sense that … the lower layers of society are portrayed as producers of less fortunate events" (p. 83). For nations, "The thesis is that positive things that happen in the underdog countries will go under-reported and this will promote an image of those countries as being unable to govern themselves" (p. 83).

Much recent scholarly news values research has involved revisiting Galtung and Ruge's categories through new content analyses accounting for the contemporary news environment, which typically involves rearranging or renaming bits of their original twelve criteria, dropping some, and adding others. Harcup and O'Neill (2001), for instance, studied newspapers in the United Kingdom and came up with: power elite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow-ups, and the media agenda. Brighton and Foy (2007) cite Harcup and O'Neill's list and then present their own: relevance, topicality, composition, expectation, unusualness, worth, and external influences. Harcup and O'Neill return in 2017, cite

Brighton and Foy's list, and revisit their own 2001 lineup with a new content analysis that

incorporates social media in the sample. To their existing (2001) news values, Harcup and

O'Neill (2017) add: audio-visuals, conflict, drama, exclusivity, and shareability.

> Bednarek and Caple suggest these back-and-forth efforts have not been terribly fruitful:

> Most researchers … do not fully justify why the need to propose new lists has arisen, nor do they explain how the new lists differ significantly from the old ones or why a particular label was chosen. In fact, many lists, including Brighton and Foy's 'new' ... and Harcup and O'Neill's 'contemporary' ... news values still demonstrate considerable overlap with traditional news values. (Bednarek & Caple, 2017, p. 34)

Somewhat ironically, Bednarek and Caple then go on to compile their *own* list of news values.

Saying they "do not want to reinvent the wheel," they "only include those news values where

there is some overlap in news values research overall" (p. 53). The authors choose consonance,

eliteness, impact, negativity, personalization, positivity, proximity, superlativeness, timeliness,

and unexpectedness.

Bednarek and Caple (2017) also make a helpful distinction, which is maintained

throughout this dissertation, among several ways of conceiving news values. Outside the field

(such as when I describe my research to non-journalism scholars), the term "news values" is

often inferred as a reference to ethics, or the moral values journalists bring to their work, which

might include concepts like balance and objectivity. Bednarek and Caple note that certain

scholars, such as Bell (1991), also tend to conflate different species of news decisions. For

clarity, Bednarek and Caple categorize these different species as (1) "news writing objectives"

(clarity, accuracy, conciseness); (2) "news selection factors" (the range of influences that play

into news judgments, such as political economy, audience demand, staff availability); and (3)

"news values," the story selection criteria based on journalists' perceived characteristics of

people and events (Bednarek & Caple, 2017, p. 41-42). Like Bednarek and Caple, this

dissertation focuses on the third concept when discussing news values, as defined in the introduction and elsewhere.

Gans' Cultural News Values

One well-cited (e.g. Brighton & Foy, 2007; Cotter, 2010; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001) conception of news values that does not rely substantially on Galtung and Ruge is Gans' (1980) ethnographically derived examination of news values in his seminal book, *Deciding What's News*. Similar to Bell's (1991) approach critiqued by Bednarek and Caple (2017), Gans, under the umbrella of story "suitability considerations," creates three categories journalists use to assess a story's relative worth: "*substantive considerations* judge story content and the newsworthiness of what sources supply; *product considerations* evaluate the 'goodness' of stories; and *competitive considerations* test stories for their ability to serve in the continuing rivalry among news organizations" (Gans, 1980, p. 146, emphasis added). Gans' list of substantive considerations for domestic stories (which most closely parallel *news values* as discussed in this dissertation) includes story importance, which is determined by the official or social rank of key sources; the story's presumed impact on the country; the breadth of impact on ordinary people; and its "significance for the past and future" (p. 152). The second main criterion for substantive news judgment considerations is whether the story is interesting, with conceptually overlapping sub-categories for "people stories," "role reversals," "human-interest stories," "expose anecdotes," "hero stories," and "gee-whiz stories" (p. 156).

Perhaps more interesting than these categories that roughly correspond to commonly identified news values is Gans' examination of what he calls American journalism's "enduring values," which he believes to be rooted in the reformist Progressive era, "concurrent with the era of the muckrakers … among them Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, and their editor, S.S. McClure"

(Gans, 1980, p. 204). These enduring values drive news judgment in the U.S. through the

implicit, longstanding beliefs of journalists and their sources. Gans identifies such values as

ethnocentrism, which could be likened to the concept of American exceptionalism (see Parks, in

press-a); *altruistic democracy,* in which politics is portrayed as a contest whose participants

"should be scrupulously honest, efficient, and dedicated to acting in the public interest" (p. 43);

responsible capitalism, favoring honest business competition, support for "the deserving poor"

(p. 47), and aversion to socialist arguments; *small-town pastoralism*, or the idea that virtue lies in

"intimate social relationships and [a] sense of community" (p. 48); *individualism,* recognizing

self-dependence*; moratism,* to counteract renegade individualism; *moral and social order*; and

authoritative *leadership*. These values are rarely explicitly invoked by journalists, but rather

implied through the selection and ordering of information:

> If a news story deals with activities which are generally considered undesirable and
> whose descriptions contain negative connotations, then the story implicitly expresses a
> value about what is desirable. … [I]t reminds the audience of values that are being
> violated and assumes that the audience shares these values. When a story reports that a
> politician has been charged with corruption, it suggests, *sotto voce*, that corruption is bad
> and that politicians should be honest. (Gans, 1980, p. 40)

It is in this discussion of enduring news values that Gans, without invoking his French

contemporaries Bourdieu and Foucault, nonetheless overlaps their perspectives on how social

and cultural conditions help tailor journalists' views of what is and is not legitimate news. For

instance, Gans argues:

> Journalists do apply news judgment, both as members of a profession and as individuals,
> but they are by no means totally free agents, and in any case, they rarely make selection
> decisions on overtly ideological grounds; rather, they work within organizations which
> provide them with only a limited amount of leeway in selection decisions, which is
> further reduced by their allegiance to professionally shared values. (Gans, 1980, p. 79)

Gans' use of the term "enduring" to describe his derived values, however, marks a key

difference between his perspective and Foucault and Bourdieu's, who would see such values as

continually shifting and contested based on the social context of the moment. 2016 was a terrific demonstration of the fragility of "enduring" values. Gans, for instance, writes that "[t]he foremost leader in America is the president, who is viewed as the ultimate protector of order" and who, "[t]hrough his own behavior and the concern he shows for the behavior of others … becomes the nation's moral leader" (p. 63). Gans also identifies deviant political behaviors presumed to disqualify certain actors from favorable coverage: "Financial corruption is always news, as is nepotism, patronage appointments, logrolling, and 'deals' in general" (p. 43). And, Gans writes of journalists' "shared antipathy to … demagogues, particularly of populist bent" (p. 69). But Trump's demagogic, populist candidacy and presidency are rooted in the overt corrupting of public institutions for private gain; Trump's inner circle is populated by his children and in-laws; and his favorite term-of-art for problem-solving is the crafting of "deals." Journalists may have begun their coverage of Trump's presidential campaign with an eye toward watchdogging his behavior against the principles of altruistic democracy, only to find that most Americans were unmoved: The "enduring" values could not withstand public indifference to those values. Gans allows for this possibility with a foreboding hypothetical: "[I]f a large segment of the audience moved far to the right, and if a crisis spawned a widespread demand for totalitarian leadership in Washington, journalists would be under strong pressure to relinquish their belief in altruistic democracy" (p. 290). This claim echoes Frothingham's (1884) argument, quoted above, that journalists must "be careful how they run counter to the tide" when the multitudes come unglued (Dicken-Garcia, 1989, p. 209).

Fledgling Reconceptions

Technological change such as the spread of social media over the past decade has prompted a more expansive view of news values among a handful of scholars. In her book

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Affective Publics, Zizi Papacharissi (2015) begins her discussion of news values with both

Galtung and Ruge (1965) and Gans (1980), but she draws most directly from Hartley (1982),

whose argument she summarizes as claiming that "news values are ever-evolving and are about

news *stories* and not news events themselves" (p. 39). Papacharissi approves of the "more fluid"

values enumerated by Hartley. These include many familiar concepts: "recent, sudden,

unambiguous, predictable, relevant, and close … conflict or human interest … elite nations …

elite people …" but also the argument that "[n]ews values often appeal to dominant ideologies

and discourses. What is cultural and/or historical will be presented as natural and consensual"

(Papacharissi, 2015, p. 39). This approach suggests "enduring values" can shift with cultural and

ideological winds, a possibility Gans noted in passing above but did not emphasize in his work.

But "fluid" news values are no less constraining. They "form a code which sees the world in a

very particular (even peculiar) way" (Hartley, 1982, p. 80). Hartley quotes a woman journalist

pointing out the limits of a news taxonomy that was "developed, of course, by white, middle-

class men, generation upon generation of them, forming opinions, imposing them, learning them

and passing them on as Holy Writ" (Hartley, 1982, p. 80; quoting Coote, 1981, p. 11).

Papacharissi's (2015) own study of Twitter coverage of the 2011 Egyptian uprising,

which included interaction between journalists and publics, found that tweets tended to contain

traditionally enumerated news values, both in their focus on scale, proximity, and timeliness and

in their reflection of Gans' enduring values. But Papacharissi also found four news values at play

that reflect the affordances of the interactive and immanent medium: "instantaneity, the

crowdsourcing of elites, solidarity, and ambience" (p. 44). Crowdsourcing involved retweeting,

and therefore amplifying, the messages both of elite media and of emergent actors within the

uprising, who were "more openly emotive" in contrast to traditional journalists. The interaction

of these two types of elites and the non-elites who distributed their messages amounted to what Papacharissi calls "*networked gatekeeping*" (p. 48). Journalists have struggled with the erosion of their exclusive gatekeeping authority in the digital era, but many had already begun cracking open the gates in the 1990s as part of the "public journalism" movement, which ceded some news judgment to willing citizens in pursuit of broader civic engagement (Glasser & Craft, 1998). That movement was superseded by the immanence and accessibility of social media. For her fourth emergent news value, Papacharissi argues that ambience produced through the "always-on" social media atmosphere, exemplified by constant tweeting and retweeting of events in Egypt, constitutes a news value because "it influenced the structure and texture of news content produced" (p. 52).

Such identification of unorthodox news values surfaced by newly interactive media suggests the possibility of more spontaneous and agile conceptions of news than are afforded by the relatively stable lists of values described in most earlier research. And the ultimate mutability of news values – the fact that despite their relative stability, certain values nevertheless come and go with the whims of taxonomizers – is a reminder that these criteria are not naturally occurring but rather subject to daily construction. Gitlin (1980) notes that "criteria for newsworthiness that refer to 'effect,' 'interest,' 'readership,' or even man-biting dogs are all *serviceably* vague: they permit the news organizations both flexibility and stability" (p. 101, emphasis in original). This flexibility prompts Glasser (1984, n.p.) to argue, "[W]e are not going to be able to hold journalists accountable for the consequences of their actions until they acknowledge that news is their creation, a creation for which they are fully responsible."

The question remains as to how most journalists become so committed to naturalized conceptions of news, both spoken and unspoken, that in rationalizing their decisions they draw

only on news values' stability, rejecting their role as creators and the freedom such a role affords.

As Cohen and Young put it in the introduction to their edited book *The Manufacture of News*:

> [T]he picture that emerges of the selection process is one in which the newsman actively squeezes events into categories suitable for the smooth running of the media bureaucracy as well as ideologically significant in upholding a particular world view. Among the many lines of analysis which are as yet indistinct and conjectural is the socialization of the journalist into this mode of operation. How does he learn the correct methods of analysis? (Cohen & Young, 1973, p. 20.)

The remainder of this dissertation seeks a partial answer to the question of how the discourses of news values help form the criteria and rationalizations available to journalists regarding what can or cannot be news. For many contemporary journalists, this discursive process begins with college training, in which they are introduced to news values through professors, textbooks, internship supervisors, and certain peers possessing substantial symbolic and cultural capital in the journalistic field. In the following chapters, I will examine in detail how textbooks, both reflecting and reifying the habitus of professional practice, construct news values and thereby help represent and shape what it is possible to think about journalism.

CHAPTER 3
NEWS VALUES IN JOURNALISM TEXTBOOKS

In Chapter 2, I reviewed how historians and social scientists have conceptualized and described news values as they manifested in early English newspapers, through the 19th and 20th centuries, and into the present day. In this chapter, I begin my primary analysis by showing how fundamental news values were enumerated, interpreted and deployed in 75 journalism textbooks spanning from 1894 to 2016. I also establish the research questions and methods that guide the analysis through the subsequent four chapters. Reading the texts through the lens of Foucault's concept of discipline and Bourdieu's habitus and fields, I demonstrate connections between the criteria for judging news and the positioning of reporters as professionals who, despite their relative autonomy to exercise creativity and judgment, nevertheless enact socio-cultural constructions that define which stories *must* be covered and *can't* be ignored. Such an exploration helps us understand one way professional journalists are enculturated to conceive news – first as students, then as practitioners – and internalize their perceived obligations to subvert their personal news judgment to the prevailing sentiment of their peers.

Textbook Literature

Harcup and O'Neill (2017) suggest that academics such as Galtung and Ruge (1965) have had to construct formulations of news values from scratch, because news workers tend to retreat to common sense when broached on the subject: "Definitions relying on such 'gut feeling' (Schultz 2007) arguably obscure as much as they reveal about news selection, prompting academics to offer their own explanations, which can involve devising taxonomies of news values" (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017, p. 1470). Zelizer (2017) writes that "Journalists are notorious for knowing what news is but not being able to explain it to others" (p. 12). But many scholars have paid insufficient attention to the massive body of literature on news judgment emerging

from within the profession — particularly the dozens of textbooks that have taxonomized news values for apprentice and student journalists since the early 20th century.

As discussed in Chapter 2, studies such as Galtung and Ruge (1965) attempt to derive news values by analyzing both news content and news ecosystems, conflating qualities perceived to be inherent in news events with social and commercial pressures faced by news organizations (Bednarek & Caple, 2017). Such an approach leads to the identification of many factors that may play a role in story selection and news judgment but which do not represent journalists' articulated understanding of their individual freedoms and obligations – the specific toolbox of rationalizations they draw upon to explain what makes a story. This chapter focuses on criteria for judging the relative newsworthiness of people and events as explicitly synthesized by, and taught to beginning journalists through, textbooks: the language they are given to justify their choices to themselves, to one another, and to audiences. Vos (2011), in a similarly conceived study, examined "how the rhetoric of key journalism texts cast the practices and ideas of objectivity as normative" (p. 436). In this chapter I do the same for the practices and ideas of news judgment. Mirando (1992) took a similar approach in examining how textbooks defined news through 1987, but his discussion of news values catalogs every discrete news judgment term, suggesting a lack of consensus and obscuring the simplicity and universality of the handful of values that have been evident for well over a century. The focus of my analysis is on how these most widely recognized values are identified, defined, exemplified, and used to construct reporters' sense of news possibilities from the earliest stages of their apprenticeship.

Textbooks open an illustrative window into the values of a profession (Hardin & Preston, 2001). Lang (2013), following Kuhn, notes that scientific paradigms will be found "in our textbooks" (p. 12), which "do not accurately reflect the history of our field, but rather reflect

history from the perspective of the [contemporary] paradigm" (p. 12). Similarly, Vos (2011) writes, "textbooks and other primers establish orthodoxy in a field. Hence, textbooks are uniquely suited to establish occupational norms" (p. 437). In journalism specifically, "Textbooks are, and have been, the primary normative texts for training journalists" (Mari, 2015, p. 687) in matters such as news judgment. The values expressed in textbooks "reflect part of an enduring professional ethos that has survived down into our present moment" (Mari, 2015, p. 687). For Cotter (2010), "To start with textbook definitions is to start with what practitioners and experts in the field have distilled, as well as to understand student reporters' first exposure to the foundational, practice-specific values of the journalist in-group to which they are seeking membership" (p. 68).

Perhaps the most extensive scholarship on journalism textbooks is Mirando's (1992) dissertation in which he interpreted the content of 254 volumes published between 1867 and 1987 across four main themes: (1) definitions of news and newsworthiness, (2) "the image of journalism," (3) ethics, and (4) reporting and writing practices. The first theme, on news and newsworthiness, addresses news values, particularly their enumeration across volumes. "The concept of news is elusive," Mirando writes. "News involves information, but little sense of exactness exists when journalists make decisions on what is news and what is not news" (p. 98). Mirando, through Mott (1962), maps the development of news values beginning with the emergence of the penny press in the 1830s and the resulting mass markets for news, which encouraged sensational reports and human-interest stories. "In this way," Mirando writes, "the definition of news grew to include such qualities as prominence, proximity, magnitude, impact, oddity, and conflict" (p. 100). Without citation or explanation, Mirando in this passage both asserts and accepts a half-dozen concepts as the principal news values worth enumerating in

shorthand, even though he will go on to systematically uncover 125 discrete terms that various textbooks use to define news. Mirando does not explain why he chose to name as exemplary this particular handful of terms from the legion of "arbitrary" (p. 120) terms he painstakingly lists, but as we will see below, they clearly parallel the values most commonly identified by textbook authors. My explanation is that Mirando was likely subject to the same common sense by which most people immersed in the news business default to these longstanding, consensus terms for explaining and justifying news decisions (e.g. Miller & Riechert, 2000, p. 48).

Mirando (1992) distills textbook definitions of news into five categories. News is information that is: (1) attractive to audiences, (2) accurate, (3) unexpected, (4) profitable, and (5) ultimately subject to contextual judgment. Textbook authors explained contextual judgment "by offering descriptions of factors that created news, which were called news values, essentials, qualities, or elements" (p. 119) – all phrases that different authors assigned to the same concept. Mirando lists 125 news values, ranging alphabetically from "achievement" to "what provokes thought." Among the values listed is "emotions," and among the emotions listed is "sadness," but not its arguable opposite, happiness.

Mirando notes that Eberhard's (1982) study of textbooks from the 1970s and early '80s concludes there was "limited agreement on what are the basic news values" (Mirando, 1992, p. 119). Eberhard found 43 distinct terms listed in a convenience sample of 14 texts. But Mirando also agrees with Eberhard that "timeliness, proximity, and prominence" appear to be the most consistently referenced values. Eberhard identifies six terms included in at least half the books he examined: "timeliness, proximity or nearness, prominence or eminence, human interest, conflict, and consequence or probable consequence" (Eberhard, 1982, p. 10). Substituting the more contemporary term "impact" for consequence, we see that Eberhard's list tends to match those

same values that are typically mentioned in offhand references to news criteria. So although scholars have found manifold terms representing multiple news values, closer analysis indicates there is more general agreement on a handful of go-to values than Mirando and Eberhard suggest. Other scholars, such as Cotter (2010), argue that "textbook authors give nearly identical lists of characteristics when defining what news is" (p. 68). Cotter, deriving a list from a convenience sample of textbooks from the 1990s and 2000s, concludes news is "unusual, timely, local or nearby, surprising, about change, conflict and people, has impact, evokes human interest, and conveys information" (p. 68). Bednarek and Caple (2017) also find "overlap" between news values identified by different researchers, with "[t]he main differences occur[ring] in the naming/labeling," rather than the conceptual nature, of the consensus values.

Eberhard (1982) makes a significant point in observing "a large void" among textbooks in explaining the provenance of the authors' criterion terms for defining news: "The list of words seem to have emerged from journalistic folklore and experience" (p. 11). So although journalists are convinced that a set of naturally imperative, carefully derived values prescribes and circumscribes their appropriate activities, news values in fact have been passed as cultural history among generations and might therefore be regarded as constituents of a professional ethos rather than a set of core or fundamental mandates. The analysis below will detail how textbooks facilitate this transfer through appeals to discipline and habitus, concepts introduced in Chapter 2 that will inform my reading of these texts.

Recent studies of journalism textbooks have focused on objectivity (Mirando, 2001; Schudson, 2001; Vos, 2011), treatment of disability issues (Hardin & Preston, 2001), ideological homogeneity among texts (Brennan, 2000), ethical theory (Peck, 2003), treatment of the public sphere in media convergence texts (Gilmour & Quanbeck, 2010), journalism's public service

orientation (Mari, 2015), and separation between business and editorial operations (Mari, 2014).

Contrary to Mirando (1992) and Eberhard's (1982) suggestion that conceptualizations of news

vary among textbook authors, Brennen (2000) argues that across late 20th-century texts, "there is

a considerable amount of overlapping information … and all of them address the practice of

journalism from an identical ideological perspective that neglects to consider all the changes in

journalism that have occurred over time" (p. 106). Likewise, Mari (2015) argues that a near

century's worth of texts "show how an essential ethos of professionalism, including a strong

sense of public service, survived into the 1960s and 1970s" (p. 698). Gilmour and Quanbeck

(2010) argue that 21st century texts focusing on media convergence tend to present more

instrumental and less public-service oriented arguments than earlier volumes.

Of some interest for this dissertation's concern with affect in news values is Hopper and

Huxford's (2017) study of the treatment of emotional labor in contemporary journalism texts.

Hopper and Huxford argue that emotion – its suppression in reporting and its exploitation in

writing and presentation – plays a significant role in journalistic practice but gets little attention

in textbooks. Their findings do, however, suggest that emotion appears with news values related

to the concept of "human interest," generally a catchall for soft feature stories that tend to tug on

the heartstrings without spilling over into significant, relevant news of the day. Overall, Hopper

and Huxford's argument supports a major premise of this project, illustrated in Chapter 4, that

journalism as a field systematically brackets key elements of human experience in the interest of

"professionalism."

The analysis in the following chapters, guided by the socio-historical explorations from

Chapter 2, details how journalism textbooks spanning more than a century have used news

values to define what makes a news story and to (re)produce a habitus of appropriate practice

around enacting these values in professional journalism. As I explained in Chapter 1, while there have been many contemporary snapshot studies of news values, few have taken a longitudinal or historical view of how such values have been defined and rhetorically deployed over time. Similarly, news values typically appear in scholarly studies as typologies that inform content or framing analyses – that is, they tend to be a means to a different analytical end. My focus is on how news values themselves contribute to the construction of subject positions for journalists that help explain both individual journalistic judgments and collective cultural practices that make varying news decisions easy, challenging, or nearly impossible to defend. While this study will build on Mirando's (1992) exploration of textbook news definitions, the goal is not to replicate his exhaustive survey of journalism texts, which have only increased in number since his sample ended in 1987, but rather to map the predominant features of the professional ethos of newsworthiness through some of the most widely used textbooks across the history of American journalism education.

My analysis will be guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How have journalism textbooks implicitly or explicitly defined and enumerated news values since the turn of the 20th century?

RQ2: To what extent have implicit and explicit news values changed over time? What are the implications for news content?

RQ3: What do journalism textbooks suggest about how reporters and editors have been enculturated into assessing the relative worth of potential stories?

RQ4: To what extent and in what way(s) do textbooks' news values descriptions acknowledge affective dimensions of human experience, in addition to emphasizing the reporting of facts?

RQ5: In what ways do textbooks indicate that reporters are autonomous professionals who exercise independent judgment in selecting and presenting news?

RQ6: In what ways do textbooks help construct journalistic identities through which reporters bind themselves to the norms and expectations of their peers and critics, thus subsuming their professed autonomy to perceived constraints that determine what they *must* and *can't* do?

These questions illuminate where and how I directed my attention as I read and interpreted the texts, and they helped inform the structure of the analysis chapters. The answers are complex, interrelated, and cumulatively constructed across chapters over the course of the following analysis. I revisit the questions briefly in the concluding chapter, en route to offering an approach to news values that might help journalists unburden themselves from the disciplinary load these questions contain.

Methods

This dissertation is a work of *qualitative* research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I use the term in its broadest sense, to mean *not quantitative*, in that this work eschews efforts at counting and statistical modeling to attempt a numerical generation of replicable reality – although I do offer one frequency-based visualization of aggregated news-value occurrences later in this chapter. My research here is *historical*, in that it draws on a substantial archive to tell stories about continuity and change in the journalistic field through the content of instructional textbooks (see Brennen & Hardt, 2011). It is *critical*, in that it surfaces and challenges certain practices and assumptions that are taken as common-sense and are therefore typically overlooked mechanisms of social behavior (see Richardson, 2007). It is *constructivist* (see Berger & Luckman, 1966) as contrasted with *positivist*, in that it does not seek to identify some underlying

objective reality but rather builds a subjective reality using artifacts of other constructed realities as raw materials. If you don't like my constructions, you are welcome to develop better ones. In the concluding chapter, I turn to a *non-representational* approach (see Thrift, 2008, Vannini, 2015), an immanent and affective presentation of experience that is not past-dwelling but forward-looking and future-generating. A limit of qualitative, constructivist, non-representational research is that we cannot presume to make universal, eternal truth claims or predict precisely what will happen next based on computational formulas. But an advantage is that such approaches invite a deep, rich connection with data (see Geertz, 1973) and an opportunity to make unpredictable connections that can activate latent light bulbs in human heads.

Drawing on these qualitative, historical, critical, and constructivist tools of thinking and questioning, the present chapter, and Chapters 4 through 7, compose an interpretive analysis in which I apply the social theory of Foucault and Bourdieu to both historical and contemporary journalism textbooks to map how conceptions of newsworthiness discipline journalists to think of news, and the options available for presenting news, in particular ways. In the following sections I describe my method of selecting texts to analyze and how I performed the analysis. This chapter concludes with the findings from the first, basic question: How have journalism textbooks defined and enumerated news values since the turn of the 20th century?

Sample

To select textbooks to examine for this study, I adapted a mix of practical sampling techniques applied by scholars who have studied journalism texts across several time periods. This multifaceted approach afforded a sizeable, representative, and manageable sample of the most influential books spanning nearly 125 years. To select texts from the late 19th and early 20th century, I adopted Vos' (2011) list of relevant texts from his study of objectivity in early

textbooks. Vos started with Mirando's (1992) exhaustive pre-1990 list and derived a purposive

sample of texts "that made it into at least a second edition or are mentioned in previous studies"

(p. 438), including Mirando (2001), Sloan (1990), and Sutton (1968). Of the 20 historical

textbooks listed in Vos' references, the earliest is from 1894 and the latest is 1937. These texts

span the period during which Vos argues the concept of objectivity emerged and congealed. To

select texts from 1940 through the 1980s, I scanned Mirando's (1992) reference list, which is

organized by decade, and highlighted texts that had been reprinted or gone into second and

subsequent editions. The focus on multiple-edition texts follows Vos' (2011) logic that such texts

would have been the most popular for instilling a professional ethos in journalism students and

the most influential for subsequent professional practice.[7] For contemporary texts, those

published after the completion of Mirando's (1992) dissertation, I adopted a list of 18 titles

derived by Hopper and Huxford (2017), who followed Huxford and Moore (2011) in seeking

recommendations of popularly adopted journalism textbooks from 10 major publishers.

Altogether, this sampling method resulted in 104 volumes spanning 66 titles, which I

then sought through library and database searches, interlibrary loans, and used book purchases

through online retailers. I gathered multiple editions for many of the most popular and longest-

running texts (e.g. Charnley, Fedler et al., Hohenberg, MacDougall, Mencher), to examine

whether and how the articulation of news values by the same authors had changed over time. I

collected and read books based on availability until I reached saturation for each major period. It

is possible that any additional text may have contributed a new or slightly altered term for a

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[7] Nearly every text was explicitly written for apprentice journalists or journalism students. Exceptions include
Byxbee (1901), whose aim was to introduce the field to publishing entrepreneurs; Flesch (1949), which Mirando
(1992) included in his sample for its sweeping mid-century influence on how journalism educators assessed the
quality of news writing; and two editions of a *New York Times* (1941, 1949) guide apparently intended for general
media literacy and public relations branding.

particular news value, but there is no evidence or apparent reason to believe that reading more

books would alter the substantial agreement among the body of influential texts as to the

fundamental categories driving news selection. The final total of individual books I examined

was 75 texts across 55 titles[8] by 50 different first authors.

Annotation and Analysis

I examined the textbooks in roughly chronological order, to develop a narrative of

emerging, shifting, or consolidating news values. However, in cases of multiple editions, such as

MacDougall's *Interpretative Reporting,* which stretched from the 1930s to the 1980s, I read

through the full available collection to detect subtle changes between volumes and get an

accelerated view of disruptions in the field. Between these two tactics, I was able to track

developments decade by decade while gaining insights into longitudinal change from multiple-

edition authors. I entered basic publishing data and observations for each volume into a

spreadsheet to keep track of enumerated and implied news values. To make sure the most

commonly enumerated values were not diluted by varying terminology, I assigned the most

common value terms as column headers and entered any appropriate synonyms that appeared in

various books under the umbrella header. For instance, entries in the "Conflict" column include

different authors' terms of "struggle" and "combat." In this way I was able to consolidate the

most commonly enumerated news values while also keeping note of unique ways in which these

values were described. Bednarek and Caple (2017) similarly condensed related news values

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[8] By "titles," I mean books written by the same principle author that retained their distinct identity through two or more editions. Some texts by different authors share the same name (e.g. Brooks & Kennedy, 2008; Mencher, 1991) but are counted as distinct titles for each author. Other continuously running texts changed their names between editions (e.g. Fedler 1973; Fedler et al., 2001), but were counted as a single title. A couple of authors (e.g. Charnley, Mencher) were responsible for more than one title; and a couple of titles (e.g. Fedler et al., 2001 to Bender et al., 2016) changed lead authors between editions.

under major categories in order to "use no more explanatory concepts than are absolutely necessary" (p. 56) in developing a taxonomy.

I read each book essentially from cover to cover, scanning the table of contents for major themes, mining the preface and introduction for author(s)' stated intentions, and proceeding through each chapter in turn. I gave special attention to chapters that sought to define news, which usually contained the most explicit references to and examples of news values. And I consulted indexes for entries featuring "news factors," "news values," "conflict," "human interest," and other relevant terms. But in addition to precisely located topic areas, each book was sprinkled throughout with references to priorities and practices that revealed authors' attitudes toward reporters' autonomy to find and present the news and their disciplinary obligations to citizens, fellow journalists, and publishers. Sections or chapters receiving less detailed attention included those dealing with grammar and style, formatting, and legal or police jargon and procedures. Chapters on reporting and interviewing, story and beat assignments, legal and ethical concerns, and the state of the profession were reviewed in detail.

For annotation, I kept running notes in a series of Evernote files, roughly sorted by decade or by multi-edition volumes. Notes included extended relevant quotations from each book, with particular attention to prescriptive, disciplining phrases such as "must," "have to," "can't," and "forbidden"; my cumulative observations as to how language and arguments compared among texts and with the news values literature; and searchable keyword notations for terms such as "news values," "discipline," "autonomy," etc. My accumulating sense of authors' priorities was reinforced, contextualized, and/or challenged through constant comparative analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) of each subsequent book until I felt justified making claims as

to the trajectory of news values and connecting those claims with Foucault's notions of discipline and governmentality, and Bourdieu's of habitus enacted in the journalistic field.

The 75 textbooks in this sample are frequently voluminous, meandering, and unwieldy. Many texts exceed 500 pages. Authors are largely practical, but many also delve at will into discussions of philosophy, social science, ethics, and economics. In other words, the field for analysis is vast and fertile. In narrowing topics for detailed analysis, I remained mindful of the research questions at the beginning of this chapter and the driving question of this dissertation: In a nation that mythologizes a near-absolutist stance on press freedom (Bennett, 1996; Hallin & Giles, 2005, p. 14), what helps explain the conditions under which mainstream journalists speak and act as though they *have* to do some things and *can't* do others?

I break my findings into chapters addressing these main topics: implied news values in the earliest texts and a longitudinal taxonomy of enumerated news values across texts (present chapter); a discussion of how "human interest" is used to cleave "serious" news from emotional content, with a case study of suicide references to illustrate how practices change dramatically even as the news value remains relatively constant (Chapter 4); textbooks' self-contradictory discussions of crime, conflict, and negative news (Chapter 5); the apparent paradox intertwining textbooks' proclamations of autonomous journalistic judgment and manifold disciplinary constraints (Chapter 6); and the discipline-autonomy paradox applied specifically to the largely unarticulated but deeply disciplining news value of U.S. presidential politics (Chapter 7).

Basic News Values: Analysis and Discussion

Conceptions of News in Early Texts

Let's start at the beginning with a tour of the first book in my sample, Edwin L. Shuman's *Steps Into Journalism* (1894). This is not the very first instructional journalism text –

Mirando (1992) identifies a half-dozen earlier volumes dating to 1867 – but he cites Mott (1962) in characterizing Shuman's work as "the first comprehensive treatise on journalism" (p. 29). Mindich (1998) echoes this characterization, calling it "probably the first comprehensive journalism textbook" (p. 116). Schudson (1978) heralds *Steps Into Journalism* as emblematic of a transition between the freewheeling days of imaginative reporting and the formalizing of journalism as a vocation requiring both accurate reporting and colorful storytelling. The paradox of a reporter's disciplinary duty to report accurately and autonomous license to tell a good story is on full display in Schudson's analysis. He notes that Shuman both "advocated the reporter's using his imagination to create images he had not witnessed and had no direct testimony about" and "cautioned that even this mild form of fakery is dangerous" (Schudson, 1978, p. 79). Schudson quotes Shuman articulating a standard that "truth in essentials, imagination in non-essentials, is considered a legitimate rule of action in every office. The paramount object is to make an interesting story" (Shuman, 1894, p. 123, quoted in Schudson, 1978, p. 79).

Like the first handful of texts heading into the 20th century, Shuman's (1894) does not explicitly enumerate a set of fixed news values, but it does contain a few paragraphs on "what constitutes news," and its descriptions of news stories and examples of newswork offer numerous clues as to what the author considers to be newsworthy. The book waxes eloquent on multiple occasions about how news people (mostly men) bear witness to the full experience of "humanity, with its faults, foibles, hatreds, crimes, sorrows, loves and joys" (p. 57). An early passage offers an expansive view on the sweeping role of the reporter, with "[w]rongs to right, great lives and deeds to chronicle, new triumphs of science to describe, the seething battlefield of human life to paint" (p. 5). Yet Shuman reserves the joyful realm of human experience for these lyrical abstractions; his predominant examples of actual or hypothetical news stories involve spot

news and calamities: fatal fires, boats ramming bridges, crimes of passion and opportunity. As to

the criteria by which to judge the fitness of a news story, Shuman, a former reporter and editor

himself, refers obliquely to the reporter's "nose for news," a boundary-setting and reproductive

journalistic trait invoked in the majority of texts (Mirando, 1992). For Shuman, reporters develop

this news sense by trial and error, developing as apprentices under the close guidance of

journalistic veterans:

> The reporter has a chance to learn the relative value of news from an expert judge. When sent out to investigate a 'tip' that gives promise of a story, the first thing that he does on his return is to report the results of his quest in the fewest possible words to the city editor. In a flash the latter will weigh the value of the story … Under this training the new man soon learns to judge for himself almost instinctively what an item is worth, and to avoid wasting time in collecting minutia on a worthless lead. (Shuman, 1894, p. 60)

Here we see what Foucault might describe as the *disciplining* nature of the newsroom, the

process by which reporters come to limit their sense of what constitutes news through the

panoptic gaze of the city editor, so that eventually, without feedback, they come to know which

stories are appropriate and which are not.

Shuman's coyness about the characteristics that actually make a good news story

suggests a solid faith in the discipline and habitus of journalistic culture to imbue news judgment

– a faith he does not share regarding copy preparation or other elements of the newspaper trade.

The book devotes paragraphs to precise prescriptions regarding whether to render a story in

pencil, pen, or typewriting; the proper margins and proofreading marks; and the best way to

approach an editor with an idea. But Shuman's notion of what news is remains ephemeral,

implied but not directly explained. In fact, the section of the book explicitly devoted to "what

constitutes news" offers not positive assertions of what news *is* but negative examples of what it

isn't, excerpted from the *Chicago Tribune*'s "instructions to country correspondents." The list

begins "*The classes of news here indicated are not wanted*" and proceeds to catalog a litany of

personal disasters and petty crimes that apparently do not meet the threshold of carnage sufficient to warrant mention in a city paper. Such injunctions include "Fatal or other accidents to conductors, engineers, brakemen, switchmen, or persons not identified, or persons in obscure positions in life, except when two or more fatalities result from the same accident or there is a great loss of property involved" (p. 98). The news value most apparent in the *Tribune*'s list is *prominence*, as multiple story categories – rapes, seductions, weddings, remote crimes, holiday celebrations, and obituaries – are not to be pursued "except when persons of marked prominence are involved" or "when persons of State or National importance are to speak."

Following the *Tribune*'s list of what doesn't constitute a news story, Shuman writes, "At first blush the beginner may exclaim in dismay that there is nothing left to send; but a little thought will dispel that discouraging illusion" (p. 100). After providing such reassurance, though, Shuman moves on, offering no helpful thoughts of his own. Given the pedantic nature of Shuman's expositions on grammar, punctuation, deadline writing, and other issues, his relative silence on what makes news is noteworthy.

But between the lines, and occasionally in randomly deployed explicit terms, Shuman's concepts of newsworthiness emerge, laying groundwork for the enumerated lists of news values that will begin appearing in early 20th century texts. We have seen that *prominence* coalesces here as an explicit value, as does *timeliness*. *Conflict* is apparent in examples throughout the book, and Shuman even suggests that newspapers attained their indispensable status during the Civil War, as people sought news of their loved ones. *Impact* is suggested in the *Tribune*'s refusal to accept accidents resulting in only one fatality; the implication is that the higher the toll, the greater the news. "The *human interest*" is a frequent character, but never defined; it is merely contrasted with less newsworthy natural and material subjects. Shuman implies generally that

there is room for wonder, surprise and humor in the news, but his specific examples do not cover this territory. Nor does civic importance play a major role in this formative exploration of news judgment: Although Shuman concludes the book with a paean to the press as a guardian of democracy, there is virtually no exposition on coverage of government affairs beyond the activities of the police.

> Shuman's final message shines with nearly transcendent fervor:

> The true-hearted element of the press is purifying the atmosphere all through the body politic, and is calling for clear heads and clean hands in high places. It is teaching justice and mercy and temperance. The sound of its coming is sweet in men's ears, for the burdens it bears are glad tidings, and the gifts it scatters are life and light. (p. 224)

Yet here are typical story examples, some presented tongue-in-cheek, used to demonstrate basic news writing structure and reporting techniques: An apocryphal boy runs away from home and is eaten by a bear. A mistreated woman is thrown to the streets and subsequently kills herself. A steamer crashes into a bridge. A saloon brawl ends in a fatal stabbing. The disconnect between Shuman's rhapsodic elegy on the uplifting virtues of the press and his maudlin prototypes of daily news output reveals a tension between news people's perception of their social role, and the reality of what they typically produce, that survives to this day (Parks, 2015).

Many other early texts talk a good game about journalism's essential role in democracy, while paying very little attention to the coverage of government, public officials, or elections. Mari (2015) notes that "[c]laiming to serve the public interest is one way for journalists to preserve their autonomy and authority" (p. 690), and texts from the early 20th century either made that claim or implied that the public's business is inherently newsworthy. "It is almost appalling," Shuman (1894) writes, "when we stop to think of it, that the voters, the men who are the sovereigns of our land and who make and unmake our presidents and our legislators, get their schooling almost wholly through the newspapers" (p. 9). Ross's (1911) *The Writing of News*

begins its first chapter with an epigram from a speech asserting that one ideal of news is "to take

the best attitude for the perpetuation of our democracy" (p. 1). But Ross never takes up that ideal,

nor does he go into any detail on coverage of policy or politics.

Hyde (1912), in declaring that the role of the press is "to keep us informed concerning the

events that are taking place each day in the world about us" (p. 14), captures only the first half of

the definition Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) would assert nearly a century later: "The primary

purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need *to be free and self-

governing*" (p. 17, emphasis added). Hyde proposes that journalists are responsible for providing

the information but not the agency – though later in a brief aside on public business he claims

that "political news interests every one, for we all feel that the management of the government

has an influence on our own lives. … The story of any political maneuver … carries farther than

any other story" (p. 25-26). This is a significant, unsupported assumption that helped guide news

judgment through much of the 20th century, but it is embedded in discussion of the news value

Hyde calls "Personal Appeal," what we might describe today as the "relevance" of a news event

to a reader's life. And despite the apparently central nature of political news to a newspaper's

readership, Hyde addresses the concept only in part of a section about meetings in part of a

chapter about "Other News Stories." The word "election" appears just twice in the book, both in

the final chapter on style – matters of grammar and language mechanics for rendering news

consistently. The archetypical story Hyde deems most prevalent and foundational to the

newspaper is the fire story, which is explicated across multiple chapters and which also provides

fodder for the most common and detailed examples of reporting and writing across most of the

early texts. Hyde argues that "The desire to interest readers is behind the whole question of news

values" (p. 15) – and prior to World War I, the news we generally categorize as "public affairs" was apparently not considered commensurate with that desire.

Naming News Values

It wasn't long before news values, clearly implied in Shuman (1894) and his turn-of-the century imitators, became explicit in journalism texts. The sixth book chronologically in my sample, Williams and Martin's *The Practice of Journalism* – a reprint of a text first published in 1911 – enumerates six characteristics of newsworthiness in a chapter called "News and Its Value":

> An analysis of a vast majority of all news stories published possibly will show that the fact such stories are of general interest and hence constitute news is due chiefly to at least one of these elements:
> 1. The *prominence* of persons or places concerned
> 2. The *proximity* of the event to the place of publication
> 3. The *unusualness* of the event
> 4. The *magnitude* of the event
> 5. The *human interest* involved
> 6. *Timeliness*
>
> (Williams & Martin, 1922 [1911], p. 172, emphasis added)

The most striking thing about this century-old list is its lack of qualitative difference from lists in contemporary texts and the common-sense, top-of-head values that many present-day journalists and scholars rattle off extemporaneously. In fact, this study's key finding regarding positively identified news values, dating to the earliest serious journalism texts, is that they have barely changed at all. Compare Williams and Martin (1922 [1911]) with the latest text in this sample, Bender et al. (2016), whose enumerated news values are *timeliness*, *impact or magnitude*, *prominence*, *proximity*, *unusualness or oddness*, and *conflict or controversy* (See Table 3.1). The only changes from then to now are the addition of the value of *conflict*, which my analysis shows to have been explicitly identified no later than 1929 (in Warren) and which became ubiquitous in texts after 1990; and the deletion of human interest, which has increasingly receded

Table 3.1: Enumerated News Values – A Century Apart

Williams and Martin 1922 [1911]	Bender et al. 2016
Prominence	Prominence
Proximity	Proximity
Timeliness	Timeliness
Magnitude	Impact or magnitude
Unusualness	Unusualness or oddness
Human Interest	Conflict or controversy

in significance (See Chapter 4). Otherwise, the early 20th and early 21st century lists are essentially identical.

Of the 75 books in this study, 44 explicitly enumerate news values, which typically means that the authors choose an umbrella concept label – news "values," "factors," "elements," "qualities," etc. – and then describe or define specific values after listing them in bold or italic or as a sub-section head of a chapter defining news or news judgment. (This is also how Mirando [1992] identified and described explicit news value references.) Many books whose values I recorded as unenumerated articulate similar standards, but they do so in a less structured or organized fashion – they either do not clearly set apart a typology of criteria, or they mix event characteristics with other kinds of judgment criteria. Still other books do not directly or systematically address a process or standards for judging the relative worth of news events; in these cases I derived lists of implied values through descriptions of reporting processes or examples of stories quoted in the texts.

For the texts that do enumerate news values, I created a total of 50 spreadsheet columns to represent distinct named value concepts, uniting synonymous terms when practical under single column headers (e.g. "combat," "struggle" and "conflict" are all terms I placed under the

"Conflict" header). The overwhelming majority of these distinctly named values appear less than a handful of times. Examples of rarer values and one-hit wonders include "adventure," "property loss," "beauty," "romance," "disaster," "humor," and "money." Mirando (1992) identified 125 distinct news value terms in his study and, following Eberhard (1982), concluded that the sheer volume of terms indicates "limited agreement on what are the basic news values" as expressed in 20th century texts (p. 119-120). But if we focus not on the number of discrete terms but rather the frequency with which certain terms appear, we can see that a handful stand out in what amounts to powerful agreement across texts, authors, and time as to what characteristics make a good news story. Eberhard and Mirando conclude that timeliness, proximity, and prominence are standard values even among dissenting authors. My analysis finds several more values that belong in the canon. Figure 3.1 is a word cloud representing the frequency with which each articulated value appears. It encompasses 431 total (non-unique) terms derived from the 44 texts with enumerated values.

The standouts, in rough order, are *proximity*, *timeliness*, *prominence*, *human interest*, *conflict*, and *consequence/impact*. (Impact and consequence are conceptual synonyms. "Consequence" was the preferred term through the 1980s; Mencher [1989] applied the dual label "impact or consequence," and nearly all subsequent texts use "impact.") Note that "*unusualness*" and "*the unusual*" appear with similar frequency and, if considered together, would be next on the list – especially taking into account manifold synonyms such as *oddities*, the *bizarre*, *novelty*, *rarity*, and the *exceptional*. *Animals* and *children* were reasonably popular categories through the mid-20th century; authors sometimes singled them out as separate values and sometimes named them as sub-categories under human interest. *Sex*, similarly, varied as a distinct value or a human-interest dimension. Curtis MacDougall, whose main work, *Interpretative Reporting,* lived

Figure 3.1: Prevalence of News Value Terms in Journalism Textbooks, 1894-2016

for nine editions, linked *sex and age* as a unified value through at least three volumes (1932, 1938, 1948). *Progress* was a popular term from the late 1920s through the late 1940s, along with *mystery*, *drama*, and *suspense* through roughly the same period.

Definitions of several key values changed little over time and generally apply across presentation platforms. While most of the texts in my sample focus on newspapers and print journalism, authors began acknowledging television as a news platform as early as 1948 (MacDougall) yet made few distinctions regarding news judgment among media. Some 21st century textbooks are explicitly billed as multimedia or convergence texts, but their basic definitions of news values are essentially the same as the older texts'. One exception is an increased attention to visual elements for television in particular and digital media in general. Hage et al. (1976), for instance, write, "choices will usually be made on the basis of the overriding broadcast news values: conflict, drama, and, in the case of television, visual

possibilities" (p. 52). And Rich (2007) writes, "The presentation of a story with photographs or graphics is crucial" (p. 18).

Below are some exemplary definitions of the consensus news values presented by authors from across my sample of texts that enumerated such values. Note the consistency of language, description, and metaphor used to define these values across time:

Hyde (1912) writes of *timeliness*: "[N]ews is news only because it just happened and can be spoken of as one of the events of 'to-day' or of 'late-yesterday'" (p. 20); and Rich (2007) writes, "An event that happened the day of or day before publication or an event that is due to happen in the immediate future is considered timely" (p. 11). Many authors also assert that an older event, freshly learned, can be timely: "The city council may have let a contract for paving in secret session two weeks ago, but that does not invalidate the information as news when the mayor makes his first announcement. News is timely if it has not been generally known or printed before" (Harwood, 1927, p. 48). Rich (2007) adds, "Some events that happened in the past may also be considered timely if they are printed on an anniversary of the event" (p. 12). More rarely, some authors bring a more critical take to the concept: "Recent talk about interpretive reporting seems to indicate some realization that timeliness can be overdone as a news element. Certain events surely deserve to be reported even though they are not timely, partly because they help people understand matters of current interest" (Izard, Culbertson & Lambert, 1973, p. 11).

Of *proximity*, Yost (1924) writes, "Interest in any event that is not national in its scope decreases with the distance from the scene of the event" (p. 33); Fedler et al. (2001) write, "readers and viewers are most interested in and affected by stories about their own communities" (p. 110). Some authors include both geographical and psychological proximity in their

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definitions. Warren (1959), for instance, writes that the term "means mental as well as linear —

psychological as well as physical — nearness. … Sarajevo and Pearl Harbor once seemed remote

places to Americans but the events which took place there affected all of us" (p. 19). Fedler et al.

add, "Two individuals who share a characteristic or an interest may want to know more about

each other although thousands of miles separate them" (p. 110).

For *prominence*, the favored catch phrase is "Names make news" (e.g. Brooks et al.,

2008; Burken, 1979; Johnson & Harriss, 1952 [1942]; Lieb, 2009; Mott, 1958; Scanlan & Craig,

2014; Warren, 1959). Texts vary in emphasis on public officials or celebrity entertainers as the

most prominent subjects. Many texts, as I will show in Chapter 7, place the president of the

United States at the apex of prominence.

By *consequence*, Warren (1929) means "importance or significance, hence breadth of

appeal. The signing of a European treaty may be a dull and drab affair, yet its results may affect

the destiny of nations" (p. 15). Johnson & Harriss (1952 [1942]) mean "[a]n event which causes

or is capable of causing a great sequence of events affecting many people" (p. 25). Similarly, in

defining *impact*, Fedler et al. (2001) write that "[n]ews stories tend to focus on the most severe

storms, the most damaging fires, the most deadly accidents, the most important speeches and the

most interesting organizations because these are likely to affect the most readers and viewers and

have the most serious consequences" (p. 110). Harrower (2010) writes of impact: "Does the story

matter to readers? Will it have an effect on their lives or their pocketbooks? The bigger the

consequences, the bigger the story becomes" (p. 19). Scanlan & Craig (2014) write that impact

means the story "affects a lot of people" (p. 5) and give the examples of Hurricane Katrina and

the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

For *unusualness*, oddity, novelty, etc., the near-universal stand-by definition identified by

Mirando (1992) for textbooks through 1987 was the axiom that news is when a man bites a dog,

rather than the other way around. This truism survived well into the 21st century (e.g. Harrower,

2010; Lanson & Stephens, 2008; Scanlan & Craig, 2014; Stovall, 2002).

I will take up *human interest* in detail in the following chapter.

Conclusion: Naturalizing the News

Mirando (1992) was highly critical of the pat, essentially timeless textbook news

definitions based on rudimentary event characteristics as evidenced in the findings above:

> In relying on arbitrary distinctions to define what is news, textbook authors were showing a disdain for any advanced thinking on the subject. Presenting lists of news values merely succeed in helping teachers write tests easier. They will be memorized by students for tests and then usually discarded. ... Textbooks just passing news off as something that has to be timely or prominent deny a student the opportunity to develop an individual definition of news that they will spend a career working to crystallize if they become reporters. (Mirando, 1992, p. 226)

This may be an uncharitable assessment. It's rather fascinating to consider that, for all the

changes that have occurred in the news industry from the turn of the 20th century to the turn of

the 21st, journalism educators have held firm to their characterizations of what news intrinsically

is and isn't. This strikes me as running deeper than a practical question of how to establish short-

answer test problems. Even though these values are written down, the systematic, ritualistic

manner in which textbooks pass on the lore of news values across generations of authors and

teachers to succeeding waves of students has the feel of an oral history. One can envision

apprentice journalists clustered around a campfire, eyes aglow, as they are regaled by elders

chanting: Timeliness, proximity, prominence, impact, unusualness, human interest, conflict.

As I showed in Chapter 2, these are relatively modern, not eternal, news concepts. They

do not represent the dominant values of pre-penny press American newspapers and did not really

kick in formally until around the turn of the 20th century, when they appeared as a collected

articulation of previously unenumerated rationalizations of largely commercially driven news

decisions. But after more than a hundred years, it is hard to argue that such values *remain*

arbitrary. As these historically contingent values have been passed from sage to neophyte across

the decades, they have become cultural, even mythic: "Names make news"; "Man bites dog."

This is the language of journalistic habitus. Vos (2011), in his study of objectivity as expressed

in early journalism texts, terms such thinking "ideational logic," a condition in which

"institutional actors put forward a set of ideas to solve a perplexing problem. These ideas may or

may not be coherent or logical; they only need to shape how actors will think about or justify

their actions in their environment" (p. 437).

To identify news values as a key constituent of journalistic habitus does not imply that

they necessarily lead to well-considered or socially desirable journalism. By definition, news

veterans invoke such values mechanically, unthinkingly, and as common sense, even as

newcomers help subtly reshape them through practice. Bush (1940), in a post-chapter exercise

question, asks whether it's appropriate for a newspaper to accommodate an attention-seeking

judge who "deliberately performs unusual actions in his court room, such as eating sandwiches,

in order to obtain publicity..." (p. 357). Bush then asks, "Can you formulate a definition of news

which would *require* that the Judge's behavior be reported?" (p. 357, emphasis added). The

suggestion is clear that while news values might be arbitrarily derived, once they are agreed

upon, they are vigorously enforced. Thus, news values' entrenched position in journalistic

discourse very well may stifle, as Mirando (1992) argues, more flexible and thoughtful

approaches to news judgment. Lanson and Stephens' (2008) definition of *impact* offers a case in

point:

> Reporters are constantly measuring what effect events have on their readers. A tiny fly can be more newsworthy than a space-shuttle landing if that fly and its offspring have a taste for fruit and you are writing for a newspaper in a fruit-producing region. … All other things being equal — and they rarely are — facts and events with the greatest impact on the most readers have the greatest news value. (Lanson & Stephens, 2008, p. 7)

This definition gets at an essential flaw of impact or consequence as a news value: It often requires predictive powers beyond journalists' grasp. It is insightful to note that "a tiny fly" might have more impact than a landing spacecraft, depending on the concerns of one's audience. But the truth is that a tiny *individual* fly – not just a whole species as implied in the above example – can have a profound impact by buzzing near a particular person at a particular time. The irritation generated by a single fly could alter a world leader's disposition toward her counterparts, signaling an unintended aura of diplomatic discord, which could prompt watchful aides to recalibrate language in an impending international agreement, which could change the physical or economic fortunes of millions. A routine space-shuttle landing, meanwhile, might have no practical, material impact on a population – yet images of such a landing might spark a sense of wonder, humility, or curiosity that leads to a career change, a marriage proposal, an apology, or a stalking case.

A priori judgments of a given image or event's impact based on common-sense interpretations of textbook news values or disciplined thought patterns based on editorial precedent can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies in which a select few things are given more opportunity to matter, or outsized credit for mattering, compared to others. But even though the long-term stability of conceptualizations and basic definitions of news values have made such misjudgments common, there has also been an ebb and flow among which news values appear to dominate in given eras. As I discuss in Chapter 4, in the earlier texts, small everyday dramas – emotional, concrete human-interest events – were portrayed as essential to news gathering.

Conflict was often presented through these everyday dramas rather than through abstract clashes between officials and institutions. That trend is largely reversed in contemporary texts, which regularly enumerate conflict as a major value and spend much less time and energy on the emotional, affective give-and-take of everyday existence. Further, even though conceptions of the values or elements that make a news story have remained constant, ideas about what *kinds* of events constitute valid news have shifted dramatically over the past 125 years. The essential criteria that have been applied to phenomena have not substantially changed, but *how* they are applied demonstrates that news values themselves are neither fixed nor natural.

Hemstreet (1901) defines news as self-evident and naturally occurring: "The material of the newspaper writer is always awaiting him. There is usually more than he wants. His duty is to collect it. There need be no seeking for plot. Nature, in every phase, is there ready to be 'written up' for the benefit of those who do not study it for themselves at close range" (p. 9-10). But, as Hemstreet will demonstrate briefly below, news is not natural, at least not across time. As Giddens (1991) notes, human reality is a function of the interactions between individuals and the societies they inhabit. And as Foucault points out, what appears to be obvious, natural or normal is not fixed in human history but rather subject to the "episteme," or the totality of knowledge and understanding in a given society in a given time. Even if "unusualness" is articulated as a news value in both 1911 and in 2016, what constitutes unusualness is a function of the social backdrop, not of intrinsic human nature. Very few textbook authors across the years have overtly acknowledged this social construction. One who has is Metz (1977), who argued: "Editors have claimed an intuitive, unlearned, automatic knowledge of what is news, but this notion has been discredited. Traits that were thought to have been 'built in' have been shown to be the products of beliefs, learning and interaction" (p. 8).

Consider, for instance, a dye factory in which a benzine explosion traps twenty people, two of whom are burned alive and three more of whom are severely injured and hospitalized for weeks. The contemporary common-sense journalistic response to such an incident would be extensive coverage of the explosion and its victims, reported outrage over the conditions that led to the explosion, investigations into the regulatory mechanisms controlling the handling of benzine and the extent to which those regulations were followed or enforced, and explorations of remedies to prevent future incidents. But the "obvious" journalistic response to such an outrageous event was not common-sense in 1901. Hemstreet describes just such a factory fire and dismisses it in this way: "This was an ordinary story, the chief interest lying in the fact that several people were burned to death. The story was given half a column" (p. 23-24). Such dismissive judgments of factory dangers were common, according to news critics of the time. Upton Sinclair (2003 [1928]), in his polemic on the capitalist priorities of early 20th century newspapers, wrote extensively on journalistic indifference to the plight of laborers. The different social expectations around horrific workplace deaths at the turn of the 20th century, prior to the establishment of strong unions and the construction of the federal regulatory system, resulted in an entirely different perception of newsworthiness surrounding such events.

So, even though textbook news values help produce discursively limiting conceptions of what does and doesn't matter, what *must* be covered and, given finite resources, what resultantly must be ignored, those values are not fixed. In the next chapter, I argue that human interest, in particular, has changed over time and has been used to segregate human emotion within a narrow genre of news content.

CHAPTER 4
HUMAN INTEREST: THE ANTI-NEWS VALUE

The previous chapter showed that there has been little change in how journalism textbooks describe the key characteristics attributed to actors and events that drive news decisions: The values of timeliness, proximity, prominence, unusualness, consequence or impact, and human interest have been explicit, and the value of conflict at a minimum implicit, since the second decade of the 20th century. But the resilience of these values' presence and conceptualization in journalistic discourse does not necessarily require uniform application of the values in journalistic practice. In this chapter, I take the special case of human interest to demonstrate two important findings regarding news values: first, that human interest is an essential tool for enforcing journalistic detachment in most news coverage by serving as a conceptual repository for nearly all the affective and emotional components of daily events, splitting such components off from other, more "newsworthy" occurrences; and second, that the prominence of human interest in news judgment diminished through the 20th century as "harder," more public-affairs oriented news became the primary driver of professional news judgment. To illustrate how emotion-laden news content moved from the foreground to the background of American journalism, I close the chapter with a case study of suicide: portrayed in early 20th century texts as an important source of human-interest news, and increasingly into the 21st century as simply another cause of death to be dispassionately recounted in matter-of-fact reports.

Human interest might be considered the earliest of the news values. Definitions tie this value not to external events that might be rationally deemed more or less newsworthy due to their urgency, significance, or tangible impact; but rather to internal, presumably universal *feelings* that help define what it means to be human. "Human interest stories," writes Chalaby

(1998, p. 102), "are the journalistic equivalent to earlier forms of popular discourse, sharing the same narrative format and providing the same link to the universal through symbols and allegories." We saw in Chapter 2 that the first English newspapers trafficked regularly in tales ranging from the sordid to the heartbreaking – stories routinely classified by historians such as Frank (1961) as human interest.

It is interesting to note that many of the most prominent academic taxonomies of news values reviewed in Chapter 2 do not include human interest, despite its longstanding presence in journalism textbooks (see Figure 3.1) and practical news judgments. The concept does not appear to be thoroughly explicated in much scholarly journalism literature; rather, it's usually a pre-formed, taken-for-granted concept used to categorize news values or frames in content analyses or similar work (e.g. Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997). Gans (1980) does list human interest among his half-dozen overlapping "interesting" story types. He defines human interest as

> stories in which ordinary people undergo an unusual experience that evokes audience sympathy, pity, or admiration, such as victims of tragic illnesses or people who act heroically in disasters. Story selectors choose them because they expect the audience to "identify" with a victim or hero; nonetheless, they themselves are often moved. (Gans, 1980, p. 156)

As with the other news values, textbook authors' definitions of human interest run fairly consistently through the 20th century and well into the 21st. But almost from the start, human interest stands apart as a vague release valve for pressurized judgment standards built into the other values. Human interest, most broadly, describes anything that doesn't fit other definitions of news that a reporter or editor nevertheless wants to make into a story. Its chief characteristic, in stark Cartesian contrast to proper news stories, is emotional content. I argue below that human interest, among other functions, allows journalists to justify publishing stories that cannot be

rationalized through values of intrinsic newsworthiness, so long as reporters and editors can convince one another, as Gans indicates, that the story is moving.

One seminal look at human interest in the literature is the work of Helen MacGill Hughes (1937; 1981 [1940]), who examined the affective power of human interest to help construct American culture through accessible storytelling, in a way that public affairs reporting could not: "[P]aradoxically, it is not the political news that informs people about one another. It is the revelations of private life and those inconsequential items that in the newspaper office are known as human interest stories" (Hughes, 1937, p. 73). Hughes attributes the construction of modern human interest news to the penny press pioneers who branched off from elite-centered government and commercial news to attract the working masses pouring into cities in the mid-1800s. She refers to accounts such as Benjamin Day's *New York Sun* giving more prominence to a woman being arrested for smoking and dancing on Broadway than news of an impending visit by Henry Clay as "the first human interest stories in the American press" (Hughes, 1981 [1940], p. 8). The term "human interest stories," she asserts, "was first used in the office of the *Sun* to designate the chatty little reports of tragic or comic incidents in the lives of the people. … Early newspapers used human interest stories to fill odd corners of space, but Day's *New York Sun* was the first to specialize in them" (Hughes, 1981 [1940], p. 12-13; 47). Hughes argues that human interest stories could appeal across the social spectrum: Society news helped feed lower classes' fascination with the rich, and then reporting on slum life sated wealthy residents' curiosity about the lives of immigrants and the poor. "For purposes of the newspaper the city became a laboratory for the concoction of stories" (Hughes, 1937, p. 77). It is in this atmosphere, with human interest conceived as the essence of mass-market news values at the end of the 19th century, that early textbook writers shared their conceptions of what makes news.

Early Human Interest: The Essence of News

Shuman (1894) and a couple of immediate successors saw "the human interest" as the vital essence of news, with all judgment flowing from the determination of where human interest lies. "People are more important than things" Shuman writes; "the human interest is universal; the interest in science or scenery is limited" (p. 139). Hemstreet (1901) writes, "In collecting news, the reporter takes each fact presented and examines it to see that the human interest is there, whether the matter is local or general, whether it will interest many people and to what extent it will interest" (p. 18). The human interest, then, is the starting place for Hemstreet's implied news characteristics. It "may be embodied in the unusual or unexpected circumstances surrounding some ordinary happening; something unnatural or appalling; or in a commonplace accident or incident that occurs in a peculiar manner" (p. 20). For authors such as Shuman and Hemstreet, if there is no human interest, there is no story.

The human interest in these early texts is not sharply defined. It usually manifests in some Dickensian ordeal – a tenement fire, a neighborhood feud, a pathetic suicide. Such content might not be the height of journalistic endeavor, but it satisfies a universal desire. "You and I have our private opinions about filling column after column with this sort of stuff," Shuman (1894) writes, referring specifically to buttonholing men accused of breach of promise:

> [B]ut if we are reporters,
> 'Ours not to reason why
> Ours but to do or die.'
> Besides, people who feel called upon to scold the editors should not forget that newspapers are just what their readers make them. The penny in the pocket of the reader is the ballot that settles the policy of the newspaper, and the majority rules. (Shuman, 1894, p. 54)

But the human interest did not last long into the 20th century as the origin of all news. By the time of McCarthy's (1906) *The Newspaper Worker,* human interest had become a distinct aspect of news judgment, side by side with other elements:

> News is always heightened in value when it is marked by the novel and the singular, the extraordinary or the unusual. So much there is of the commonplace and conventional in the happenings of the day that editors are forever on the lookout for stories out of the ordinary *or* that are full of the element of human interest. (McCarthy, 1906, p. 16, emphasis added)

Likewise, Ross (1911) tacks human interest onto the end of a list of other considerations:

> The importance of a story in the eyes of the editor depends on one or more of several considerations — on the property involved, as in a fire or an earthquake; on the number and the prominence of the persons concerned; on the distance of the happening from the place of publication; on the timeliness of the story; on the element of human interest. (Ross, 1911, p. 43-44)[9]

Once human interest became a component of news, rather than the essence of news judgment itself, it took on an important role in demarcating and codifying a dichotomous division between types of legitimate journalism. The extent of human interest to be found would henceforth establish whether a story was "news" or a "feature," whether its intended effect was "rational" or "emotional," and whether the subject matter should be treated as "important" or "interesting."

Separating Emotion from News

A key element of most definitions of human interest is that it appeals to universal feelings and therefore transcends any factual particulars:

> Although the interests of any individual differ in almost every aspect from the interests of his neighbor, there is one sort of news that interests them both, that interests every human being. That is the news that appeals to the emotions, to the heart. It is the news that deals with human life — human nature — human interest news the papers call it. … However trivial may be the event, if it can be described in a way that will make the reader feel the point of view of the human beings who suffered or struggled or died or who were made

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[9] Note how this paragraph comes close to enumerating the basic news values identified in Chapter 3 without doing so explicitly or systematically. The values of timeliness and prominence are stated directly. Values such as impact or magnitude and proximity are implied.

happy in the event, every other human being will read it with interest. (Hyde, 1912, p. 17-18)

Ross (1911), like many authors to follow, equates the stories Hyde describes with "feature" stories, and he contrasts the human interest genre with "the plain news story," which is "based on a recent happening of more or less importance in itself, as a fire or a business transaction, told without attempt at embellishment" (p. 46-47). In making this distinction, Ross introduces the Cartesian split between "plain news" and "human interest" writing:

> Stripped to the bare facts, a human-interest story may be without news value; but told with the keen sympathy that comes of accurate observation and a knowledge of human nature it may have an even greater value, that of giving the reader a clearer insight into the real life about him. (Ross, 1911, p. 47)

Hyde (1912) reinforces the news/emotion split in a chapter on writing human interest stories, arguing that "the distinguishing marks of the human interest story are its lack of real news value and of conventional form, and its appeal to human emotions" (p. 233-234). Many other authors throughout the 20th century and into the 21st (e.g. Bleyer, 1932; Bond, 1961; Burken, 1979; Charnley, 1959; Fedler, 1973; Johnson & Harriss, 1952 [1942]; Harwood, 1927; Lanson & Stephens, 2008; Rivers, 1964; Warren, 1929) make a similar distinction. "The element of interest on which news is based, especially where the news is at all important, differs from that of human interest," write Williams and Martin (1922 [1911], p. 177). Human interest is "an appeal to the emotional rather than to intellectual appreciation, an appeal to instinct rather than thought," writes Yost (1924, p. 36). Yost adds, "[T]he term 'human interest' is seldom applied to matters of large importance. It pertains more particularly to the sentiments and attractions of social relations, the minor manifestations of humanity or inhumanity, the things that appeal to the heart" (p. 37). Harriss, Leiter, and Johnson (1981), conversely, declare, "As long as the reporter presents the *news* as it actually occurs, *without any ... emotional coloring*, he is performing his

duty professionally" (p. 65, emphasis added). Kolodzy (2013) writes, "Emotion or human interest comes into play in newsworthiness on stories that may not be so timely but may have impact by appealing to people's emotions to connect with others" (p. 18). Kolodzy notes that these stories tend either to evoke "painful emotion" or, on "the other end of the spectrum … silliness and laughter" (p. 18), the same humor/pathos categories of human interest used by the early authors.

In other words, in definitions spanning a century, human interest is emotional content that may not be news; news, meanwhile, is consequential but lacks emotional content. News and human feeling are incommensurate. This dichotomy gives human interest a dubious and paradoxical role in the canon of "news" values: It is a staple in describing characteristics that establish a legitimate story, but it is almost anti-matter to news' more instrumental matter. It is a news value in the sense that it provides a rationalization for making news out of something that definitionally is not.

A fundamental purpose of maintaining human interest in this newsy canon is that its affective appeal is widely perceived to be an advantage in attracting readers. In introducing news values, Charnley (1959) portrays a typical (male) reader trying and failing to relate to a news story on the federal budget, which "isn't real to him" (p. 40), then engaging deeply with a story about a local high school girl – pictured in a bathing suit – winning a fishing competition:

> [T]he image of a high school girl has specific meaning for him — it's not something off on another planet, like the federal budget. Moreover, the story has conflict, which always stimulates people — in this case, a contest, a winner, and some losers. There's a touch of comedy in the story — the fact that a seventeen-year-old girl came out ahead of hundreds of older, more experienced, more professionally equipped men. And the bathing-suit picture, though it is entirely discreet, has added to his interest … It is a story about human beings, not about statistics or intellectual concepts. (Charnley, 1959, p. 41)[10]

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[10] It's around this time – the late 1950s through the early 1970s – that several textbooks adopt the term "cheesecake" to describe apparently common "human interest" photographs involving attractive young women. For example, echoing the Charnley quote, Izard et al. write, "Even a very important story with a multi-column head on page 1

This emotional appeal, some authors suggest, can be transcendent:

> For human interest stories the writer must look about for those episodes or passing phases of life from which may be gleaned facts that will awaken in readers a sense of pity, delight, beauty, or pain; above all, that will speak to "the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation." (Robertson, 1930, p. 140)

The Most Flexible News Value

While human interest's lack of intrinsic newsworthiness and its purely emotional appeal relegate it to second-class status among contemporary news values, it is of high utility in expanding the boundaries of news judgment. Ross (1911) helps sets the tone for human interest as a catchall category that allows journalists to bypass other news criteria if they have the talent to whip up an affective response: "Almost any subject may be made into a feature story if the writer has the gift of originality" (p. 48). MacDougall's (1932) sweeping definition – "Interest in human beings as such, and in events because they concern men and women in situations which might confront anyone else, is called human interest" (55) – demonstrates the fungible nature of this news value. Human interest, by this definition, can be any non-unique circumstance that involves people. By many definitions, it can also include compelling circumstances that involve animals: "Anything interesting that may happen to the monkeys, or the elephant, the sparrows or the squirrels in the parks, horses or dogs in the street, is used as the excuse for a human interest story" (Hyde, 1912, p. 253). Such flexibility transfers the fundamental criteria for judging newsworthiness from the innate characteristics of an event to the reporter or editor's affective

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would often be lucky to gain 20-30 per cent readership. But run a picture of a local girl winning a beauty contest, spice it with some cheesecake, and you could almost count on 50-75 per cent readership" (Izard et al., 1973, p. 14-15). The rampant sexism, both casual and calculated, that pervades journalism textbooks from the late 1800s and into the 1980s, followed by a sharp discursive pivot toward inclusivity by the end of the 20th century (see Steiner, 1992), is largely beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I want to acknowledge it here. To call sexism from 1894 "sexism" smacks of "presentism," or the disapproved practice of applying contemporary values to historical actors. But it was sexism as we understand it, whether the actors thought of it that way or not.

disposition toward it. If the reporter feels a tug and pursues a story, or if the editor is intrigued or moved by the reporter's tale, the story has human interest appeal.

Hyde (1912) argues that the opportunity to write such openly emotional stories helps to offset hard-nosed reporters' numbing daily encounters with human tragedy: "They are a reaction against cynicism" (p. 252). But there is evidence that a certain manipulative and formulaic bent lies behind the conceptualization of human interest items, dating at least to the turn of the 20th century. McCarthy (1906) offers this advice while typologizing news stories:

> Evictions, Hard Luck and Destitution Stories — In news of this class the reporter always emphasizes the 'human interest' and pathetic sides. If the weather is unusually severe, the landlord flinty-hearted, the victims scantily clad and the larder and coal bin empty, the reporter is in his element. How he does work one's sympathies by contrasting the threadbare shawl of the helpless, shivering mother with the fine, warm ulster of the snug and comfortable looking landlord. (McCarthy, 1906, p. 24)

Harwood (1927) offers examples of the kinds of such stories one might find in the courts: "The mother who left her child on a doorstep because she could not support it, the small boy who shot his father for abusing his mother, the swindler swindled by a cleverer sharper than himself — all of these situations make interesting reading for the circulation if the reporter has an eye for comedy and pathos" (p. 62). And Warren (1959) provides a table listing three-part recipes for composing "Typical Topics of Human Interest":

> Starving mother…deserts baby…kind policeman
> Alley cat..…up a tree..…brave fireman
> Destitute family..father killed..generous neighbors
> Pigeon flock…attacked by owl…crack marksman
> Small child….runs away….thoughtful stranger
> Country visitor.…meets slicker….buys bridge
> Childhood lovers . surprise meeting . happy wedding
> Amateur gamblers…bet on game…loser barefoot
> Bored society..…treasure hunt..…stern judge
> Boy asleep….imperiled by fire….faithful dog
> Ill explorer..…needs antitoxin..…daring flyer
> (Warren, 1959, p. 245)

Reporters learn over time to pursue only those stories they believe their editors will respond to, and editors tend to adopt only those stories they think will play well with other editors. Their affective responses, therefore, are informed by the disciplinary patterns of thought inscribed by a given newsroom habitus, which is in turn informed by the internal discourse of the broader journalistic field. It is these same disciplinary patterns that lead reporters and editors to allow affect to weigh on the value of a prospective human interest story, while burying any affective responses to stories they consider to be "news."

The Diminishing Role of Human Interest

We have seen that human interest, around the turn of the 20th century, was practically synonymous with news, before splitting off into a separate concept that helped maintain flexibility in news judgment and regulate the emotional detachment increasingly enforced within "objective" news stories. It is also the case that human interest has been a consistently enumerated news value throughout my 122-year sample. However, human interest's importance as a news value diminished over the course of the 20th century, in roughly the proportion that conflict as an explicit value increased. One explanation for this change is the increased journalistic commitment to public affairs news and efforts to explain the world as the 20th century matured, and the transfer of conflict from the small-scale narratives of human interest stories to institutional-level clashes and strategy-oriented frames in public affairs reporting. Yost (1924) makes a conceptual link between conflict and human interest, arguing, "Whether the contest is one of skill or of strength, one of principles or of force, whether it is material, intellectual or spiritual, the fight's the thing that appeals most strongly to human interest" (p. 36). This connection is the fulcrum on which the balance of news judgment shifted from human interest to conflict.

The kind of conflict that began to dominate news stories, rather than individual, emotionally driven human dramas, was the newsy, "rational" clash of competing political forces, and the strategic moves they undertook to manipulate levers of power. Commensurately, news coverage topics expanded from the one-off events of bar brawls and tenement fires in the early textbooks to public affairs-related news beats such as City Hall, state houses, school boards, etc., in addition to reporting specializations such as religion and the environment (see Table 4.1). By the late 1900s and early 2000s, as the field of journalism doubled down on "objectivity" and reportorial detachment, direct appeals to emotion and affect – the principal driver of news judgment in the early texts – receded. Human interest remained nominally on most authors' lists of values, but its appearance was more spotty and merited reduced explication and examples in later texts. Some 21st century authors even came to see human interest as a distraction, arguing that it "is valued too highly, leading to important stories being pushed out of the news by emotional stories of little consequence" (Lieb, 2009, p. 29).

This is a sharp tonal shift from the first third of the 20th century, which supported a much broader view of what could constitute a valid human interest story. By allowing that human interest bore no burden of significance or newsworthiness, even the most apparently trivial matters and moments could be elevated into stories by the sensitive reporter. "An incident in a crowded street car, a mishap on the street, a bit of conversation between two small boys, a mistake made by a countryman unaccustomed to the ways of the metropolis, or any one of the hundred little episodes in the daily life of the city may be taken by the reporter as the subject for a human interest story" (Bleyer, 1932, p. 318). These slices of life, now rare in organized news reports, lent a sense of discovery and surprise to the early 20th century newspaper, little shiny pennies (see Dillard, 1974) left for loyal readers.

Table 4.1: News Categories as Indicated by Chapter Designations in Three Textbooks

Hyde (1912)	Neal (1949)	MacDougall & Reid (1987)
The Simple Fire Story	Speech Stories	Persons and Personalities
The Feature Fire Story	Stories of Meetings	Meetings, Conventions,
Other News Stories	Church News	Speeches
Follow-Up and Rewrite	Interviewing Forms	Illness, Death, Disasters
Stories	The Sectional Story	Police, Crime, Criminal Law
Reports of Speeches	Color Stories	Courts, Civil Law, Appeals
Interviews	Clubs and Lodges	Politics, Elections
Court Reporting	Crime News	Government
Social News and Obituaries	News of Accidents	Business, Finance
Sporting News	Court News	Labor
Human Interest Stories	Sports News	Agriculture
Dramatic Reporting	Society News	Religion
	Theater, Music, and Book	Science, Technology
	News	Weather
	Obituaries	Entertainment
	Weather Stories	
	City Hall Reporting	
	Political News	
	Labor News	
	Business News	

This serendipitous approach to seeing stories everywhere now feels quaint, but it is closer

to the kind of news sensibility I will encourage in the conclusion of this dissertation. Before the

primary activity of journalists became tracking the daily play of political elites for strategic

advantage, presenting the actual play of lived experience was a more common reportorial

occupation. And by seeking the human element "not [in] events but the background of events"

(Johnson & Harriss, 1952 [1942], p. 29), or quoting Chekhov that "one should write without

thinking about forms at all" (Mencher, 1991, p. 142), some textbook authors hint at my

concluding chapter's non-representational argument that phenomena of all kinds can be regarded

equally on the same plane of immanence, with all aspects of experience accorded an opportunity

to make a difference (Fendler, 2016; Thrift, 2008). These kinds of stories now are less likely to

appear in mainstream news reports and more likely to originate with ordinary people who share

an experience on social media (e.g. Cliffe, 2017), where if it catches the right affective wave it

could become viral (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Parks, 2017).

Textbook authors across the decades have occasionally acknowledged that human interest

elements can add value to more "newsworthy" stories: "Very frequently the reporter can create

interest in social, economic, scientific, or technical matters by developing first the human interest

phases of the subject and then passing on to an explanation of the more significant aspects of it"

(Bleyer, 1932, p. 43). Williams and Martin (1922 [1911]) write that "the reporter should learn to

watch for the little details of human interest that add to the effectiveness of news stories," such as

a statesman peeling his third banana as he discusses the merits of a bill. Such a detail "did not

add to the importance of the story as news, but it did add to its effectiveness" (p. 179). Metz

(1977) suggests that human interest can draw attention to stories lacking in certain other values,

such as disasters overseas: "[E]mpathy can overcome linear distance to provide a feeling of

proximity" (p. 7). Warren (1959) appeals to panoptic discipline by suggesting that, rather than

trying to "'featurize' every assignment," ambitious new journalists should "begin by cautiously

weaving threads of human interest into straight news accounts" (p. 253) to assess editorial

reaction.

But even in cases where human interest elements are invited into traditional news stories,

the conceptual dichotomy is maintained. The idea that significance bears its own affective weight

– that federal budgets, depicted as cold and alien by Charnley (1959), are ultimately about

human conflict, striving, anxiety, joy, and sorrow – is not entertained. In the Williams and

Martin (1922 [1911]) example above, the banana peeling is human interest; the human impact of

the bill is not. Hohenberg (1962) writes that "the human interest element in the news is being

included more and more in situations that used to call for the simple declarative sentences of straight news handling. This is basically a matter of broadening reporting, of doing something more than merely recording events" (p. 183). But he also continues to police the line between matters of fact and matters of affect, arguing, "A complicated development in economics, such as the effect of the raising of the prime interest rate and its impact on the economy, *necessarily must* be told far differently from a human interest story about a blind woman student who has just received her M.D." (Hohenberg, 1978, p. 128, emphasis added).[11] News here is defined as something that affects your life but affords no emotional arousal. Human interest arouses your emotions but has nothing to do with you.

To summarize, human interest at the turn of the 20th century was the central functional news value – considered the essence of newsworthiness in a transitional era when news mostly meant telling dramatic stories to the masses before journalists embraced the professionalized role of delivering civic intelligence to citizen-voters. Human interest has persisted as an enumerated news value but has diminished in relative significance as rationally oriented public affairs coverage – explaining and interpreting national and world events for befuddled citizens – became the preeminent role of journalists through the bulk of the 20th century. Human interest's Cartesian definition – a focus on emotional content to the exclusion of significance or relevance – has remained constant, eliding the natural connection between the significant and the affective, the interplay between rational cognition and emotional reaction inherent in forming political attitudes and behaviors (Papacharissi, 2015).

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[11] Perhaps Hohenberg would have thought differently had he had access to Michael Lewis' *The Big Short* (2010), which examines the onset of the 2008 financial crisis through the personal trials and tribulations of key characters who gained and lost in that crisis.

For the remainder of this chapter, I look specifically at how a single topic – journalism textbooks' advice on covering suicide – illustrates human interest's transition from the centrality to the periphery of news judgment.

Same Values, Changing Practices: The Case of Suicide

If human interest was the first news value in English journalism, pathetic suicides were a sensational staple of that value for centuries. Stephens (1988) quotes historian James Sutherland cataloguing the following stories in a 1681 London newspaper: "twelve drownings in the Thames …, '*seven suicides, four attempted suicides*, four murders, four fatal quarrels, one rape (*followed by the suicide of the victim*), one attempted abduction … several muggings, burglaries and highway robberies,' and the death of a man hit by a falling tile in Covent Garden" (Stephens, 1988, p. 233, quoting Sutherland, 1986, p. 76-77, emphasis added). Nineteenth century British newspapers "featured sensational melodramatic reports of deaths," including "suicide cases … illustrated with graphic wood engravings such as *The Suicide of Two Girls* (1868), … *A Man Crucifying Himself* (1869), … and *Suicide on a Railway* (1877)" (Niederkrotenthaler and Stack, 2017, p. 112). Likewise, "suicide was regularly discussed, and in quite shocking detail, in the Canadian press of the nineteenth and early twentieth century" (Richardson, 2015, p. 426).

Suicide, then, was a widely exploited sensational event through the early 1900s. In early U.S. journalism textbooks, suicides and attempts featured prominently as part of the daily newsgathering and storytelling routine – they fit squarely into the genre of individual human struggle and were reported without regard to stigma or sensitivity to surviving victims or family members. Hemstreet (1901), for example, considers the coverage of private-citizen suicides as a major common-sense representation of "the human interest" – the only question being what sensational details would elevate a suicide from routine to exceptional treatment in the news.

Contrast this approach to the present day, when suicide is handled demurely in mainstream news as a private affair, unless other news values such as prominence or impact intrude (Beam, John, & Yaqub, 2017; Jamieson, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003; Richardson, 2015; Yaqub, Beam, & John, 2017).

References to suicide in contemporary textbooks have all but vanished. When the subject is broached, it is not to expound on suicide as fodder for human interest stories or to illuminate particular reporting and writing methods. Contemporary suicide references appear instead in discussions on the ethics of reporting the cause of death in obituaries. Some recent texts also note that most newsrooms are loath to cover most suicides in any substantial way, out of sensitivity to families and a reticence to foment copycat attempts. When suicides are covered, they are typically presented as hard news stories with significant facts – not as maudlin features showcasing the human condition.

This major shift in how journalism texts have handled suicide across the decades is a powerful example of how the standards journalists use to apply news values to specific topics can change, demonstrating that news is not inherent in events but rather constructed in the context of what Foucault called "epistemes," or the confluence of accepted bodies of knowledge in particular historical periods (Fendler, 2010). Applying Foucault's concept, Richardson (2015, p. 426) writes, "Western cultural meanings and attitudes toward suicide are not fixed and stable, but have changed over time"; journalistic meanings and attitudes have as well.

Suicide as Human Interest Staple

Shuman (1894), author of the first textbook in my sample, doesn't spend a lot of time on suicide – not because it is insignificant but because it is obvious. He brings it up as an incidental example to illustrate the selection of facts for a news lead:

> If some poor woman has been abused by her husband, thrown out on the street, and, struggling for weeks against poverty and disgrace, finally succumbs to her load of sorrow and ends the tragedy of her life by suicide, it is this last, most startling fact that should make the first sentence. (Shuman, 1894, p. 24)

Noteworthy here, of course, is the matter-of-fact approach Shuman takes to the problem. There is no hand-wringing as to the appropriateness of such a story, only advice about how to get to the point quickly. In the same vein, the only other reference to suicide in Shuman's book is a grammatical edict: "Don't use 'suicide' as a verb. A man no more 'suicides' than he 'arsons' or 'mayhems'" (Shuman, 1894, p. 190).

Likewise, in Byxbee's (1901) *Establishing a Newspaper*, "Suicides – full particulars" joins an alphabetical list of good local story topics, along with subjects like "Assaults, attempted murder," "Balls, dances," "Divorces," "Early fruits and vegetables," "Political rallies, caucuses, conventions," "Violations of law," and "Wedding anniversaries." Hemstreet (1901) compares two suicides – one more sensational than the other – as a lesson in establishing relative human-interest news value. A 60-year-old French shoemaker shooting himself in the head in his business merits a few lines, whereas much more space is devoted to an Italian fruit peddler, "if possible of less importance" (p. 33) than the Frenchman, who tries poison first, then shoots himself when the poison is too slow-acting, then jumps from the fifth floor when people race to him after hearing the gunshot. "There was sensation in this triple attempt at self-destruction that made it a very good story" (p. 34).

As early as 1911, textbook authors were pointing out the potential copycat risks of detailed suicide reporting. "It is largely for this reason," Ross (1911) writes, "that many newspapers give little space to news of this character unless it concerns someone of prominence or contains some unique human-interest feature. Ordinary, routine suicide stories receive bare mention at the most, and then usually in an inconspicuous part of the paper" (p. 132-133.) This

sentiment is all well and good, but Ross's text does not exemplify the generalization. The book is rife with examples and references to stories of public and private, mundane and spectacular suicides, including the reprinting of several paragraphs about a former coal company clerk who shot himself near a golf course (p. 71); featuring the lead about a 50-year-old rheumatism sufferer who killed himself in his apartment (p. 72); beginning a section on crime reporting with the advice, "In covering a story of murder or suicide, don't stop with the facts that appear on the surface – get the motive" (p. 131); providing a full story about a 70-year-old photographer who drowned himself in his studio developing tank as exemplary of reporting for concrete details (p. 146-147); and turning that same story into an exercise wherein students should condense the piece into "a telegraph dispatch of 150 words" (p. 149).

Similarly, Hyde (1912) suggests that many newspapers don't print "accounts of ordinary suicides, except when the individual is prominent" (p. 115) while in the same vicinity indicating that such stories are, in fact, routine: "What is true of murder stories is also true of suicide. … We ordinarily find a good beginning in the manner of the suicide, the name of the person who has killed himself *if* he is well known, [and] the reason for the act…" (p. 115, emphasis added). Hyde later makes an example of a 14-year-old who killed herself when her parents divorced as a member of the "pathetic" species of the human-interest story. From the top of the *Chicago Record-Herald* story:

> Rissa Sachs' child mind yesterday evolved a tragic answer to the question, "What shall be done with the children of divorced parents?"
> She took her life. (Hyde, 1912, p. 239)

Readers of Rissa Sachs' story also bore witness to the method of the girl's demise: "[S]he retired to her room, turned on the gas and, clothed, lay down upon her bed to await death and relief..." (p. 240). Meanwhile, Harrington and Frankenberg (1912) give suicide top billing in a rundown

of news available at the police department: "information regarding suicides, murders, misdemeanors, fires, and petty crimes" (p. 63). Williams and Martin (1922 [1911]) continue the run of suggesting that suicides are rarely reported to avoid copycat activities while simultaneously providing extensive advice on how to cover them: "[T]he coroner often receives news of suicides that never reaches the police. … The three chief news elements that enter into suicide stories are: Means of death, cause of the act, and the prominence of the person who took his or her life. On these the reporter bases the importance of his story" (p. 108).

A Mid-Century Transition

As the 20th century progressed, attitudes toward suicide transitioned from characterizations of crime and curiosity toward orientation as a mental health issue requiring sympathy and sensitivity. I did not find a historical study of suicide coverage in American journalism, but Richardson's (2015) analysis of suicide reporting in two major Canadian newspapers from 1844 to 1990 is the next best thing – especially since the Canadian papers often picked up U.S. suicide stories to display. Richardson argues, "The emphasis on the mental state of individuals who killed themselves continued to grow in the twentieth century, foreshadowing the current highly medicalized conception of suicide that is now widely accepted" (p. 434) and that coincided with changes in journalistic approach.

Journalism discourse began a general shift in the 1920s and '30s away from emphasizing personal human interest stories and episodic disasters toward more institutional and public-oriented reporting commensurate with the post-World War I professionalization of journalism (see Schudson, 1978). Harwood (1927), for instance, mixes a much broader range of political and civic stories with more traditional fire and mayhem examples. However, suicide remained a prominent news topic during this era. One of Harwood's favored stories is a *New York Times*

yarn about an old-timer musician who gassed himself to death in his room after he stopped finding work because he refused to keep up with the times and play jazz (p. 242). Robertson's (1930) *Introduction to Modern Journalism* also uses a drawn-out attempted suicide as an example of feature writing. MacDougall's (1935 [1932]) predecessor volume to his half-century-spanning *Interpretative Reporting* spends several contiguous pages (304-308) on suicide coverage, within a chapter titled "Illness and Death; Suicide."[12] MacDougall writes that a suicide story should cover "(1) The motive (2) The method (3) The probable circumstances leading up to the act [and] (4) The coroner's inquest" (p. 304). He also engages in nuanced discussion about whether editors should withhold suicide as cause of death, arguing that "[t]he rumors which circulate as to the motive of a suicide usually are much more damaging to a person's reputation than the simple truth would have been. A frank newspaper account puts an end to rumors" (p. 305). Aping the contradictions of his predecessors, MacDougall cautions against "dramatiz[ing] the means of a suicide or printing a story that might encourage another to take his life" (p. 305) while also highlighting "leads to short stories of suicides illustrat[ing] how the motive or circumstances of a suicide may be played up more dramatically" (p. 307).

The remainder of MacDougall's editions offer some hints as to how textbooks and journalism practices reflected gradual changes in social views of suicide during the middle part of the 20th century. While MacDougall gives basically the same tonal treatment to suicide coverage in his *Interpretative Reporting* editions from 1938, 1948, 1957, 1963, 1972, and 1982, there are subtle substantive changes in the middle editions that grow more apparent in the later volumes. In MacDougall's fourth edition, in 1963, the term "Suicides" is dropped from the "Illness and Death" chapter title, but the chapter's content on suicide coverage is unchanged. The

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[12] The table of contents lists the chapter title with a semicolon; the chapter itself uses a colon. The semicolon makes more sense, as the chapter is organized into four parts: Illness, Obituaries, Morgue Stories, Suicide.

fifth (1968) and sixth (1972) editions include an example of a private person hanging herself at

home – a story almost certain to be untouched by modern mainstream news organizations

(Richardson, 2005; Yaqub, Beam, & John, 2017). But by the eighth edition (1982), the primary

example has shifted from a private suicide to a public figure leaping to his death in a public

place, which meets the contemporary bar for newsworthiness (Jamieson, Jamieson, & Romer,

2003) due not primarily to human pathos but to prominence, the unusual method, and a duty to

lay out factual details of the incident. The ninth and final *Interpretative Reporting* volume,

completed posthumously by a former student listed as second author (MacDougall & Reid,

1987), tightens the suicide section to a page and half, with much less exposition on method and

no example story. But the essential 1930s tone regarding suicide coverage ("If the person does

not leave a letter explaining motive, the reporter must investigate whichever motive seems most

probable" [p. 276]) survives. The general mood of MacDougall's later editions, still echoing his

earliest work, did not keep up with changing mainstream consensus on the news value of

suicides.

Commensurate with the broader cultural transition in how suicide was viewed, journalism

textbook authors in the mid-20th century displayed an aggregate ambivalence regarding the

journalistic attention suicide warranted. Individually, authors covered a wide spectrum between

caution and enthusiasm in discussing the reporting of suicides. I found no references to suicide

coverage in Wolseley & Campbell's (1949; 1957) *Exploring Journalism*, Mott's (1958) edited

New Survey of Journalism, Charnley's (1959; 1966; 1975; 1979) *Reporting*, or Bond's (1961) *An

Introduction to Journalism*. On the other end of the spectrum, Bush (1965), a contemporary of

MacDougall's, actually opens his *Newswriting and Reporting Public Affairs* book by depicting a

hypothetical reader stopping on the headline "Jonesville Woman Attempts Suicide" after bypassing a less interesting story about a coal miners' strike:

> Mrs. Smith read only the first two paragraphs because the woman mentioned was the wife of a laborer on the other side of town and unknown to Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Smith had been attracted by the headline, however, because the words "Jonesville," "woman," and "suicide" were very strong cues for her reading interests. (Bush, 1965, p. 3)

Bush later reprints an undated narrative from the *San Francisco Chronicle* of a man who threatened to shoot himself in a bar, was apparently talked down by a priest, and then in a surprise ending shot himself anyway (p. 79-80). These prominent, casual mentions of suicide reporting in a textbook constitute a reversion to earlier 20th century values, from an author who had published his first text before 1940 and therefore experienced his formative years in a different era. It's an approach similar to MacDougall's, whose treatment of suicide fell within journalistic norms in his early editions and felt antiquated by the later ones.

Most mid-century texts are more subtle, even characteristically contradictory, in their discussion of suicide. The primary advice is less about explicitly protecting families or avoiding stigmas and more about exercising reportorial caution in characterizing a death as a suicide without official sourcing. Neal (1949), for instance, addresses suicide in a brief paragraph under a section on "office policy" for handling sensitive crime stories. Even if the facts indicate a suicide "[b]eyond doubt, … the paper does not suggest this possibility until the coroner or medical examiner returns his official findings" (p. 287). Capturing the changing sensitivity of the times, Neal adds that sometimes official records "will report 'accidental death' or will omit any reference to self-destruction" (p. 287). Meanwhile, Warren (1959), under a chapter titled "Accidents, Fires and Suicides," asserts that suicides "are news and newspapers do not hush them up, especially if they concern prominent persons, spectacular or unusual circumstances" (p. 155). But Warren, while advising reporters to seek spectacular suicides, also allows for

downplaying or ignoring suicides with "no impelling news element" (p. 155), in line with the broader transition from affect-driven human interest coverage to decisions based on explicit news values. Warren also discourages poor taste or "using the power of suggestion to encourage others who are considering suicide to go through with it" (p. 155-156). And he encourages reflection by asking readers at the end of the chapter to "[d]iscuss the treatment of suicide news" (p. 156).

As with MacDougall's gradual changes across succeeding editions, the shift in other mid-century authors' tone and emphasis from earlier to later volumes helps illustrate broader epistemic changes in social and journalistic attitudes toward suicide. Like Neal (1949), Johnson and Harriss' (1942/1952) *The Complete Reporter* urges care in identifying a death as a suicide without specific, official attribution. Johnson and Harriss also contradictorily argue that "*The newspaper should recognize suicide as an unfortunate social problem,* not as an excuse for a sensational story" (p. 143, emphasis in original), then advise that "[a]n unusual method or motive is usually the feature" of a suicide story, "unless the person's prominence overshadows that feature" (p. 196). While *The Complete Reporter's* fourth edition (Harriss, Leiter, & Johnson, 1981) takes a similar approach to the earlier volume, there is more emphasis in the later work on caution and less on enthusiasm: "The method of suicide is usually described in general terms, with few details of methods that might be suggestive for others contemplating suicide," the authors write. "...Under no circumstances should the reporter attempt to treat a suicide story in a lighthearted or humorous manner" (p. 280, 281).

Likewise, in 1962, Hohenberg writes that "[a]n apparent suicide is one of the most difficult crime stories to handle" (p. 285) but focuses, like previous authors, on exercising care in attributing suicide to official sources, rather than concern about social stigmas or invasion of

privacy. By the fifth edition (1983), however, Hohenberg has shifted emphasis toward

conditional considerations for the family:

> Sometimes bereaved families will ask newspapers to omit obituaries for one of their number. This often happens in the case of a suicide, particularly when the person involved has never before figured in the news. When such things are published in large cities, some families feel a sense of shame and do not understand why their personal tragedy should be publicized. … The request may be granted, or the editor may decide that the affair *must* be published, if only in a few lines, just to show that the paper plays no favorites. It's not the kind of thing over which an editorial conference is called." (Hohenberg, 1983, p. 125; emphasis added)

The 1970s appear to continue a general transition from textbooks treating suicide as a

particularly affecting human interest story in the early 1900s, to a more routine crime story in

mid-century, to a 21st century exemplar not of reporting and writing practices but of varying

editorial policies for handling sensitive material. The changes in textbook emphasis parallel

practical reporting trends: After the 1960s, the Canadian press began to focus on suicides

reflecting harder news values, such as watchdog reporting on jailhouse suicides or straight

reporting of murder-suicides, "while the everyday stories of local suicides, once common in the

nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century press, tapered out and disappeared for the most part"

(Richardson, 2015, p. 437). The drift away from covering private suicides roughly coincided

with new research by sociologist David Phillips in the 1970s linking media coverage of suicide

with higher subsequent rates, raising awareness of the copycat phenomenon that had been

articulated since the beginning of the century. Many newsrooms resultantly adopted "a standing

rule against covering suicides" (Richardson, 2015, p. 440), and those guidelines made their way

into textbooks.

Fedler (1973), for instance, mentions suicide in a broader paragraph about how

"Newspapers routinely omit obscene or scandalous details" and "ignore many cases handled by

the police in their communities [such as] a young girl's unsuccessful attempt to kill herself. …

They report suicides, but seldom describe the precise methods used" (p. 80). A brief chapter on obituaries includes exercises in which suicide is listed as the cause of death, but the chapter itself offers no guidance on how such deaths should be reported. Fedler's most recent edition, now Bender et al. (2016), contains this reference: "Some causes of death, such as suicide or drug overdose, have social stigmas attached to them. In such cases, news organizations may report the death, including the cause, in a short story separate from the obituary, carefully attributing the cause of death to some authority, usually the coroner" (p. 339).

Izard, Culbertson & Lambert (1973) also come at suicide indirectly, not separating it out as a category of coverage like older texts but working it into a discussion of newsroom guidelines: "[O]ffice style is more than spelling. It frequently will include statements of policy on such matters as identification of a juvenile or first offender, use of suicide stories or how to handle crank telephone calls or bomb threats" (p. 53). Mencher (1989) writes: "Unless a suicide is committed in a spectacular fashion, the story of the death should be treated no differently from other obituaries. Newspapers and stations usually play down the means of death. But how the person died should be mentioned somewhere in the story" (p. 290). In a 1991 text, Mencher both suggests a vanishing taboo against listing suicide as a cause of death in obituaries, for which he offers little evidence, and advises that newspaper policies on the matter vary: "Most are frank; some avoid the word. The *Bangor* (Maine) *Daily News* uses the term 'died unexpectedly,' and the *Eagle-Tribune* in Lawrence, Mass., uses the words 'short illness' for suicides" (Mencher, 1991, p. 396).

Several authors around this time also harken back to the news approaches of early 20th century editions. Mencher (1991) returns to suicide in a chapter on taste, presenting the affirmative case for publishing a photo of woman jumping from the top of a brick building in

human-interest terms: "The pictures of a 71-year-old woman leaping to her death show us that old age, ill health and loneliness take their toll in many ways that this youth-oriented culture prefers to turn its back on" (p. 593). Burken (1979), in discussing relative news value, explains that a random elderly London woman's suicide note referencing a UK currency shift merited coverage in the U.S.: "She wrote that she was worried about her garden, a boiler in her house 'and now this decimal calculator. It's worrying me that I cannot understand it'" (p. 45). Burken raises suicide again in a section on invasion of privacy, where she reprints a Michigan newspaper editor's defense of prominently displaying several images of police talking a man off a ledge:

> "Emotional illness is no different than any other illness. It requires treatment and it can be cured. … The man on the ledge in our June 5 pictures is now receiving medical attention. We sincerely hope that he will not have to move out of town. If he does, it will not be because of our pictures but because of a narrow-minded community attitude toward mental illness." (Burken, 1979, p. 178)

While this editor's argument addresses the stigma question in a manner some might consider naive, it is still a notable change from his early 20th century peers, whose common-sense recognition of suicide as a compelling human interest story reflected no concern for reputation and no need to justify publication.

Contemporary Suicide Standards

A more nuanced concern for the well-being of those suffering mental illness, and decreasing interest in maudlin human-interest features that characterized much early 20th century reporting, reduced suicide to an afterthought in most journalism textbooks by the end of that century. In the 2000s, textbook references to sensational suicides have all but disappeared. There are no apparent references to suicide in Stovall's fifth (2002) or eighth (2012) editions. Gibbs and Warhover's (2002) and Rich's (2007) sole noted examples of suicide stories involve combination murder-suicides – a great distance conceptually from the private desperate acts of

individuals highlighted in century-old texts. Rich briefly mentions suicide along with AIDS as policy concerns in reporting certain causes of death in obituaries. Brooks et al. (2008) spend more time discussing the stigma of AIDS-related deaths than suicide, stating matter-of-factly that "[s]ome newspapers include suicide as the cause of death in the obituary, others print it in a separate story, and still others ignore it altogether" (p. 223). Lanson and Stephens (2008) argue for specifying AIDS-related deaths, because through underreporting, "the disease's true toll is hidden from the public" (p. 268-269). This would be a logical place to broach suicide on the same terms, but the authors don't even take it up here, nor does Kershner (2009) in a discussion of obituary euphemisms. Kershner's only apparent mention of suicide is a brief acknowledgment that "many editors decline to report news of suicides in order to avoid encouraging others to imitate that behavior" (p. 151).

Harrower (2010) cites "a national survey of managing editors" reporting "62 percent said they never use the word *suicide* in obits" (p. 96). Scanlan & Craig (2014) engage in perhaps the most thoughtful discussion of my 21st century sample, making the case that under-covering suicide downplays its significance as a public health problem and citing the Poynter Institute's Bob Steele saying "journalists face three 'ethical pressure points' with any suicide: responsibility to the family, deterring copycats and avoiding sensationalism" (p. 432). The authors argue that suicide should be covered under advice from authorities such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to minimize the negative effects of such coverage.

Recent studies investigating journalistic coverage of suicide demonstrate how journalism textbooks and professional practice have followed similar paths in reconstructing suicide as a hard-news story featuring special ethical considerations rather than a routine human-interest story ripe for exploitation. While suicide has been an afterthought in 21st century textbooks, and

journalists approach suicide with self-reported reluctance (Beam, John, & Yaqub, 2017; Jamieson, Jamieson & Romer, 2003), the subject has not disappeared from news reports but has changed in character and involves some contradiction between what journalists say and what they do. Beam, John, and Yaqub's title for their interview-based study of journalism practice is telling: "'We Don't Cover Suicide … (Except When We Do Cover Suicide).'"

Much contemporary research on suicide coverage in the 21st century focuses on health experts' consensus guidelines for how to report suicides without doing further harm, and journalists' rhetorical and practical responses to those guidelines. The recommendations

> encourage journalists to cover suicide responsibly by avoiding prominent placement of the story, sensational headlines that will draw undue attention to the act, and overly detailed descriptions of the method. In addition, the recommendations sensitize journalists to the potential for imitation if the suicide victim's act is described as noble, romantic, or an effective solution to a life problem. The recommendations encourage journalists to provide information about likely precursors to suicide that can be treated, such as depression and substance abuse. (Jamieson, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003, p. 1644-1645)

Through content analysis and interviews with journalists, Jamieson, Jamieson, and Romer conclude there was little adherence to a set of CDC guidelines issued in the 1990s, and that many reporters weren't aware or were dismissive of research connecting sensational reporting with copycat suicides or "contagion." Jamieson, Jamieson, and Romer did establish the general contemporary practice of ignoring suicides considered "private," focusing only on disruptive public suicides or the suicides of public figures. "Throughout the interviews, reporters expressed a sense of unease about covering acts of suicide at all. Words such as *personal* and *private* recurred in statements expressing reluctance to cover the act" (Jamieson, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003, p. 1649, emphasis in original). But reporters were also committed to violating guidelines if they believed the stories were newsworthy. Murder-suicides, for instance, were not subject to soul-searching due to the overtly criminal nature of the act, allowing "the private space of the

home to be treated as if it were the public sphere" (Jamieson, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003, p. 1653).

In similar research, Yaqub, Beam, and John (2017) found that, subsequent to the Jamieson et al. study, journalists had become familiar with and internalized most of the guidelines for reporting suicide. Interestingly, most journalists were not aware of national reporting recommendations but suggested their knowledge "was something they had gradually accumulated from years of newsroom experience" (p. 6) or speaking with local sources, an illustration of the habitus through which journalists are enculturated into common-sense norms and practices. Similar to the Jamieson et al. study, Yaqub, Beam, and John found that many reporters "profess great reluctance to write about suicide and … show extraordinary compassion toward suicide loss survivors" (p. 3), but also maintained a willingness to violate coverage guidelines if they were superseded by news judgment and tended to bristle at the idea of adhering to external recommendations – expressions of their autonomy.

That autonomy, as always, however, is tempered by the disciplining discourses of news judgment (for a detailed examination of the interplay between discipline and autonomy, see Chapter 6). Working from the same interview data, Beam, John, and Yaqub (2017) found that journalists making news decisions "begin with the assumption that a death by suicide seldom merits attention, and they ask themselves or a supervisor: Is this death something that we *must* report to our readers and viewers?" (p. 2, emphasis in original). A content analysis of suicide reporting in Australia bears out this reluctance, finding only 1% of suicides in that country were actually reported (Pirkis et al., 2007). To decide if a suicide warrants or requires coverage, journalists revert to the discipline of hard news values, such as prominence and impact, rather than the more personally and affectively driven human-interest value that supported suicide

coverage in previous decades. Human interest angles, or "compelling narrative" attributes, did come into play when journalists sought to use individual cases to illuminate larger, newsworthy issues: "When the cause of a suicide has been identified as part of a national trend and given a label that permits reporters to group instances, newsworthiness rises" (Jamieson, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003, p. 1654).

Beam, John, and Yaqub (2017) also suggest that journalists gravitated toward suicides among young people, often because such deaths connect to larger social issues such as identity or bullying. Journalists noted that schools had become more vocal with outreach in the wake of student suicides and that parents often clamored for additional information. This research is supported by an example in a contemporary journalism textbook: The same *Eagle-Tribune* whose euphemistic policy toward characterizing suicide deaths was noted by Mencher (1991) a few paragraphs ago faced accusations of under-reporting an exceptional case in the early 2000s. Lieb (2009) excerpts an editor's column explaining and apologizing for not reporting the cause of death of an 11-year-old boy who killed himself at home: "We didn't include that fact … out of sensitivity to the boy's family and because of the newspaper's policy of only reporting suicide that's committed in public or by a public or well-known figure" (Lieb, 2009, p. 287). The editor went on to concede that the case had been so unusual, and had been made unusually public due to outreach from the boy's principal, that demand for the full story called for an "exception" to the paper's policy that editors were late to recognize. This is an example of public pressure contributing to Foucault's idea of panoptic discipline, prompting journalistic arguments that they *have* to cover unsavory stories (Beam, John, & Yaqub, 2017).

I would take the finding about coverage of youth suicides, though, with a grain of salt. As noted above, some texts point out particular sensitivity to the privacy of young people or wishes

of families. An Australian study suggested "the media may exercise some caution and sensitivity with particularly vulnerable groups, such as young people, who are known to be particularly susceptible to the copycat effect" (Pirkis et al., 2007, p. 281). Beam, John, and Yaqub (2017) themselves note respondents would "sometimes ignore an otherwise 'newsworthy' suicide to accommodate a family member's request or out of fear of copycat behavior" (p. 14). In most of the examples where a youth suicide is covered, other hard-news values tend to intervene. The 11-year-old noted above was an unusually young age for suicide. The *Washington Post* in late 2017 published a highly viewed story that detailed text messages between a 15-year-old boy and his friend in the days leading up to his "suicide by cop" (Cox & Mount, 2017) – but that case met several criteria for publication described in the above literature: It was public, in that the boy was killed by police; it involved a "labeled" trend, suicide by cop (see Beam, John, & Yaqub, 2017) that could be illuminated by a compelling individual narrative (Jamieson, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003); the age of the boy was unusual for an already unusual method of ending one's life; and the story was leveraged to report a near doubling in annual youth suicides over the past decade.

My local paper, the *Lansing State Journal,* similarly used a teenager's suicide to frame an issue story about school employees' responsibility to monitor students' mental health and alert parents to problems (Greco, 2017). But this was a story because the parents publicly blamed their school district for ignoring warning signs. When the boy died, six months earlier, by stepping in front of a train, the circumspection described in textbooks and journalists' interviews above dominated. His death was announced in a news brief (Palmer, 2016), followed up the next day with details of the school he attended and official reaction (Haxel & Palmer, 2016). But neither story reported suicide as the cause of death, and even in the story reporting that the school district had identified the boy by name, the newspaper explicitly chose not to identify him. It was

only after his parents became activists that the paper delved into details of the boy's mental health struggle and intentional death.

For an example contrasting how some journalists treat a more "private" and less unusual teen suicide as compared to more "newsworthy" suicide deaths, I can offer another case study from the same newspaper, which arose as I was composing this chapter. On a Tuesday morning in December 2017, a Lansing man and his wife were found shot to death in what police quickly ruled a murder-suicide culminating a relationship infused with domestic violence, a circumstance that often prompts aggressive coverage (Jamieson, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003). The *Lansing State Journal* published a detailed story on its website that afternoon and on its front page the next morning, complete with photos, video clips, and interviews with neighbors (Haxel and Palmer, 2017).

On that same Tuesday, a 17-year-old boy at my daughter's high school killed himself at home. Administrators sent a candid letter to parents, identifying the boy with the parents' permission, on Wednesday morning, even as the local paper's murder-suicide front page was circulating. The next day, the paper posted a follow-up on the murder-suicide focusing on the victim wife. But I could not find a single word that week about the 17-year-old boy's private death on the paper's website: not searching by name, by the name of the high school, the term "suicide," or the paper's obituaries. Google News results indicated no local television station had covered it either.

Surely a compelling human narrative was available in the boy's death – distraught parents, reflective teachers, bewildered classmates. Such a story may well have been a glorified textbook example in the early 1900s, or perhaps a reluctantly reported contemporary story if enough parental pressure had been applied – as it was in the earlier case of the boy who stepped

in front of a train. But in this instance of teen suicide, absent other, harder news values, this human interest story wasn't news at all.

Conclusion

In this chapter I zeroed in on a particularly enigmatic news value as described and exemplified in journalism textbooks: human interest. From early conceptualizations as the basic foundation of news, wherein "the human interest" was what made a story newsworthy, the value took on a special role as the sole conduit for any emotional content that a news event or its participants might possess. Cordoning off the emotional aspects of human endeavor in a single value allowed the other dominant values – timeliness, prominence, proximity, unusualness, impact, conflict – to serve the increasingly central professional ethos of "objectivity," suffused in modern rationalism and applied to any news deemed to be important or in the public interest. Such a Cartesian split helped produce a century's worth of important news stripped of affective appeal and emotional entry points, cuing audiences to the same detachment from public affairs that journalists imposed on themselves to remain ostensibly impartial.

I have also shown that, while the conceptualization of human interest as a uniquely emotion-laden value applied to otherwise newsless occurrences remained constant over the 122 years of my textbook sample, its relative significance in news judgment diminished over the course of the 20th century. This change coincided with mainstream journalism's increasing concern with reporting official news, monitoring government activities, and conceiving conflict as a series of institutional and political clashes more than the daily inter- or intra-personal struggles so often featured in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As an example of this transformation, I presented a case study of textbooks' treatment of suicide, once a central feature of human interest and romanticized drama, now a brief aside in discussions of taste or style.

Specifically, explication of suicide coverage has drifted over the decades from a major category of news appearing in chapter titles and featuring extensive examples of detailed, harrowing reports of both successful and unsuccessful attempts; to brief buried asides about whether to state in an obituary line that suicide was a cause of death. As demonstrated above, by the 21st century, suicide was no longer a human interest story at all, and in fact its human interest elements were generally to be overlooked out of sensitivity to families and to prevent "contagion" or copycat attempts. The private pathos, the driving demons behind a suicidal act were no longer newsworthy but rather nobody's business. Now, if suicide was to be covered, it was under the standards of the "hard" news values: public impact, unusualness, prominence. The news values themselves did not change, but the conceptualization of suicide as an expression of news values flipped. And because suicide came to be a hard news story, it also began to fall under the Foucaultian disciplinary regime whereby reporters and editors did not judge a good story on their own feelings, as human interest allows, but rather faced circumstances in which news principles led them to conclude they *had* to cover certain events, even if they didn't want to (e.g. Beam, John, and Yaqub, 2017).

Tracking a century's worth of texts, there is no overt discussion of this shift nor clear explanation of authors' opinions about why a private suicide was regarded as an event to play up in the early 20th century and as an event to play down in the early 21st, even as the core articulated news values around timeliness, prominence, proximity, unusualness, conflict and human interest remained relatively constant. Grounded in Foucault's concept of epistemes, Richardson's (2015) history of suicide's gradual transformation from a sin and a crime to a mental health issue offers some clues to the surrounding social and cultural influences disciplining reporters' and editors' changing perceptions of good taste and newsworthiness. The

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above-mentioned pattern of news conceptions transforming from the personal and emotional to

the public and detached is further explanation. Together, these findings are a reminder that news

is a choice, albeit a subtle one, and that journalists making one kind of choice one day can

choose something different the next. As we will continue to see in subsequent chapters,

journalists often forget that these choices are available.

CHAPTER 5
NATURALIZING CRIME, CONFLICT AND "BAD" NEWS

"Everything in the news is damaging"

– a reporter, quoted in Yaqub, Beam, and John (2017, p. 11)

"Americans, it seems, like a good fight and consider life as a whole to be a struggle," writes MacDougall (1935 [1932], p. 58) in the first of his run of journalism textbooks that would stretch into the late 1980s. "The strong survive, the weak succumb, and the side lines cheer the winners." That sentiment pretty much sets the tone for news judgment in the professional era of journalism that took hold in the first decades of the 20th century (see Schudson, 1978), when "objectivity" became entrenched and journalists ostensibly and ostentatiously moved to the sidelines of civic life. Conflict, and the destruction it engenders, is the go-to news value in assessing a story's worth and which aspects of the story to emphasize. While journalism textbooks repeatedly hawk the public service value of journalism (Mari, 2015), they are equally quick to justify reporting of conflict for its own sake and to rationalize journalists' emphasis on bad news that can depress and demoralize societies with a wide range of well-rehearsed naturalizing explanations. Karen McIntyre, who researches the possibilities of psychologically edifying reporting under an umbrella of genres called "constructive journalism," notes that "[c]onsumers have criticized the American news media for publishing too much bad news for more than half a century" (McIntyre, 2016, p. 223) and that recent studies suggest "the news media's negativity bias disengages viewers and threatens democracy, and reporting in a more constructive, meaningful way brings back audiences" (McIntyre & Sobel, 2017, p. 5).

Journalistic habitus has a long way to go before it fully embraces the idea that the "public interest" means news that *helps* publics rather than merely interesting or informing them. The quote at the top of this chapter is not necessarily representative – journalists fall along a broad

spectrum of attitudes toward balancing information and harm – but it constitutes an important aspect of discourse that fosters many news judgments. The full quote, from a study on journalists' suicide reporting decisions cited in the previous chapter, comes amid a discussion of journalists' perceived obligation to reveal as much and withhold as little as possible, irrespective of consequences: "[A]s far as the impact on the public, to be honest, I don't care. Do my readers need to know this? That might weigh into [my decisions] but whether it hurts the people – my god, no – because everything in the news is damaging" (Yaqub, Beam, and John, 2017, p. 11).

Journalists' predilection for the negative is justified and naturalized in part through what Harold Lasswell (1948) called the "surveillance" function of the mass media. The argument goes that human beings have an instinctive tendency to surveil their environment for potential threats, and that they direct disproportionate attention to information that may signal danger, which helps explain "why so much news involves misfortune, disaster, or deviance" (Shoemaker, 1996, p. 33). This evolutionary tendency has been extended to explain journalistic practices such as the "watchdog" role, whereby the press monitors the actions of government to raise alarms of malfeasance for intermittently attentive publics (Bennett & Serrin, 2005). In this way, the press can remain vigilant on behalf of publics who need not be thoroughly or constantly informed, but can be aroused at need (Graber, 2003).

Of course, for early humans, surveillance work was based on what the senses could detect within hearing, seeing and smelling range, which limited the potential dangers a person could notice in any given hour or day. In the contemporary environment, humans surveilling the "landscape" for threats via the media can easily overwhelm themselves with real and imagined dangers from across the globe. Since humans have not evolved extensively since their savannah-dwelling days, they aren't physiologically adept at distinguishing between a real and present

danger and any virtual, distant danger (see Lee, 2004) that happens to cross their news feed. As Mitchell Stephens wrote even before the widespread adoption of the Internet, "[W]ith the vast pool of occurrences available to modern news organs, our ancestors' need to be alert to potential threats is now satisfied by daily, hourly immersions in a selection of tragedies so unrelievedly black that the world itself, always grim when viewed through the news, may appear actually to have darkened" (Stephens, 1988, p. 291).

In this chapter, I examine how journalism textbooks encourage reporters and editors to highlight the world's conflicts and disasters, armed with a litany of common-sense justifications that orient their judgment toward negativity and damage. I report these findings in the context of literature suggesting that journalistic emphasis on conflict and bad news can foster a distorted sense of social relations, increase fear, and depress civic participation. I also present literature suggesting that non-journalists often view news through less conflict-oriented, and more value-laden, frames. These varying ways of relating to news provide further evidence that journalistic values are not "natural"; they are constructed through contested, iteratively (re)structuring social formations that Bourdieu referred to as habitus, and they are enforced through self-governing mechanisms that Foucault called discipline – both phenomena of reinforcing self-regulation that camouflage the arbitrariness of journalists' common-sense decisions. Finally, I compare contemporary conceptualizations of "constructive" journalism (e.g. Gyldensted, 2015; McIntyre, 2015; McIntyre, 2017) with a brief early-20th-century movement in textbooks using that same term.

"World of Pain"

Consensus is fairly strong among academic and popular critics that the news media disproportionately highlight the negative side of humanity, nature, and events, often conjuring

conflict if it is not already present. "News tends to emphasize conflict, dissension, and battle," writes Schudson (1995, p. 9); "out of a journalistic convention that there are two sides to any story, news heightens the appearance of conflict even in instances of relative consensus." Similarly, Stephens (1988) writes, "Authorities thrive on good news, while news organs, though they may prefer victory to defeat for the society as a whole, thrive on disputes, errors and scandals among those who lead the society" (p. 189-190). Such a relentless focus on dissensus and irreconcilability, Stephens argues, can foster distorted perceptions about the world:

> [S]ince news generally is the public's primary source of information on such societal issues as the incidence of crime, the members of a society, when evaluating the social climate, too often mistake the unnatural for the natural, the extraordinary for the ordinary. Married people have less to fear from their spouses – and dogs have less to fear from the teeth of humans – than it would appear from following the news. (Stephens, 1988, p. 137)

A manifestation of this phenomenon is the front page of the *Boston Herald* from December 20, 2016 ("Top Ten honor", 2016). The full-color tabloid page collects images from three separate terrorism-related incidents – all in or near greater Europe – from the previous day and displays them above the stark reverse-type headline "World of Pain." Surely it was a painful day for the 16 individuals killed in those incidents, their families, witnesses, and emergency and health workers. But as an interpretation of global events, the headline is either too little, or too much.

Around 150,000 people on average die each day around the world, according to 2001 figures (Lopez et al., 2006). Of these, some 29,000 are children. Half of those children died from diseases such as "acute respiratory infections, measles, diarrhoea, malaria, and HIV/AIDS" (Lopez et al., 2006, p. 1747). In the U.S. in 2014, 43 people on average died by homicide each day – 30 of them shot to death (https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/homicide.htm). Taking these deaths into perspective, we do live in a world of sensational pain, and the Dec. 20, 2016, *Boston*

Herald headline would be appropriate on the cover of every newspaper on every day of every year. The one-time use of "World of Pain" to describe 16 particular deaths, then, only demonstrates how little attuned journalists are to shocking global pain on a daily basis.

From another perspective, unhappy, unexpected, violent, painful deaths are not sensational but typical. They are, statistically, ordinary, and therefore not particularly newsworthy by the values enumerated in Chapter 3. The front-page presentation of the 16 deaths highlighted by the *Herald*, then, is too much. At the very least, it is a construction based not on rationally derived criteria for judging events but on a very specific discipline that calls Western journalists to focus disproportionally on deaths resulting from what government officials choose to describe as terrorism.

Repeated exposure to such unremitting unpleasantness can support a distorted worldview that contributes to fear (e.g. Chagnon, 2015; Hall et al., 1978; Siegel & Usher, 2016), contraction, cynicism (e.g. Cappella & Jamieson), and helplessness. As journalism textbook authors Gibbs and Warhover (2002) put it, "The assault of crimes in our daily news leaves citizens feeling helpless and fearing that the system is out of control." One survey of Americans found 84 percent consider the news to be "depressing" (Patterson, 2000). An explicit concept illustrating this state of affairs is "mean world syndrome," a dimension of cultivation theory which has found that:

> [L]ong-term exposure to television, in which frequent violence is virtually inescapable, tends to cultivate the image of a relatively mean and dangerous world. Responses of heavier compared to matching groups of lighter viewers suggest the conception of reality in which greater protection is needed, most people "cannot be trusted," and most people are "just looking out for themselves." (Gerbner, 1998, p. 185)

Romer and Jamieson (2003) found that watching local TV news in particular heightened viewers' fears of crime, controlling for other factors. (Reading a newspaper did not.) In the

present day, when people increasingly get news online and through social media channels in which the provenance of the information is often overlooked (Mitchell et al., 2017), people's reactions to reports of violence can feed off one another. As media scholar Nikki Usher put it in an NPR interview:

> [W]ith increased coverage of terrorism, more people are thinking about terrorism as part of their daily world experience. This is compounded in another way, though, because now you have an entire conversation of people taking place online through Twitter, through comments on news stories. And so there's almost a compounding effect as people remind each other why there's a reason to be scared. (Siegel & Usher, 2016)

There are real-world consequences to people's lopsided perceptions of danger. For instance, despite dramatic decreases in U.S. crime in recent decades (Gramlich, 2017), "a perceived, and growing, need for self-protection appears to drive contemporary gun ownership in the United States" (Azrael et al., 2017, p. 51). Deborah Azrael, author of a study on gun ownership, described to the *Guardian* an atmosphere of *"increasing fearfulness"* (Beckett, 2016). One of her co-authors in the same news story said, "The desire to own a gun for protection – there's a disconnect between that and the decreasing rates of lethal violence in this country. It isn't a response to actuarial reality."

Donald Trump, as I illustrated in Chapter 1, both promotes and thrives on a media environment of escalating and self-reinforcing fear. He has become the poster child and leading catalyst for mean world syndrome. In an analysis headlined "Trump's rallying cry: Fear itself," *The Washington Post* pointed to rhetoric ranging from "his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention that conjured 'crime and terrorism and lawlessness,' to his dark inaugural address, with its vivid image of 'American carnage'" (Tumulty & Nakamura, 2017). Deflecting suggestions that his immigration policies might inflame the Muslim world, Trump said, "The world is a mess. The world is as angry as it gets. What, you think this is going to cause a little

more anger? The world is an angry place" (Brooks, 2017). A pastor who attended one of

Trump's post-election rallies described the atmosphere like this: "There was palpable fear in the

room. There was thick anger and vengeance. He was counting on it" (Edwards, 2017).

Journalists, in carrying out their common-sense news values, spread and amplify Trump's

message and affective resonance, leading introspective journalists such as *New York Times*

technology columnist Farhad Manjoo to argue that journalists and citizens should pay less

attention to Trump for their collective mental health:

> It's not that coverage of the new administration is unimportant. It clearly is. But social
> signals — likes, retweets and more — are amplifying it. Every new story prompts
> outrage, which puts the stories higher in your feed, which prompts more coverage, which
> encourages more talk, and on and on. (Manjoo, 2017)

Conflict and negativity don't just foment fear and anger among publics, they also depress

public-ness altogether by presenting politics as a spectator sport beyond the reach of ordinary

people to influence. Patterson (2013), for instance, notes how Senate passage of a major arms

treaty with Russia in 2010 "deliever[ed] what the headlines called 'a victory for [President

Barack] Obama,' as if that was somehow the crux of the issue" (p. 116). Similarly, the top story

in my *New York Times* email newsletter on Jan. 16, 2017, about an impasse that threatened to

halt federal government operations, was headlined, "As Shutdown Talk Rises, Trump's

Immigration Words Pose Risks for Both Parties" – as though the Democratic and Republican

organizations are the ontological end of U.S. politics instead of a means to produce government

that supports actual human citizens who face material risks when it fails. Political stories that

focus on strategy in elections and policy formation "activate cynicism" in news consuming

publics (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996). In politicized science stories, "conflict narratives …

undermine overall public trust in experts and government officials and reinforce public cynicism

about whether a problem can ever be resolved" (Nisbet & Fahy, 2015, p. 225). Civic cynicism

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and helplessness can help explain abysmal turnout rates in U.S. national elections (see Wallace,

2016), particularly among younger age groups (https://civicyouth.org/quick-facts

/youth-voting/).

The harms of consensus news values are not subtle or merely academic. World spiritual

leaders are among those who have called attention to the distorted views engendered by news

disciplines. Here are the Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama in a book of discussions

they co-authored:

> [Tutu:] Yes, there are many, many things that can depress us. But there also are very
> many things that are fantastic about our world. Unfortunately the media do not report on
> these because they are not seen as news. ((Dalai Lama, Tutu, & Abrams, p. 120-21).
>
> [Dalai Lama:] When bad things happen they become news, and it is easy to feel like our
> basic human nature is to kill or to rape or to be corrupt. Then we can feel that there is not
> much hope for our future. All these things happen, but they are unusual, which is why
> they become news. (Dalai Lama, Tutu, & Abrams, p. 121).

The Dalai Lama's comments stem right from a statement of the Buddha's: "Whatever a [person]

frequently thinks about and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of the mind"

(Goldstein, 2013, p. 107). This is a claim supported by contemporary scientific research, which

has found that habitual mind patterns often initiate human actions that are only later cognitively

processed and rationalized (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Repeated negative messages prompt

habitual negative mind states.

Journalistic approaches breeding fear and despair are not necessary or as natural as they

may appear. Journalists, in fact, gravitate to conflict emphases in news stories at a much higher

rate than non-journalists (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). They are invited to do so in the early

stages of their careers, some while taking college courses featuring introductory textbooks that

justify conflict as desirable, natural, and inevitable and go on to rationalize bad-news reporting

through dubious statistics and logical gymnastics. The remainder of this chapter offers a tour of

these textbook rationalizations, followed by a look at how some early 20th century texts and some early 21st century scholarship present alternative perspectives.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Textbook Conflict</h3>

The concept of conflict first appears as an enumerated news value in my textbook sample under "struggles for supremacy" in Bleyer (1916). It next shows up as "conflict" in Warren (1929) and then as "combat" in MacDougall (1935 [1932]). As an enumerated value, conflict gains steam through the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, ebbs during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, and then becomes pervasive from the 1990s through the present day. There is very little philosophical confrontation with conflict as a prioritized abstract in these texts; discussion manifests most frequently in common-sense statements about people's attraction to conflict and in defenses against the charge that newspapers publish too much crime and "bad" news.

Regarding the naturalness of conflict, Yost (1924) writes of an "instinctive attraction" (p. 36) to this value in all realms of human endeavor: "[N]o contest ever reaches so high an elevation of intellect or spirituality that there is no element of interest in the fight simply as a fight" (p. 37). An editorial reprinted in MacDougall (1938) adds that "human nature will have to change before crime, horror, scandal and lust can be eliminated from the pages of the honest newspaper" (p. 384). The chapter on police reporting in Mott (1958) claims that "newspaper accounts of crime are the only definite information received about the dangers and evils of present-day life" (p. 94). Mencher (1991) depicts conflict as the essential drive of history: "[T]he advance of civilization can be seen as an adventure in conflict and turmoil" (p. 60). Benson (1937) stresses the zero-sum nature of combat: "Whenever there is a contest, one side must win, and the other side must lose. Naturally the newspaper reader, if he is at all interested in the story of the contest, will take one side or the other" (p. 51). Warren (1959) genders this instinct:

"Within every human animal, especially males, lies an emotional chord which instinctively responds to a fight" (p. 22).[13]

Defenses against criticism that news is too negative usually take two forms: (1) dubious claims based on rough content analyses suggesting that crime news represents a smaller proportion of overall news than people perceive, and (2) claims that crime and disaster stories are so prominent because that's what readers want: "Wrongdoing holds a fascination for saint and sinner alike. Frequently we hear editors criticized for publishing 'too much crime news.' Too much or too little, they wouldn't publish it at all unless readers found absorbing interest in it" (Bond, 1961, p. 83).

Regarding the first defense, Charnley (1959) is representative:

Although sweeping criticism, frequently voiced by the uninformed, often declares flatly that 'too much crime news' is published and broadcast, the fact is that less than 5 percent of newspaper space goes to this kind of news — in some cases as low as 2 percent. A study of Indiana newspapers' use of the wire-service news available to them showed that crime news was kept in almost exact proportion to the other types of news. (Charnley, 1959, p. 42)

The 5 percent figure is updated without explanation to "less than 10 percent" in Charnley's second edition (1966, p. 38), calling attention to the figures' unreliability. As for the Indiana study, the conclusions might be spurious since the content examined is wire copy, and the news values of proximity and impact suggest that all but the most sensational crime stories tend to arise locally and therefore are covered by staff reporters.

But even if these percentages are in the ballpark, they don't speak to how prominently crime stories are played relative to other news (they're often at the top of front pages and news shows [e.g. Grabe, 1999]) in assessing the impact on audiences. This is a point Charnley (1966)

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[13] Which raises the question: What would news values be like if women had predominantly run newsrooms in the 20th century? (Anna Coote [1981] asked this, too).

acknowledges, briefly challenging the common-sense notions that either news judgment or audience interest justifies such practice. Harriss, Leiter, and Johnson (1981) neglect to consider story presentation when confronting critics in a chapter on covering "Religion, Philanthropy, [and] Promotion." The authors argue that "[a] systematic check of the news in almost every newspaper would show that a majority of it is 'good,' in the sense that it reports on the accomplishments of people and organizations" (p. 353). While it's possible that wedding announcements, church bulletins, business briefs, etc. may have outweighed crime coverage in pure column inches, such "good news" items are typically buried while carnage and strife are emphasized. This becomes clear enough when Harris, Leiter, and Johnson indicate on the following page what types of religion stories merit prominent display:

> A hotly contested pastor-versus-a-faction-of-the-congregation controversy … may be reported on the front page. A split in a major congregation, especially if it lands in the courts, or the filing for divorce by a popular minister or the leaving of the church by a local priest or nun to get married is a story that almost surely will get front-page play. (Harris, Leiter, & Johnson, 1981, p. 354)

Gans (1980), meanwhile, did conduct a systematic check of news in national television and magazine content in the 1960s and 1970s in his seminal study, *Deciding What's News.* Gans found crime and scandal accounted for a fifth of domestic news stories, not counting stories about the Vietnam War. Government conflict, resolution of government conflict, protests, and disasters accounted for most of the other categories. Small portions of airtime and column space were devoted to "rites of passage" – births, weddings, and deaths – and to a category he called "innovation and tradition," which created a narrow window for news of possibility (p. 16-17). Gans' empirical study suggests that textbook authors from the same era underestimated the volume of crime and scandal news, and over-estimated "good" news content.

Overall, textbook defenses of crime and conflict coverage rest primarily on authors'

endorsements of working journalists' common sense rather than sound empirical, philosophical

or ethical considerations. MacDougall (1935 [1932]) draws on *The New Republic* magazine's

survey of editors about their "opinions of the most important news events of the year just ended,"

noting that "[a]lways the result showed that stories with the greatest element of combat were the

most interesting" (p. 58). But, of course, this survey consists of editors re-affirming their own

judgments, not evidence that those judgments were valid. Invoking the discipline underpinning

news routines, Mencher (1989) writes of a reporter who "knows the pattern" of spot news

stories, whose first question to a dispatcher on the outbreak of a major fire was, "Any deaths?"

(p. 211). Bender et al.'s (2016) casual declaration about the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing

demonstrates the durability of this self-reinforcing common sense: "Editors from all over the

country had no difficulty deciding what to put on the front page of their newspapers the day after

the bombing. *There was only one news story*" (p. 13, emphasis added).

Several authors across many decades appeal to the news value of unusualness in

defending journalists' emphasis on negativity:

> Trains arriving on time, planes landing safely, and rivers remaining in their banks are not
> news. These are normal and customary occurrences. … Critics of newsmen often say:
> "Why don't you write more about good people instead of bad people?" The newspapers
> print plenty about good people, but goodness is commonplace. (Warren, 1959, p. 21-22)

> Deaths, destruction, crimes, fires, explosions, crashes ... Such events make news because
> we are accustomed to normalcy, and — thank heaven — disasters are the exception
> rather than the rule. That being the case, the press *must* cover such occurrences (Metz,
> 1977, p. 240, emphasis added)

> Admittedly, there is usually no story when people are doing what they are supposed to
> do. Sometimes there should be, if they do their duty uncommonly well or have done it for
> a very long time or do it under the burden of some handicap. Sources like these "good
> news" stories, and so do readers. (Brooks et al., 2008, p. 307)

> Some critics lament this focus on "bad" news, suggesting journalists should work harder
> to find stories about the many "good" things that people do. The reality, however, is that

by definition journalism will always focus on these types of stories because stories generally become news only when they break from the routine. (Lieb, 2009, p. 267)

Three thousand people enjoyed a concert. Is it fair in some ultimate sense to concentrate on the one person who was stabbed? Journalists *have to accept* the fact that *they can never be free* of this sort of philosophical bias. Subjective or not, they're going to write about the stabbing. (Lanson & Stephens, 2008, p. 20, emphasis added)

Viewing the range of explanations and defenses, we can see that textbook authors tie themselves in knots both in trying to understand readers' desires and in rationalizing journalists' decisions. Hough (1975), on a single page, asserts both that "Newspaper editors are ... painfully aware that the reading public tends to like good news and dislike bad news" and that, "[o]n the other hand, newspaper readers apparently enjoy conflict and violence" (p. 5). Authors' response to this conceptual whiplash is to argue first that journalists are only giving audiences what they want, and second that audiences who want something different don't understand news judgment.

A good case study of the range and insufficiency of explanations for journalists' bad-news focus is a grab-bag chapter section in Scanlan and Craig (2014). The section, misleadingly titled "Positive Versus Negative News: Striking a Balance," is heavily skewed toward justifying negative news. The authors first invoke the straw man, "What if the front page of the paper today reported that 800 flights took off safely from the local airport and landed without incident?" (p. 9) as though uncrashed airplanes are the only available positive occurrences on a given day. Scanlan and Craig follow this argument with the assertion that "[m]ost things go right, and it's only when they go wrong that the news media sit up and take notice" (p. 9), which does not suggest much intent to strike a balance between positive and negative. Their next attempt more directly addresses the balance claim:

When the Supreme Court upheld a ban on partial-birth abortions in April 2007, it was welcome news for abortion opponents but bad news for those supporting abortion rights. A balanced news story reflects that duality. News is not just a record of society's failures. It must also be a record of achievements. (Scanlan & Craig, 2014, p. 9)

While readers are trying to make sense of that argument, Scanlan and Craig come in with the coup de grâce, offering the following reductio ad absurdum example of how "Some news organizations strive to counter bad news with positive developments":

> After a beloved babysitter was found dead in her home, apparently the victim of her estranged husband who was charged with murder, the *Bradenton* (FL) *Herald* wrote about a memorial service celebrating her life. (Scanlan & Craig, 2014, p. 10)

There's a clear chicken-and-egg quandary in assessing whether editors are simply giving audiences what they want in presenting reams of crime and conflict news. It might well be that over decades, American audiences have come to expect and savor such stories at the expense of, say, essential policy debates or questions of social justice. I recall readership data from my old newspaper showing that "Local Crimes and Trials" was a top category of reader interest, and online metrics at my Internet hyperlocal news gig placed galleries of arrestees' mug shots among the most popular eyeball attractors. But this audience expectation might be conditioned by what editors have emphasized time after time as much as by intrinsic preference. Warren (1959), for instance, writes specifically of how politics, lacking physical combat, is intrinsically boring. Therefore, "To *inject* the element of struggle, the reporter must rely heavily upon figurative words and expressions. Hence his frequent employment of political journalese which approaches slang" (p. 421, emphasis added). Warren's implication that reporters should insert conflict where it doesn't exist shows that common sense and habitus play a large role in journalistic judgment.

But textbook arguments that combat is the dominant human interest are masculinist and overblown. As noted above, research (e.g. Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992, p. 75) suggests that audiences have been much less likely to prefer conflict frames than journalists, and much more likely to frame issues in terms of moral values and human impact than the news media have. Ordinary people who have appeared in news stories report disappointment with the non-

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constructive angles journalists select and perceive the press to work against citizens' interests (Palmer, 2017). Metz (1997) captures this by observing, "The credibility gap from which the press is undeniably suffering may exist in part because readers often don't agree with editors on what is important" (p. 9). Brooks et al. (2008) acknowledge that a predisposition toward conflict reflects a journalistic "bias" (p. 13), while Hohenberg (1962) simultaneously accepts and rejects claims of differing editor/reader priorities: first acknowledging that journalism critics see newspapers as "a catalog of horrors" (p. 65) but also claiming that "newspapermen much prefer good news to bad" and that "[i]t is sheer nonsense to imply that newspapers must have bad news to stay in business" (p. 65). Nevertheless, Rich (2007) reports an Education Writers Association study concluding that "readers want more education stories about substance and less about conflict" (p. 350). And Izard, Culbertson, and Lambert (1973) cite a study (Gieber & Johnson, 1961) suggesting that reporters sometimes played up conflicts in a California city, even though city officials strove for consensus. As Gieber and Johnson write, "[T]he daily reporters have used tricks of the craft such as pitting one source against another to generate a 'good' story" (p. 295). In his textbook discussion of news values, Stovall (2002) suggests that one reason conflict often appeals to journalists more than audiences is the low-hanging fruit it provides. If a conflict is evident, deep digging and reflection are often unnecessary: "Conflict is one of the journalist's favorite news values because it generally ensures there is an interesting story to write" (p. 114).

Several texts over the past half-century take up the discrepancy between the substantive coverage audiences are sometimes presumed to want and the superficially combative content they typically get. For instance, some authors acknowledge that journalists default too often to horse-race coverage of elections (e.g. MacDougall and Reid, 1987) and strategy-oriented coverage of policy news to the exclusion of more illuminating and empowering emphases. "The

newspaper should regard the voter as a citizen rather than as a pawn in the game of politics,"

writes Bush (1965, p. 537). "Most citizens," elaborate Gibbs and Warhover (2002, p. 161), "are

less concerned about the competition and the candidates' strategies than they are about what the

candidates stand for — and whether the candidates have some sort of track record that proves

they know how to translate their positions on issues into actions that benefit their constituents."[14]

Gibbs and Warhover make a point of offering cooperation and consensus – "Stories about people

who cooperate or reach agreement that enables them to achieve a common goal, sometimes

overcoming serious obstacles or conflicts" (p. 91) – as an alternative to traditional news values.

In a similar vein, Bush (1965) argues: "It is the practice of some newspapers to report debate

only because it is controversial. When such debate is mere name-calling and does not add to the

reader's understanding of the measure or does not assist the reader in making a judgment about

the councilman's ability or public attitude, it is usually not worth reporting" (486).

Hage et al. (1976) point out that modern political professionals are able to "exploit"

journalism customs "to the advantage of their clients" at the expense of citizens (p. 197), a

phenomenon I've illustrated in this dissertation with the political success of Donald Trump.

Advising reporters covering political conventions, Hage et al. write: "Because conflict is such a

traditional staple of news reporting, no reporter needs to be told to look for it. What he does need

to look for are the issues, the ideologies, the personalities, and the histories that underlie the

conflicts so that his report of the convention can help the reader to understand it..." (p. 197).

Charnley and Charnley (1979) acknowledge that "Misbehaving politicians and misbehaving

government often get a bigger share of the press spotlight than they merit" (p. 43). Hohenberg

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[14] This assertion was easier to believe before 2016. On its face, voter behavior in the 2016 presidential election seemed instead to support Bleyer's (1932, p. 36) assertion that "[i]n political campaigns the interest of many persons centers in the struggle for party victory and in the success of individual candidates, rather than in any direct results that will affect the individual voters."

(1978) writes, "Most American journalists think of conflict as an essential element in much of the news — from the town hall to the White House and from the playing fields to the divorce courts. But there is more to the news than conflict" (p. 90). Fedler et al. (2001) paraphrase a business professor who "claims news organizations focus on negative news because they believe it sells papers or increases ratings, but the practice actually may turn audiences away as they become saturated with a constant barrage of negative stories" (p. 112).

Constructive Journalism: Then and Now

One conceptual detour in over 100 years of emphasizing conflict and turmoil was a relatively brief period in the first third of the 20th century when authors explicitly advocated that socially deleterious stories be handled "constructively" – that is, in ways that might discourage readers from participating in such behavior themselves. This idea preceded a contemporary movement to package various journalistic practices that explicitly aim to improve communities, including "solutions journalism" and "civic journalism," into a conceptual category called "constructive journalism" (Gyldensted, 2015; McIntyre, 2015). While contemporary constructive journalism can be traced to principles found in innovations such as community, civic, citizen, solutions, and positive journalism, McIntyre (2015) argues it is "distinct in its intentions, methods, training, and commitment to journalism's core functions" (p. 10). Fundamentally, the concept involves pursuing serious news while mindful of emotional impact and future possibilities, seeking "to improve individual and societal well-being" (p. 9) by evoking positive affect, heightened self-efficacy, and engagement leading toward intention to act.

The early 20th century constructive efforts focused less on reader agency and more on using the power of the press to steer readers' thoughts toward proper causes and consequences of antisocial behavior. Such efforts might be a product of a time when the "transmission" or

"hypodermic needle" model of mass media – the notion that average people would simply take

mediated information at face value – was widely accepted. Here's Bleyer (1916):

> So-called "waves" of crime and suicide ... are often the result of suggestions given to morally unstable readers by newspaper stories of crime and suicides. By constructive treatment of such news, they [newspapers] attempt to reduce to a minimum these undesirable suggestions and to substitute for them suggestions that tend to prevent similar criminal and anti-social acts. (p. 9)

> And:

> In order that the crime story may have a deterrent effect, the crime must be shown to be wrong, even though the wrong-doer deserves some sympathy. … Constructive presentation of crime news may also include emphasis on underlying causes and responsibility ... since such emphasis leads readers to consider the necessity for changing the conditions that are directly or indirectly responsible for the criminal acts. (p. 46)

But Bleyer (1916) also had broader ideas in mind for constructive journalism that ran about a

century ahead of current efforts:

> Constructive journalism is not satisfied to present merely what readers are naturally interested in; it aims to give news that is significant to them from the point of view of their personal affairs as well as from that of the welfare of society. It likewise undertakes to create interest in significant news that of itself may not interest a considerable number of readers. (Bleyer, 1916, p. 6-7)

Yost (1924) took a similar position, introducing a discussion linking emotion and policy that

resonates with similar contemporary arguments (e.g. Papacharissi, 2015):

> [E]motional impression rightly directed ... is often as important as intellectual impression. At times it is even more important, for many of the greatest advances of civilization have been secured through the sweep of emotions aroused by information. It is no less true that the baser emotions may be aroused in the same way, and it is the task of the conscientious journalist so to discriminate in the selection of news of this character, and so to balance the essential publication of the events of wrongdoing that ever color the news of the day, with the news of the good and with instructive and constructive information, that the total and constant impression of his journal is for the betterment and advancement of society. (Yost, 1924, p. 37)

> Warren (1929), another constructive journalism advocate, is illustrative of the pro-state

and status quo nature of early constructive journalism conceptualizations: "[S]ome of the leading

papers zealously endeavor to encourage rather than discourage respect for law" (p. 200-201);

"[C]onstructive handling of crime news calls for emphasis upon the evil aspects of wrongdoing, upon punishment of a vicious act rather than glorification of the criminal, and upon some reference to the social consequences of the act" (p. 206). Warren made a similar case 30 years later in his updated *Modern News Reporting* (1959). Bleyer (1932) also returned briefly to the constructive theme he established in 1916 by stating crime news is constructive specifically "when it tends to deter readers from the commission of similar acts" (p. 212). MacDougall (1935 [1932]) quotes a newspaper editor arguing that crime news on its face is constructive "in that it informs the public about dangers and evils that should be met or corrected by the criminal law or procedure or by the police" (p. 332). As late as the 1970s, Hage et al. (1976) argue that "one of the hoped-for effects of thorough coverage of crime is to prevent it" (p. 146).

But MacDougall appears to abandon the concept of constructive journalism in his later editions, and few other authors explicitly take it up, though some do continue to pursue mitigating strategies for crime coverage. Neal (1949) suggests reporters avoid laying out methods for successful lawbreaking, refuse to glorify criminals, and take pains not to make crime seem more prevalent than it actually is. A chapter on newspaper policy in Mott (1958) singles out the *Christian Science Monitor* for "[a] policy of excluding news of crime and disasters and devoting its space to news of educational and constructive significance" (p. 256). Another chapter asserts, "It is not necessary to discuss here the many ways in which the better class of newspapers co-operate with the legal forces in winning public support for the suppression of crime and the upholding of law and order" (p. 97).

After 1960, the concept of constructive journalism all but disappears, popping up only in a quote from a Chicago editor about how, in contrast to the stunt journalism era of Nellie Bly,

"Today, most stories about state institutions are of this constructive type — calling attention to evils for the purpose of remedial action" (Hage et al., 1976, p. 255); and in an explanation of public journalism holding that "journalists should become more aware of how their work influences public life and hold themselves accountable for using that influence constructively" (Gibbs & Warhover, 2002, p. 331). The contemporary academic movement for constructive journalism aims to demonstrate how journalists who do consider the consequences of their work can help improve lives and communities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how journalism textbook authors have spent more than a century alternately acknowledging and denying, attacking and defending, rationalizing and reifying journalists' over-reliance on crime, negativity and calamity in news decisions. Authors often perform these contradictory positions in the same book, in the same chapter, on the same page. Conflict addiction is human nature; it's reader driven; it's reflective of reality; it's the engine of history; it's socially constructed; it's overplayed; it's a reader turnoff; it's not essential; it distorts reality. Journalism educators – trying to understand, introduce, and explain professionals' behavior to budding journalists – perform extraordinary logical and rhetorical gymnastics to produce a coherent narrative of news judgment. But they repeatedly fail to stick the landing.

The journalistic ethos is rife with such contradictions and paradoxes that frequently find journalists enacting practices in opposition to their declared aims, even as they claim internal consistency, which is the definition of habitus. In the following chapter, I dig deeper into the theoretical framework provided by Michel Foucault for understanding these paradoxes that constitute a journalistic habitus. Foucault's concept of discipline helps explain journalists'

irreconcilable pinging between their legally sanctioned, professionally asserted autonomy to make news decisions in the public interest, and their self-imposed, rationally dubious habits of practice that subvert the public interest to nebulous values bearing the stamp of common sense.

CHAPTER 6
THE DISCIPLINE-AUTONOMY PARADOX

Conjure in your mind the most iconic reporters in U.S. history. Who do you think of? Edward R. Murrow, who called out Joseph McCarthy's evidence-free Communist-baiting while most reporters credulously quoted him? Ida B. Wells, who crusaded against lynching in the 1890s while *The New York Times* covered "both sides" (see Mindich, 1998)? Walter Cronkite, who came out against the Vietnam War in "an analysis that [was] speculative, personal, subjective" ("Final Words," 2009)? Hunter S. Thompson, whose narcissistic rants shed oblique light on the underbelly of American life? Anderson Cooper, whose emotional on-air confrontation with a U.S. senator broke the facade of government efficacy after Hurricane Katrina?

These reporters represent multiple eras, platforms, techniques, and results, but they share a specific trait that rendered their work memorable across decades: They violated the journalistic norms and conventions that constrained their peers from engaging fully with the news of their times. They exercised a notable degree of autonomy in a field where the discourse of autonomy is rampant but the practice of autonomy is rare, where workaday journalists restrict their own behavior not to obey direct orders or laws, but rather to conform with unwritten cultural expectations circumscribing the possible words and deeds they may enact. These legendary news people performed a key paradox of journalism, a paradox Schudson (1978, p. 80) observed as "a theme in the memoirs of reporters: that the rules one learned as a beginner one had to unlearn to stand out..." Or, as MacDougall (1972) writes of the 1960s "New Journalists" and their forebears, "Certainly they were heretical as regards what came to be regarded as journalistically orthodox in the early part of the 20th century" (p. 180). Harrower (2010) offers an appendix of

stories by such iconic writers, gleefully extolling their idiosyncrasies without acknowledging the irony that he disparages their practices throughout the body of his book.

Journalism as a field is quick to assert its autonomy from other fields or influences. "The American newspaper is traditionally jealous of its independence" (Charnley, 1975, p. 133). The news media "have absolute discretion to define news and the form in which it is presented" (Hage et al., 1976), and "[m]ost journalists resist guidelines that would limit their freedom to cover an important story" (Fedler et al., 2001, p. 556). Journalists "tend to eschew and deride" codified ethical standards, "exhibiting what one columnist called an 'instinctive journalistic aversion to official codes of conduct...'" (Zelizer, 2017, p. 84-85). They are "'a collection of scruffy, recalcitrant characters that … don't like to be managed'" (Harrower, 2010, p. 287). They draw substantial bravado from the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which decrees that "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press…" and which means that "[t]he press, in effect, can do as it likes" (Charnley, 1975, p. 142), because it's "legally entitled to print almost anything" (Kershner, 2009, p. 149). Journalists resist any licensing as "a form of governmental control of the press" (Harriss, Leiter, & Johnson, 1981, p. 11), and most "define *any* demand for accountability … as a violation of the sanctity of the newsroom" (Glasser & Gunther, 2005, p. 389). They practice with what Zelizer calls journalism's "seemingly untouchable authority: its reliance on practices that unfold largely behind closed doors; its insistence on power without commensurate degrees of accountability…" (Zelizer, 2017, p. 103). One reporter in a study of Iowa daily newspapers boasted, "We're beholden to nobody" (Mencher, 1989, p. 40).

And yet, journalists collectively operate within a maze of norms, both articulated and unarticulated, that constitute their professional ethos. For all their professed autonomy, they are

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constantly reminded through the mechanisms of governmentality of what they *must* and *can't* do. Journalists, Zelizer (2017) argues, "learn by osmosis... Their conventions and collective lore are embedded in routines that for the most part remain unarticulated and are informally and ritually passed among group members" (p. 244). This way of being resembles what Bourdieu calls *habitus*, the tenets of which are often self-enforced by individuals through what Foucault calls the *discipline* of the panopticon: People, always aware or concerned that they're being watched, regulate their behavior in the absence of any direct coercion or requirement. In this chapter, I draw on the social theories of Foucault and Bourdieu that I introduced in Chapter 2 to explore how the discipline-autonomy paradox of journalism theory and practice has played out in discussions of news judgment in textbooks over the past 122 years: Are journalists free to decide what's news, or aren't they? As with other paradoxes described in this dissertation, authors assert competing claims to journalistic autonomy and disciplinary requirements within these texts, without apparent awareness of their contradictions.

A Self-Disciplining Field

Bond (1961) demonstrates the ease with which textbook authors veer from declarations of journalistic autonomy to disciplinary constraints. At the outset of his book, Bond insists: "A free press must be free from any compulsions, governmental or social. … Only public support can be accepted as a safe criterion" (p. 2). Of course, it's hard to separate dependence on public support from a social compulsion, but the sentiment is firm. Then, almost immediately following this declaration, Bond raises an exception for wartime, during which "this freedom does not protect the right to publish material that would undermine the public morale, encourage men to refuse to fight or give information to the enemy" (p. 3). This exception is followed with the assertion that, even in peacetime, "there are, of course, some freedoms which the press never had

– the freedom, for example to be libelous or obscene" (p. 3) and the corollary that "The better journalists impose upon their work as they impose upon themselves the censorship of good taste" (p. 5). Note how willing and hasty is this retreat from total freedom.

Charnley (1959) concurs with these restrictions: "The press almost without exception recognizes as valid the principles behind the restrictive laws that make false or malicious libel punishable and that forbid indecent and obscene publication" (p. 15). In a later edition, Charnley (1975) offers an epigram from the Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitzyn, in a 1974 interview with Walter Cronkite, precisely juxtaposing the autonomy that permits journalists to do as they please with the discipline that prevents them: "The press must be totally free with respect to everything external to it. But internally it has to control its freedom" (Charnley, 1975, p. 9). Mencher (1991) suggests much the same:

> Nothing in the law requires a reporter to be responsible. In fact, journalists sometimes flinch at the word. The reason for their discomfort is that some people and some organizations use the word as a club with which to beat journalists when the newspaper or station presents material they dislike.
>   Journalists reply testily that they can be as irresponsible as they like. That's understandable, and it is true. But beneath the surface, every reporter, every editor understands that journalism is a moral enterprise, that theirs is a calling practiced with honesty and diligence within the limits of verifiable truth and time. (Mencher, 1991, p. 51)

Yost (1924) further exemplifies the paradox in his discussion of the First Amendment. He points out that "The press is the only private institution that is so shielded by the mandate of that fundamental law" (p. 115-116) and argues, "The very nature of this right makes any limitation of its exercise a paradox unless the limitation is in itself essential to the protection of society" (p. 116-117). To this nearly essentialist argument, Yost then begins to tack disciplinary caveats, subjecting press freedom to statutory law, plus:

> the law of custom, of reason and conscience, that society has in all times enacted for self-protection from liberty unrestrained. … The very fact that the freedom of the press is so

guarded by the Constitution and so little restrained by law throws upon the press as an agency of public welfare an obligation to exercise that liberty wisely, fairly, righteously and for the public good. ... [I]t should never be forgotten that the right of free speech, however unlimited, is a sacred privilege that in itself confers an obligation to use it with decent moderation for the public purposes which alone can justify its maintenance. … [Therefore] if the abuse of this freedom seriously and imminently imperils the constitutional liberties of the people and the existence of a free government its restriction might be imperative. (Yost, 1924, p. 117, 118, 120, 121)

Texts from the first half of the 20th century were quick to embrace restrictions on coverage of courts in particular. Many authors suggest that reporters can be punished for publishing commentary that could prejudice a jury or simply that "holds the court up to ridicule or distrust in the public mind" (Warren, 1929, p. 222-223). Either of these transgressions is considered "a grave offense" (p. 223). In a later book, Warren (1959) adds that journalists dealing with libel and ethics issues confront a variety of "laws, written and unwritten, which limit the reporter for the purpose of ensuring and keeping the good will of the community" (p. 198). As late as the 1980s, authors continued to demonstrate enthusiasm for any press limits they considered reasonable. "In America, the press is free and powerful, but its freedom and influence are not absolute," writes Metz (1977, p. 12-13). "They are properly curbed by laws on libel, obscenity, invasion of privacy, contempt of court and other matters. Indeed, press freedom is not an end in itself, but a means of guaranteeing that ideas deserving a public hearing will have a public hearing." Harris, Leiter, and Johnson (1981) add:

> Every responsible editor knows that a newspaper simply cannot — and in a number of cases should not — print anything it wants to, even if the courts permitted. There are numerous reasons — social, economic, ethical — the First Amendment cannot be applied in its broadest, most literal sense to every story. (Harriss, Leiter, & Johnson, 1981, p. 62)

The philosophical contradictions described above, reflecting a variety of conflicting theories on the purpose and limits of the First Amendment (see Sanford & Kirtley, 2005) generally address the autonomy and disciplinary responsibilities of the press as a collective field. In the next

section, we will look at how journalistic disciplines regulate the conduct of the individual

reporter, through textbook language and metaphor that demonstrate remarkable consistency from

1894 to the present day.

Foucault, Discipline, and the Reportorial Body

The earliest texts in this sample put forth a model of news practice that most resembles

what Foucault called *sovereign power*, wherein the city editor lorded over reporters with

unquestioned authority, and reporters disobeyed at their peril: "The city editor is the absolute

despot of the local room and its editorial staff" (Shuman, 1894, p. 42). (At least one later author

echoes this language: "The city editor is king of his domain, the city staff" [Mencher, 1989, p.

40].) But the sovereign authority of the city editor quickly gives way, even within these early

texts, to metaphors that overlap the concept of discipline described by Foucault (1995 [1975]),

who used military hierarchy as a key exemplar of disciplinary apparatus. "The reporter is in

some respects in the position of the soldier," writes Shuman (1894, p. 47). "[H]e must carry out

his chief's orders or die in the attempt." Likewise, the new reporter's "duty is simply to do what

he is told under the directions of a general in the person of the editor who directs the movements

of the entire force" (Hemstreet, 1901, p. 46). For McCarthy (1906), "Discipline is as essential to

the success of a newspaper as it is to that of the army" (p. 11-12). Harrower (2010), 100 years

later, echoes his predecessors: "Publications are like armies. They need clear lines of authority to

avoid chaos" (p. 26).

Foucault describes the disciplining of soldiers as a "'...micro-physics' of power" (p. 139)

in which individuals are trained to self-regulate at the merest signal from a superior, their bodies

rendered "docile," to be "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (p. 136). It is in this spirit

that "[t]he discipline of the newspaper office, however hard it may be, teaches concentration of

both eye and brain" (Fowler, 1913, p. 77). We see the disciplining of bodies applied in

journalism texts across the years of my sample. Reporters are expected to "keep fit physically"

by avoiding long nights in bars and to "be mentally fit … [They] can't be going off on a tantrum

or tangent now and then" (Wolseley & Campbell, 1949, p. 89). Regarding news judgment, a

reporter "has served his apprenticeship when his mind can render a decision instinctively,

requiring only a flash of thought" (Byxbee, 1901, p. 19). Similarly, "'A reporter does not become

worth a good salary until he is so versed in what is expected of him that he can take initiative in

the absence of the city editor and do exactly what should be done'" (Neal, 1949, p. 39), so that

"[f]or veteran journalists, news decisions are reflexive" (Scanlan & Craig, 2014, p. 2). This

discipline applies across beats and responsibilities: "The general assignment reporter in a town of

25,000 and the AP's White House correspondent share a way of thinking, a set of techniques and

an approach to journalism," writes Mencher (1991, p. x). "Reporters … agree among themselves

what constitutes news" (p. 57).

Foucault (1995 [1975]) writes that "discipline proceeds from the distribution of

individuals in space" (p. 141), an observation that parallels the "beat" or "run" system described

in journalism texts throughout the 20th century, in which reporters are deployed to important

buildings where news routinely occurs: City Hall, police headquarters, the courthouse. "Each

individual has his own place;" Foucault writes, "and each place its individual" (p. 143). So

deployed, according to a *New York Times* promotional book, the reporter "is responsible for

everything that happens in his territory, and seldom has to be told what to do" (*New York Times*,

1941, p. 6). As Harwood (1927), anticipating Tuchman (1978), put it: "[R]eporters never wander

aimlessly around the streets, because the editorial offices have their sources of news so carefully

watched and the activities of their staff so carefully systematized that little of a routine character

ever escapes their vigilance" (p. 52). Likewise, "Individual journalists can't do as they please in a newsroom. They fit into a tight line of organization and must submit to a certain rough discipline" (Hohenberg, 1983, p. 54). In the 21st century, new technology produces a reportorial obligation to attend to even more places, some virtual: "If audiences multitask via Twitter and Facebook and YouTube, then today's journalists have to multitask there as well" (Kolodzy, 2013, p. 5).

Along with assigned places comes the obligation to be present at them, above all other priorities. "The dailies grant each man his day off," writes Seitz (1916, p. 68), "but it is often intruded upon and the sense of responsibility is always with him." Hohenberg (1962) reiterates a half-century later, "[T]he young journalist ... should be prepared to give all of himself to a demanding, exacting profession. If not, he should get out of it at once" (p. 5). Reporters covering civil unrest must even "expose themselves to danger if necessary to determine the magnitude of any street incident" (Hohenberg, 1983, p. 290). The same applies to covering disasters (Gibbs & Warhover, 2002). "To succeed as a reporter," Harrower (2010, p. 90) writes in a contemporary volume, "you've got to have moxie. Spunk. Guts. You've gotta be pushy. Nervy. Ballsy." Kolodzy (2013) quotes a reporter asserting, "You need to have the mentality that you're doing everything. … The main thing is to learn that it's all necessary" (p. 13).

In another parallel with Foucault, the reporter is also regulated by time and timetables:

In no other profession is timeliness such a constant factor or of such vast importance as in journalism. It is because of this timeliness that the reporter is unable to do things at his leisure or in a leisurely way. .... City editors keep a schedule of assignments and the reporter's name is written opposite the assignment given to him. By consulting the schedule, the city editor may know how soon each reporter may be expected to return to the office and where and how he can communicate with him... (Williams and Martin 1922 [1911], p. 162, 188).

In echoing this point in mid-century, Neal (1949) evokes another Foucaultian site of discipline, the factory:

> an establishment where things are done in an organized, systematic manner, with considerable emphasis upon schedule or timetable. A factory is also an establishment where many, diverse, and intricate departments and divisions work together in cadence and in harmony. … A newspaper is exactly that sort of establishment. (Neal, 1949, p. 18)

To perform in such a setting, Mencher (1991) advises reporters to "Be punctual," "Conform to office dress and appearance standards," and avoid "[b]reak[ing] office conventions" (p. 73). The epistemic disciplines that govern this factory-like work, grounded in "[s]ocial customs, history, geography, and economics," produce "conditioning factors … so well known to news workers, that two or twenty, or even two hundred, newsmen – given the same group of events from which to select – would make substantially the same decisions" (Charnley, 1959, p. 34). Further, "The reporter who devotes his working hours to events is governed by those events" (Hage et al., 1976, p. 56).

Journalists Disciplining Journalists

The idea that well-disciplined journalists tend to make similar decisions when confronted with the same set of facts and characters reflects the normalizing routines that render any deviating activity a risk. "Highly competitive newsrooms tend to produce similar, not dissimilar, accounts of the day's news … The greater the competition, the greater the incentives for homogeneity" (Glasser & Gunther, 2005, p. 395). The sense of looking over one's shoulder dates to the earliest texts in my sample. Shuman (1894, p. 49) remarks on "the enormous pressure and fear of failure under which every conscientious reporter works," evoking a panoptic discipline wherein the most vigilant watchman is oneself. Reporters are under constant fear of missing a story, misspelling a name, getting scooped, leading with the wrong angle, not asking the tough question. Byxbee (1901), echoing Shuman, writes: "The great importance of a 'scoop' or a 'beat'

should always be emphasized, and the disgrace of being 'scooped' never belittled" (p. 56).

Benson (1937) says, "Failure to get the news is often almost entirely the fault of the reporter" (p. 65-66). To avert these derelictions, reporters watch one another like hawks – and they know they're being watched (Ryfe, 2006). Through much of the 20th century, most news stories were published without bylines (see, for instance, Ogan et al., 1975), meaning *public* acclaim or reprobation for individual reporters was rare. This led Ross (1911) to declare that "The average news writer, however brilliant his work, receives only the commendation of his fellows. It is for this he strives" (p. 20). Decades later, Hohenberg (1983, p. 392) acknowledges, "There is ... a rather lamentable tendency among the Washington news corps to bid more for professional applause than public understanding." Charnley (1975) suggests that if a journalist uses the proper standards to reach news decisions, "he is likely to earn his colleagues' approval and his community's respect" (p. 45). Hage et al. (1976) note: "Reporters can't expect to function as independent entities, free to shape their own roles. They work, in varying degrees, under supervision and subject to pressure from colleagues and news sources" (p. 28).

While reporters' work has been much more open to public scrutiny in the most recent decades – "Even information posted on a personal Facebook page or using a personal Twitter account reflects back on the professional journalist and her news organization" (Kolodzy, 2013, p. 74) – much of the disciplinary authority over individual behavior remains enforced within the field. If every reporter does about the same thing with a given story, the field's collective autonomy can be comfortably defended against external critique. Hence:

> The beat man works in close company with reporters from other newspapers. Seldom is it possible for one stationary beat man to obtain a story which the other beat men do not have. If the others do not happen to get the information at the same time, they overhear the reporter who does get it first phoning it to his office. They take notes as he talks and then phone their own offices. (MacDougall, 1935 [1932], p. 65)

But if an individual strays from the pack, she may find her transgression undefended, and therefore indefensible: "There is group pressure against the reporter who does not go along" (Mencher, 1991, p. 247), and "[a]nyone involved with the mass media … must understand the professional standards and demands that this culture imposes" (Stovall, 2002, p. 112). Gibbs and Warhover (2002) quote a reporter from an *American Journalism Review* story: "I think what we fear mostly is our colleagues. … You don't want them to think that you're a slacker" (p. 386).

Standards of Discipline

The panoptic nature of journalistic work means honing one's actions to the expectations of the discipline becomes essential. Ross (1911) quotes Joseph Pulitzer calling for the systematic disciplining of journalists. Pulitzer argued that the reporter's instincts "need development by teaching, by training, by practical object-lessons illustrating the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, the popular and the unpopular, the things that succeed and the things that fail, and above all the things that deserve to succeed, and the things that do not…" (p. xii). The things that are and are not deserving are highlighted in Harrington and Frankenberg's (1912) quote from New York *Sun* editor Charles A. Dana's (1819-1897) 19th century code for reporters, "which has never been superseded." The original code says: "Above all, know and believe that humanity is advancing; that there is progress in human life and human affairs; and that as sure as God lives, the future will be greater and better than the present or the past." An addendum says, "Hold fast to the Constitution. … Stand by the Stars and Stripes. Above all, stand for Liberty, whatever happens" (p. 86).

This early call for journalists to identify as patriots resonates through the decades. It shows up in similar language a half-century later: "Certain abstract principles are espoused by all American newspapers. Among them are justice, liberty, patriotism, the sanctity of the

Constitution, equable taxes, honest government, sympathy for the weak and distressed, and community improvement" (Mott, 1958, p. 255). These categories bear some resemblance to the more abstract "enduring values" identified by Gans' (1980) ethnography of newsroom decision-making practices (see Chapter 2). For Metz (1977), one of the functions of mass media is "to spread and maintain our national culture" (p. 10) because "journalists are just as patriotic as everyone else" (p. 324). The journalist's duty toward patriotic enculturation, while occasionally challenged (e.g. Brooks et al., 2008, p. 14), continues to regulate reporters' ideological presentations of the news in the present day (Parks, in press-a), as well as textbook commentary. In Scanlan and Craig (2014), a broadcast expert's annotation of a TV news script about a dead Marine being returned to his family notes, elegiacally, "This story is as old as storytelling, as old as war" (p. 321). The commentary emphasizes that the reporter is "sending a message" when he ends a descriptive sequence by summarizing his subject solemnly as "A Marine" instead of closing with the Marine's young age of 20, which "might have telegraphed the message 'what a waste of human life'" (Scanlan & Craig, 2014, p. 322). The annotation, then, expresses a clear preference for journalistic messages that glorify, rather than question, military deaths in war.

Charnley (1959) enumerates qualities of news – "accurate, balanced, fair and objective, clear, concise, and current" – that "establish the working principles that *condition* the newsman's approach..." (p. 22, emphasis added). But the arbitrary nature of this conditioning is readily apparent. For instance, Bush (1940), partly echoing constructive journalism principles raised in Chapter 5, writes: "Although the news writer guards against anything that appears to have anti-social consequences, it is not his duty to preach sermons or to point morals. He does not write in order to uplift his readers, but to inform and entertain them" (p. 286). The question as to why informing and entertaining are appropriate, and uplifting is not, is not addressed.

Similarly, the Associated Press Managing Editors insist that "a good newspaper should

be guided in the publication of all material by a concern for truth, the hallmark of freedom, by a

concern for human decency and human betterment and a respect for the accepted standards of its

own community" (Rivers, 1964, p. 336). But there is no guidance for the journalist working in a

community whose accepted standards – say, the preservation of racial segregation – repudiate

any concern for human decency.

There are, however, predetermined sets of facts that inhere to specific stories. Mencher

(1989) writes that although "[j]ournalists like to say that there are no rules for journalism …

there are essential elements for every type of story and they *must* be included. They are *non-

negotiable*" (p. 227, emphasis added). Stovall (2002) expands on this:

> "Commonly accepted news values … make it incumbent upon reporters and editors to
> cover and give importance to certain types of stories. These kinds of stories are handled
> so often that a set of standard practices governing how they are written has been
> established. For instance, the disaster story *must* always tell early in the story if anyone
> was killed or injured." (Stovall, 2002, p. 68, emphasis added)

We saw this same theme in the previous chapter, as Mencher (1989) noted that a disciplined

reporter's first question on a major fire would naturally be, "Any deaths?"

To Fix or Not To Fix?

Reporters in most textbooks are assumed to enter the profession with "a desire to improve

the human condition – to make a difference in people's lives" (Gibbs & Warhover, 2002, p. 367).

Bucking the disciplining factory model, Charnley (1975) argues that "*A reporter must become

more than a news technician.* As fact assemblers and carriers, reporters are in one sense passive

agents; but in what they do with the possibilities open to them they can (and I believe should)

become catalysts of social action" (p. iv, emphasis in original). To become such catalysts, they

are encouraged to act on their outrage: "It is ... strong emotional reaction to the abuses of power

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by public officials and the titans of commerce and industry that propels investigative reporters to their discoveries" (Mencher, 1991, p. 361-362).

But at the same time, by some of the same authors, journalists are warned against reformist tendencies. Mencher (1989), in a book published two years before the above assertion, says, "A reporter may believe it is tragic and unnecessary that children suffer from poverty. But in his or her story the reporter is confined to the facts about poverty" (p. 109). Harrower (2010, p. 128) advises, "Don't turn into a vigilante." The newspaper business "does not need and will not tolerate fledglings inculcated with an idea that their main mission is to solve ... the problems of diplomacy, race, religion, science and politics," writes Warren (1959, p. 11). Burken (1979) writes, "It is not a profession for persons who view themselves as world-changers" (p. 2). Hill, Evan & Breen (1977) favorably quote Henry Adams arguing, "No honest historian can take part with, or against – the forces that he has to study. To him even the extinction of the human race should be merely a fact to be grouped with other vital statistics" (p. 163).[15]

To Cry or Not To Cry?

The discipline-autonomy paradox shows up frequently in discussions of reportorial presentation throughout the course of my sample. Hyde (1912) asserts generally, "Just as the good reporter is always one who can give his yarns a distinctive flavor, great newspaper stories are seldom written under the restriction of rules" (p. ix). But when discussing coverage of murder, Hyde changes his tune: "One rule *must* always be followed in the reporting of a murder story: the reporter *must* confine himself to the necessary facts and omit as many of the gruesome details as possible. He *must* tell it in a cold, hard-hearted way without elaboration, for the story itself is gruesome enough" (p. 114, emphasis added). Similarly, Mott's edited (1958) *New Survey*

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[15] As humanity flirts with extinction through the mechanism of human-induced climate change, news organizations' aloof approach to climate coverage suggests that this argument has prevailed.

of Journalism argues that "Reporting the news, even the hot news, is a coldly impersonal job" (p. 14). And yet, "In the raising of the reporter's work to the level of art, the initial step is to capture that element of freshness, of uniqueness in the human experiences and emotions released..." (p. 14). The paradox is clear: The cold, impersonal reporter is charged with detecting and sensitively rendering an event's emotional power — while remaining coldly detached.

Illustrating this paradox, Hohenberg (1983) offers the case of a young reporter assigned to compile a casualty list when a lake cruise boat capsized. The narrative of her reporting experience zig-zags between the poles of detachment and engagement. "To many reporters, the almost daily presence of turmoil, hardship and death … causes them to build a shield of detachment, even indifference. It enables them to keep their emotions in check," Hohenberg writes. "Anita Miller knew this instinctively… [W]hen she began assembling her casualty list, she adopted the detached attitude" (p. 11). But, when Miller describes her reporting experience in her own words, she says that while interviewing one survivor, "I dropped that barrier reporters put up to keep a detached front. … I think we need to drop that barrier sometimes just to stay human" (p. 11-12). Hohenberg engages in paradigm repair when introducing the reprinted top of Miller's news article: "But there was no hint of emotion in Miller's story... It was a completely factual, professional accounting, written in the measured cadence of a straight news story — no comment, no editorialization, no sob stuff" (p. 12). The text then returns to Miller's personal account: "After I wrote this story, I went home and cried. … I can keep my cool when interviewing and writing the piece, but when I leave the office for home it suddenly hits me and often I can't get it out of my mind" (p. 13).

The above anecdote exemplifies the "emotional labor" routinely expected of reporters (Hopper and Huxford, 2017), yet Hohenberg is uncritical in considering the contradictions

between what a reporter feels and what she relates when reporting. Mencher (1989) echoes the paradoxical sentiment. "Despite their involvement in the affairs of other people, journalists *must* be able to distance themselves from the people and the events they are observing," Mencher writes, adding immediately, "Complete detachment is sometimes impossible" (p. 39, emphasis added). Gibbs & Warhover (2002) urge interviewers to "keep your composure when asking tough questions … [L]et the person vent or cry or threaten without reacting" (p. 202). In contrast, Scanlan and Craig (2014) quote a former obituary writer saying, "[D]on't try to hide your own emotions when your sources are crying" (p. 436). During disaster or tragedy, "journalists excel and suppress their own feelings" (Rich, 2007, p. 434). When observing events, Stovall (2002) writes, "Generally, reporters do not participate… At the same time, reporters should not leave their humanity behind. If they can prevent injury or help out in an emergency situation, they should certainly do so" (p. 124). Lanson and Stephens (2008) offer a very precise set of circumstances under which humanity may be exercised: "[W]hen your subject is a Harvard freshman who has survived a malignant brain tumor that left her legally blind and you have set out to tell the story of her freshman year as a math major at an elite American university, the rules bend just a bit" (p. 359).

These textbooks, speaking for the journalistic field, ask impossibly contradictory things of reporters: to hide their emotions while interviewing – unless the situation calls for emoting; to remain aloof from events – unless they can be helpful – but then without taking sides; to write the unvarnished truth, even as they mask their own human response, even as they maintain their humanity. Other disciplines that frequently confront emergency and trauma – medicine, law enforcement, the military, teaching, social work – experience some parallels in the juxtaposition of detachment and engagement expected of their practitioners. Foucault (1995 [1975]) applies

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his theory of discipline across such fields, whose actors subject their bodies and behavior to the kinds of regulatory regimes described earlier in this chapter. But journalists are unique in their disciplinary proscription against intervening. Soldiers and cops are trained to separate good guys from bad guys and treat each accordingly; doctors are trained to heal, firefighters to put out fires. Only journalists are trained to stand *apart* from unfolding disaster *and* simultaneously expected to display some vaguely defined nonpartisan compassion.

News Writing: Creativity, Within Limits

The ironic mix of freedom and constraint in the scenarios described above also applies to the tone set in news writing. Charnley (1959) allows that the effectiveness of a reporter's writing "will be directly proportional to the individuality he gives it" – so long as "his imagination is governed by the firmest tenets of objectivity and responsibility he can muster" (p. 158). Imagine the poor reporter trying to worm a thread of imagination through the needle of objectivity. Hohenberg (1962) appears unsympathetic even to threads of creativity: "The old careless flamboyance that was the trademark of colorful American news writing earlier in this century now seems dated. Accuracy, clarity, good judgment, and responsibility are the characteristics of the news writing of today" (p. 32). Yet in a later edition, Hohenberg (1978) writes, "There is nothing static or stylized about the news; nor, for that matter, should there be any rigid rules and decrees for writing about it" (p. 87). He then goes on to insist, as noted in Chapter 4, that "[a] complicated development in economics ... *necessarily must be told far differently* from a human interest story about a blind woman student who has just received her M.D." (p. 128, emphasis added).

Hough (1975) says, "News writing demands discipline, but it also demands imagination, perception, humor, sympathy and taste" (p. 18). He suggests that reporters "should not be afraid

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to experiment" with their writing (p. 96). Meanwhile, Fedler (1973) states flatly that "newswriters are reporters, not creative writers" (p. 15) then appears to lament that although "[d]escriptions … make a news story more interesting and help recreate the scene in the minds of readers. ... [R]eporters … seldom describe what they see, feel, taste or smell" (p. 61). Harrower, 2010, says, "When you write news stories about fires or city council meetings, you don't try to jazz things up. You write simple declarative sentences in a solemn, objective tone" (p. 120). Yet Brooks et al. (2008) say, "Even when covering routine, boring events, you are allowed to use your creativity" (p. 260). A copy editor is quoted saying, "News organizations aren't in the business of publishing stream-of-consciousness musings" (Scanlan & Craig, 2014, p. 184-185). Stovall (2002) argues that on deadline, "A writer will find it easier to write things as he or she has done it before, rather than to be creative or to let the content of the writing dictate the form" (p. 130). Mencher (1991) argues that it "is fine when a Dylan Thomas plays with words, but it is dangerous for a journalist, whose first allegiance is to a straight-forward meaning" (p. 134).

Even when being "straightforward," however, reporters are warned not to explicitly tell readers which aspects of an event are most significant or relevant. Metz (1977, p. 213) argues: "The newsman is not entitled to declare what the highlight was or will be. You do that indirectly by selecting part of the meeting to feature in your lead." Stovall (2002) closely echoes this argument: "Reporters and editors inherently state their opinions about the news in deciding what events they write about, how they write about them, and where they place those stories in the paper. Yet stating opinions directly and plainly is generally not an acceptable practice" (p. 69). These almost identical arguments across a quarter-century capture the delusion under which many journalists labor: that in choosing whether a group or meeting is important enough to cover, in selecting which subject is important enough for the lead, and in deciding which source

is to be quoted first, they are somehow still innocent of having declared what is important

because they don't come out and say it. The unreflective manner in which these arguments are

presented often left me talking back to the texts as I took notes. For instance:

> **Brooks et al. (2008, p. 445):** [I]n traditional reporting, writers should strive not to have a point of view.
> **Me:** Even regarding good and evil? (Earlier in the book, the authors had written, "Just as scientists are not expected to be neutral between disease and cure, journalists don't have to be neutral between good and evil" [p. 395])
> **Brooks et al.:** Reporters should not set out to prove something.
> **Me:** Even the truth?
> **Brooks et al.:** Certainly they should not be an advocate for a point of view.
> **Me:** Even pro-capitalism?

Some disciplinary constraints are lifted, and autonomy prevails, in reports of human

interest, "a class of newspaper stories in which we are given absolute freedom from conventional

formulas" (Hyde, 1912, p. 233). Fedler (1973) says, "You should not attempt to persuade or

advocate in a feature story, but you can report your own emotions and impressions and make

reasonable judgments…" (p. 205). For Izard, Culbertson and Lambert (1973), "The feature

writer has almost complete freedom" (p. 175). Editors, Harrower says, "won't go *freakin' nuts* if

you use slang or contractions" (p. 120). A similar sheen applies to sports reporting, where

"reporters are permitted to express themselves much more freely than in covering other types of

news. What they *think* is as important sometimes as what they *saw*" (Wolseley & Campbell,

1949, p. 333-334). The sports pages feature "an informality and originality of language which

would scandalize readers if found in the regular news sections" (MacDougall, 1938, p. 543).

Rivers (1964) breaks it down: "The newspaper reporter who covers a speech is not allowed to

describe the speaker as 'persuasive' or 'eloquent,' but the sports writer reporting a football game

need not hesitate to describe a ballcarrier as 'elusive' or 'ghost-like'" (p. 205).

As we saw in Chapter 4, human interest stories are typically defined as lacking

significance and exuding affect (see Hughes, 1981 [1940]). So reporters are encouraged to be

free and creative with work considered of little importance, and are constrained by rule and

convention in reporting what is believed to matter. Even this observation, however, is not

categorical. Bleyer (1932) enforces tonal discipline in his feature treatment of holidays, for

which "[t]he chief aim is …. to bring out the dominant spirit and mood of the occasion. …

Memorial Day is the occasion for paying tribute to dead military heroes, while the Fourth of July

is one of patriotic jollification" (p. 288). Likewise, Kolodzy (2013) argues that any story's

"[t]one should reflect the subject matter so the audience can immediately detect how they should

absorb the information" (p. 79), and Kershner (2009) insists that "A performance of a comedian

should include a few examples of the jokes in the routine, but jokes normally have no place in a

review of a performance of a classical string quartet" (p. 100).

A news organization, therefore, must be predictable and direct its audiences toward

occasion-appropriate responses – although an undated "Criteria of a Good Newspaper"

document from the Associated Press Managing Editors Association argues that "[i]t also must be

lively, imaginative, and original; it must have a sense of humor, and the power to arouse keen

interest" (Rivers, 1964, p. 336). Izard, Culbertson and Lambert (1973) even argue that "although

there are guidelines for newspaper reporting, the reporter's judgment is crucial. He can break or

bend any rule except that of accuracy if the circumstances are right" (p. xii). Scanlan and Craig

(2014) suggest that the best leads "often seem not to follow rules, but rather to defy them, break

them, or make new rules" (p. 231). On writing leads, MacDougall and Reid (1987) argue:

> [W]hile there are conventions that can help you learn to make choices, there is no
> avoiding making the choices and no guarantee that everyone, or anyone, will agree with
> the choices you make. Ultimately, the interpretation you choose to put into the stories you

are reporting is your interpretation — a reflection of your mind and spirit — and you will have to live with it. (MacDougall & Reid, 1987, p. 110)

Authors of some newer texts suggest that online reporting affords greater autonomy than traditional print writing. The Web writer is advised to "[b]e yourself. … [S]ince the Web remains reasonably new and continues to evolve, it's also a place that encourages a bit of boldness" (Lanson & Stephens, 2008, p. 176). Similarly, a contemporary broadcaster is quoted saying, "Gone are the staid rules on how a journalist does his or her job" (Lieb, 2009, p. 15) Yet these little declarations invariably appear amid a wash of disciplinary proscriptions. And major news organizations continue to carefully police their staffers' online behavior; *New York Times* Editor Dean Baquet announced in late 2017 that he would tighten restrictions on what reporters could say on social media ("The Times...", 2017).

As news is increasingly accessed online, affording journalists precise metrics documenting how specific pieces of content are consumed, decision-making authority has begun to diffuse among publics, which choose either to engage or ignore a reporter or news outlet's work (e.g. Bunce, 2017). **"**Smart journalists tailor their material to the reading habits and news appetites of their audience," writes Harrower (2010, p. 20). "And as new media transform the news media, it's essential to monitor how effectively you're communicating. What good is a story if nobody actually *reads* it?"

Discipline in the Details

Many textbook authors, while waffling about creativity in journalistic writing, are all discipline when it comes to language usage and style. "[A]ll conscientious newspapermen are fighting to defend the best in the English language against the evil influences of haste, lack of training, and irresponsibility," writes Hyde (1923 [1921], p. 57). "They realize that the mother tongue of America is in their keeping, and it is evident that many of them purpose to maintain its

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beauty and purity." Individual newspaper style is also a matter of discipline, argues Harwood (1927): "No matter what the personal opinion of the reporter regarding certain phrases or constructions, he must hew to the line. When he leaves the employ of his publication, he may do as he likes; but so long as he works for a certain paper, its rules are his rules, no matter how preposterous they may seem" (p. 107). Wolseley and Campbell (1949) broadly assert, "Writing is a tool, not a toy" (p. 195), which could be rephrased as, "Don't play with words." Hohenberg, over multiple editions, adds: "While writers are always encouraged to try to develop a more readable newspaper style, they are also limited by the dictates of the style book" (1962, p. 48); "The news media cannot be casual about the uses of language. … There are no exceptions to the rule that correct grammatical usage is essential to good journalism" (1978, p. 73); because without such rules, "journalism would become undisciplined, even chaotic" (1983, p. 80). Izard, Culbertson, and Lambert (1973) write that "newspapers *cannot avoid* the fact that they are educational instruments and, therefore, must provide a proper example of language use. … The news reporter … should be a grammatical fundamentalist" (p. 43, 44, emphasis added). Such a hard line on grammatical "purity," of course, overlooks the constant flux of the English language in both proper and popular usage – not to mention the fact that American English is a glorious potluck of words and phrases derived from manifold cultures whose descendants have brought their own dishes. Governmentality and its normative edifices often block broader horizons.

Autonomy Assertions

Textbook authors are clearly of two minds – caught in a paradox of habitus – regarding journalists' freedom to exercise independent judgment, express their humanity, and demonstrate creativity in selecting, reporting, and presenting the news. They appear to cherish the idea of autonomy as a concept but also jealously guard what they consider to be natural and essential

characteristics of journalism. Some authors manage these contradictions by embracing a philosophy of autonomy from *external* influences while insisting on within-field governmentality to ensure that journalism norms are properly practiced. Governmentality is Foucault's idea that we discipline our own selves according to what we have been taught is normal and good. "The social pressures and taboos which safeguard and at the same time cramp personality and character are notable by their absence in the newspaper profession," write Johnson and Harriss (1952 [1942], p. 3-4). "The reporter must be his own monitor and must achieve his own philosophy." Similarly, Charnley and Charnley (1979) write, "The press believes that its freedom to make final decisions about news is complete, and a necessary part of its ability to serve its function" (p. 20), and reporters' "proper role is to do what their judgment dictates and let others rule on whether their judgment is defensible" (p. 25). Harriss, Leiter, and Johnson (1981) paraphrase a *New York Times* staffer arguing that "The most respected reporters, … and usually the best professionally, are those who most strongly assert their own independence and are willing to rely heavily on their own qualities of intellect and experience" (p. 27). Fedler et al. (2001) add: "Every journalist is free to decide what is right or wrong, ethical or unethical. ...[A]ny effort to change the system, to force every journalist to conform to a predetermined standard – would limit the media's diversity and freedom" (p. 560). Therefore, "If journalists cannot act responsibly themselves, or if their news organizations cannot force them to do so under pain of dismissal, nobody else can do anything about it" (Hohenberg, 1983, p. 316).

Even though city editors were granted nominal despotic authority in very early texts, most textbooks from the early 20th century onward portray reporters as autonomous actors, consistent with the field's professional ethos. As Glasser and Gunther (2005) put it, "Through the walls they build and the lines they draw, journalists accentuate forms of control that place power

precisely where journalists want it: at the level of the individual journalist" (p. 390). This thinking is in part a necessary concession to the fact that reporters outnumber their editors and serve as the eyes and ears of a news organization. "Independence and initiative are terms of peculiar significance to the new reporter," write Harrington and Frankenberg (1912, p. 85). "He should learn to make quick decisions, depending upon his own judgment rather than upon the suggestion of the city editor." Similarly, "He will train himself to work independently on his assignments, planning his own campaigns and fighting his battles alone" (Williams & Martin, 1922 [1911], p. 185). This includes exercising agency in determining whether a story is viable: "[T]he reporter who is doing assignment work will not always find the conditions and facts to be what the city editor has been led to believe they are. But the reporter should not stop his investigation when he finds this to be the case. A little probing may develop that, while the city editor's facts are wrong, there is a story..." (Williams & Martin, 1922 [1911], p. 132-133). This argument was echoed in mid-century, as Neal (1949) suggested that the persistent and talented reporter could shift a newsroom's priorities – an example of the malleability built into Bourdieu's habitus, where people's actions are structured by group norms and behaviors but also continually and subtly restructure those norms:

> It is not the managing editor or the city editor who is all-powerful in shaping a paper's views as to news vitality. The individual reporter, even the glaucous cub, makes the decisions. ... He can end the dominance of the stories he dislikes by writing other stories so well, and founding them upon such thorough fact-gathering, that, though he does not in the least neglect the executive's preference, he builds up the news he himself favors. ... The reporter who believes that church, or business, or school news is neglected can make that church, or business, or school news into "must" copy. The city editor knows he can. (Neal, 1949, p. 59)

As the 20th century matured, even the idea of nominal deference to the city editor's omnipotence receded, and the reporter's conscience became a focus of attention (see Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). "In few other occupations is it possible for hirelings to 'talk up' to their bosses

as much as in journalism," writes McDougall (1963, p. 25). "A careful fact-gatherer has a better-than-even chance on most publications if he undertakes to persuade his superiors to publish what he has found to be true." Mencher (1989) adds, "The journalist must work things out for himself or herself" (p. 32), including the liberty to act on "a feeling that something is wrong, unsound, incorrect" (p. 37). Acting on the reporter's observational discretion can drive what becomes news, and authors occasionally suggest that their enumerated news values should not limit reporters' judgment: "The reporter should, indeed, have no hesitance in attempting to apply other news measurements" (Johnson & Harriss, 1952 [1942], p. 31). A Poynter Institute fellow offered similarly empowering advice to new reporters at the beginning of the current century:

> *Follow your instincts.* Your editors may be saying one thing. The reporters from the rival paper or the local TV station covering the same story may be doing something else. But a voice in your head is telling you to do a third thing that is altogether different. Listen to that voice. (Scanlan & Craig, 2014, p. 478)

Some authors argue that this kind of judgment should be reserved for veteran journalists. For Izard, Culbertson, and Lambert (1973), discipline is essential for the beginning reporter; and autonomy comes with experience. Regarding news writing, for instance:

> In the hands of an imaginative, conscientious newswriting craftsman, the formula is elastic enough to result in interesting, informative and well-written copy. … The beginning reporter, however, needs to pretend that the formula is rigid. He must follow the guidelines religiously until he has mastered the fundamentals of newspaper writing. (Izard, Culbertson, & Lambert, 1973, p. 43)

Similarly, Gibbs and Warhover (2002) reserve "news analysis, editorials, perspective pieces, personal columns, reviews and some types of in-depth reporting" for "journalists who have experience or expertise that lends credibility to their views" (p. 60).

One factor that impeded individual judgment in many mid-20th-century textbooks was newspaper "policy," or the political and content preferences of the publisher that either implicitly or explicitly steered news and presentation choices. Warren (1959) writes that "coloring the news

to fit the *writer's* own personal opinion ... is taboo if his opinion does not coincide with that of the publisher. .... [S]lanting news to fit the *publisher's* point of view … is approved in greater or lesser degree on all newspapers" (p. 315). Varied attention to policy as a newsroom force in my textbook sample suggests that publishers were believed to exert a stronger influence over news decisions through the first two-thirds of the 20th century than in the latter third and the beginning of the 21st. One possible explanation for the drift from perceived publisher micromanagement is the consolidation of newspapers from individual- and family-owned operations into major corporate chains beginning in the latter half of the 20th century (Picard, 2005). By the late 1900s, the idea that publishers directly influenced content could be dismissed: "[O]ne thing young reporters cannot do is to let the paper's editorial policy guide their reporting. No reporter can go out on a story with a fixed idea of what he or she is looking for and expect to do a fair and honest job" (Hohenberg, 1983, p. 42). However, as late as 1991, Mencher still acknowledged some top management influence: "Some publishers and station owners have pet projects — a favored charity, a downtown business mall — and these will be given special attention. Political and social cronies may be granted time and space disproportionate to their actual news value" (p. 65). By the 21st century, Harrower (2010) was warning not of an *agenda* among upper management, but rather a lack of backbone: "Many publications are either too timid or too conservative to run 'threatening' stories about sensitive political or religious issues. Over time, reporters stop arguing and start self-censoring" (p. 148). This self-censorship is a classic enactment of Foucaultian discipline.[16]

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[16] The rapidly expanding and alarmingly controlling Sinclair Broadcast Group is evidence of a more sinister and overt assertion of contemporary senior-level policy directives, including "must-run" content circulated for required delivery across Sinclair's local TV stations such as pro-Trump commentaries and anchor "editorials" warning that "some members of the media use their platforms to push their own personal bias" (Fortin & Bromwich, 2018). Sinclair's editorial policies and contract requirements represent such an assault on journalistic autonomy (Stelter, 2018) that it is questionable whether work produced under such requirements can be defined as journalism at all. And the bravado with which Sinclair pursued such policies in early 2018 is indicative of what incremental surrender

Conclusion: The Discipline of Public Service

Over the course of the 20th century, a reporter's freedom became enmeshed with an increasing sense of responsibility – not just to find and publish news for commercial purposes, although the financial health of the news organization is a constant background concern, but to serve as the linchpin of a democratic society (see Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014; Mari, 2015). Schudson argues that a bellwether for this convergence was Joseph Pulitzer's manifesto on establishing professional journalism education, in which Pulitzer asserted that journalism schools should be "not only not commercial, but anti-commercial" and organized in the public interest (Schudson, 1978, p. 152-153, quoting Pulitzer, 1904). Professionalism as constructed for reporters was tied in with independence from external pressures, including not just the regulatory interests of the state but the economic interests of publishers (Mari, 2014). In journalism, at least conceptually, the discipline of professionalism and the ideology of public service have been aligned from the beginning.

Textbooks in the second half of the 20th century, an era Hallin (1992) terms journalism's "high modernism," focused less on a handful of what they deemed legitimate government curbs on press autonomy and more on the technologies by which journalists should discipline themselves to fulfill their public responsibilities. "Freedom from governmental restriction – a privilege – imposes on the news media the obligation to forward and protect the public interest – a responsibility" (Charnley, 1959, p. 306). Similarly, "Every journalist of consequence considers himself to be a public servant and believes that he and his organization are ultimately accountable to the public. On this base he rests his values" (Hohenberg, 1978, p. 12). Those

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of journalistic autonomy can lead to in an authoritarian-enabling era. Even when corporate masters are not dictating content to these local stations, imagine the panoptic discipline at work on their employees. Nevertheless, some Sinclair anchors and stations have expressed autonomous defiance (Schmitz, 2018; Shapiro, 2018), performing the ethos described throughout this dissertation.

values were deemed increasingly important as society grew more complex and opaque (Schudson, 1978, p. 149). "At no time in our history has the significance of the reporter as an extraordinary force in our daily life been more apparent," write Harriss, Leiter, and Johnson (1981, p. 13). "In a society marked by ever-increasing controls, he enjoys unusual latitude but he also shoulders unusual responsibilities." Mencher elaborates:

> The founders of this country made sure that journalists would be free of government interference or supervision so that the press could be a check on power. … Given such power, the press can be an unchecked power itself. If government has no control over the press, what then is to protect the public from a free-wheeling, irresponsible press? Very little. And this is precisely why codes and guidelines — whether they are written and handed to reporters along with a stylebook, or are the reporter's personal beliefs — are so important. (Mencher, 1989, p. 417)

Hohenberg (1962) detects "the beginning of a movement toward self-regulation" in asserting that mid-century newspapers had grown increasingly responsible in reporting crime news: "Where… sensational outbursts were dismissed with a shrug and a laugh a quarter-century ago, public-spirited editors now do not hesitate to attack irresponsibility in their own profession" (p. 275). Twenty years later, Hohenberg (1983) adds: "It follows that self-control, responsibility and a decent sense of restraint ought to be stressed as important elements in the practice of journalism and, quite generally, they are" (p. 316).

Just what the journalist's responsibility is to the public remains ambiguous in journalistic texts. Are reporters and editors to expand audiences' horizons, or simply to cast light on familiar surroundings? As usual, many texts offer contradictory messages. The first chapter in Mott's (1958) edited *New Survey of Journalism* argues, "As the press evolved into an agency of mass communication ... it assumed a larger degree of responsibility. … A press may not shackle a free people by disseminating only part of the news and opinions of the times" (p. 1). Yet the book's tenth chapter, "Names Make News," suggests that "Editors attempt to give their readers news

which conforms with their point of view" (p. 91) – a maxim which, if followed, would make the press complicit in narrowing the discursive possibilities of news. "Reporters and editors are affected by common assumptions and the tide of public opinion," writes Mencher (1991, p. 65). "As a consequence, the divergent idea or the unusual person may not be assessed with the same criteria applied to the accepted and the expected."

In more expansive conceptions, the independent reporter's autonomously deployed instincts become an extension of the public's awareness rather than a mirror of it. "Many people go through life with limited observation. It is the privilege, therefore of the newspaper worker to see for the unseeing and to become a public observer for the benefit of those who cannot observe" (Seitz, 1916, p. 19). MacDougall and Reid (1987) paraphrase Thomas Griffith, a former editor of *Life* magazine, arguing that "[w]hat makes one journalist 'see' a story and another not see anything worth reporting has to do with the individual reporter's imagination, curiosity and temperament…" The social construction of news is acknowledged when Griffith suggests that news depends "not just on what the reporter beholds, but also on what a reporter *decides* to behold" (p. 26, emphasis added). Such a reporter "has liberty of thought and expression" (Seitz, 1916, p. 36). But in the eyes of Charnley (1959), that liberty only extends to the boundaries of audience expectations: "He has to see things as he thinks almost everybody else would see them" (p. 248).

Journalists, then, often regulate their decisions and behaviors based not on the law or specific written policy, but rather their sense of professional obligation to multiple constituencies and their often unarticulated anticipation of how any particular decision will go over – with senior managers, with front-line editors, with their peers, and, more today than in the past, with interactive audiences.

Journalists may feel like they are working for several bosses. It is only natural to want to please the editor who assigned the story and other editors at the newspaper… And, after interviewing a source for an article, it is common to want to write an article that pleases the source… Another natural human tendency is the desire to write something that pleases us. But a good journalist will think first and foremost of the reader. In deciding what to include in a story and what to leave out, reporters should ask themselves, "What does the reader need to know?" (Kershner, 2009, p. 22)

One scholarly approach to acknowledging these many "bosses" is Shoemaker and

Reese's (2014) theory of multiple layers of influences that affect every journalistic decision in

complex and overlapping ways. Not least among the indirect influences on journalists are the

business pressures that drive their news organizations – most of them now public companies

seeking to impress shareholders every fiscal quarter (Picard, 2005). Journalists, especially in the

digital, metrics-driven era, know the health of their companies depends in part on how many

people see and share their work, and these economics-centered audience considerations can't

help but affect journalistic decisions (e.g. Bunce, 2017). Such developments, along with

diminishing newsroom resources to take on ostensibly essential assignments, help explain survey

results indicating that journalists feel less free to select their own stories in recent decades than

they did in the 1970s and 1980s (Willnat & Weaver, 2014). But as a practical matter, "In the rush

of daily journalism, most stories cannot with any precision be weighted based on their economic

payoff…" (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 141). And as I noted from Chalaby's (1998) argument

in Chapter 2, the Bourdiean perspective on habitus and fields allows for much more complex

interactions among social actors than structural economic conditions alone.

The tension between business realities and journalistic autonomy is not new and has been

addressed in various ways by journalism textbooks, with the earliest texts in my sample being

quite blunt, and occasionally nostalgic, about the profit-seeking nature of the news business.

Shuman (1894) writes: "It is money that makes the press go in this utilitarian age. It used to be

ideas. … A newspaper is a cold-blooded business enterprise" (p. 17). Hemstreet (1901) follows

with, "Writing for the newspapers is a business; nothing more" (p. 9). But, paradoxically, some

early texts also helped set the tone for the public-spirited ethos that would define how

journalistic identities are constructed in textbooks through the present day. Shuman, for instance,

writes loftily of "[w]rongs to right, great lives and deeds to chronicle, new triumphs of science to

describe, the seething battlefield of human life to paint" (p. 5). As Mari (2015) notes,

"[T]extbooks show that however commercially motivated many publishers may have been, at

least among themselves, US journalists aspired to do their work from at least a partial sense of

serving the greater good" (p. 692).

This ethos, articulated above in Pulitzer's (1904) manifesto for journalism

schools and Charles Dana's 19th century trumpeting of "progress in human life," is represented

in textbooks throughout this chapter. Scanlan and Craig (2014), in one of the most recent texts,

write: "Reporting the news in any medium provides a public service: to report and discuss

matters of public interest. That right is protected by the First Amendment and supported by the

United States Supreme Court" (p. 344). This journalistic ethos, with its deeply embedded sense

of autonomy, constructs identities that hold journalists philosophically apart from the economic

fray (Mari, 2014). Textbooks decreasingly emphasized the profit-making role of news

organizations as the professional era solidified across the 20th century and, as I have

detailed, they generally introduce people to the journalistic field as independent actors whose

duty is to serve an imagined public, not a bottom line.

If piling up page views for commercial purposes were the sole driver of contemporary

journalists' work, public affairs news (if it existed at all) would take on a highly different

character from the detached, neutral, evenhanded tone that mainstream reporters and editors

steadfastly maintain. Research indicates that positive or emotionally arousing content is more likely to be shared virally than negative or lower-affect content (Berger & Milkman, 2012). But journalistic discipline, as I have shown, discourages positive slants and affective emphasis in news reporting. This is not an economic choice, unless traced through a labored chain of logic leading to an imagined aura of credibility that news organizations nurture in vain to avoid losing audiences. At that point, discipline, habitus, and economics become too intertwined to tease apart. My argument in this dissertation is not that journalists are immune to the business pressures of their employers, but that these pressures are indirect, diffuse, and intertwined with an ethos of civic responsibility (see also Chagnon, 2015) – and that all of these factors play into the Foucaultian discipline that finds journalists self-regulating against their self-declared freedom to choose.

The paradox in which journalists tether internal disciplinary responsibilities to their strategically asserted autonomy from external fields serves as a bulwark against both formal censorship and practical risk-taking. It helps protect the press against interference by ensuring the press monitors its own ideological behavior. And, as we will see in the next and final analysis chapter, it provides savvy political actors or instinctive manipulators like Donald Trump with a predictable mechanism for amplifying divisive and harmful messages – messages that hit on so many common-sense news values, no disciplined member of the journalistic habitus would dare ignore them.

CHAPTER 7
THE U.S. PRESIDENCY: THE ULTIMATE NEWS VALUE

Nowhere does the discipline-autonomy paradox manifest in such colorful and impactful fashion in the United States than through the coverage of politics, and most particularly presidential politics. In this closing analysis chapter, I demonstrate that the U.S. presidency holds such mythic cultural status, imbued in part through textbooks documenting and shaping the editorial habitus identified by Bourdieu, that journalists typically become lashed to its normative traditions and carried along with its prevailing winds. In covering presidential politics, Foucaultian disciplinary patterns tend to overwhelm journalists' autonomous instincts, a circumstance that helps explain how Donald Trump, a showman and a sham, was able to co-opt the national journalistic infrastructure and enlist well-meaning reporters and editors in the service of his unlikely but ultimately successful presidential bid. As I raised in Chapter 1, despite his obvious lack of qualification or fitness as a potential president of the United States, Trump quickly became a phenomenon political journalists *had* to cover, and *could not* ignore. But I also show in this chapter that journalists have proven capable, both in principle and practice, of selectively bypassing these mandates – so long as they have done so collectively. By this, I don't mean a cabal of newspeople sit around a table and hash out explicit criteria for bestowing or withholding presidential legitimacy, but rather that such criteria congeal into shared rationalizations for coverage decisions through the discursive mechanisms of discipline and habitus detailed in Chapter 6 and exemplified in the analysis below. Foucault and Bourdieu's social theories account for ruptures and shifts in common sense that can produce change in naturalized behaviors, but the journalistic field did not entertain such heterodoxy in the 2016 election cycle, when it might have been needed most.

Schudson (1995) devotes much of his book on the cultural influence of news to analyzing

the relationship between the president and the press. A key convention of journalism, Schudson

argues, is that "a president is the most important actor in any event in which he takes part" (p.

55) and "the single most symbolically potent and legitimate source of authority" in the country

(p. 1). This is not a natural occurrence, but the result of common-sense conventions embedded in

the deeper national culture in which political norms are produced and enforced. Whereas Italian

political coverage emphasizes multi-party deliberation and Japanese coverage focuses on

bureaucratic process,

> in this country, normal political news is the story of the President trying to govern, or
> trying to govern in a way to maximize his chances for reelection, aided or vexed by the
> Congress, buoyed or undermined by world events, his way eased or made precarious by
> economic forces largely beyond his control. (Schudson, 1995, p. 31)

This conceptual primacy shapes a discourse in which journalists attend to the president

relentlessly. As Stephens (1988) notes, "A television camera is trained on the president of the

United States every moment that he spends in public" (p. 284), creating expectations throughout

the polity that the president is omnipresently newsworthy. These expectations are so internalized

that when the president is not available, journalists turn to "surrogates," people with little official

position or authority other than their presumptive license to speak for the president. Such people

in the Trump administration have included Kellyanne Conway, who, sparring about the

presidential-press relationship with ABC News' George Stephanopoulos following Trump's

inauguration, said, "People *have to* cover the presidency. Respect the office and its current

occupant" ("'This Week...'", 2017, emphasis added). This was not counted among Conway's

controversial assertions.

The aura of supreme significance that surrounds the president – and, by extension, people

deemed by journalists to be "serious" presidential candidates – renders any deviation from the

routines of journalistic habitus subject to what Foucault called discipline and what Jay Rosen

(2017) has called "self-policing." Rosen cites a *Washington Post* story questioning whether CNN

correspondent Jim Acosta had "crossed the line" by forcefully pushing back against new White

House press restrictions early in Trump's term:

> Acosta's remarks aren't just blunt; they're unusual. Reporters are supposed to report, not opine. Yet Acosta's disdain has flowed openly, raising a question about how far a reporter — supposedly a neutral arbiter of facts, not a commenter on them — can and should go. (Farhi, 2017)

In an example of the phenomenon I raised in Chapter 6 wherein deviant reporters risk losing

support of the pack, the story goes on to note that:

> A curious sidelight to all this has been the relatively tepid support Acosta has received from his fellow White House journalists. Only a few have publicly spoken out in support of him. … In fact, the pushback against Acosta from some quarters of the media has been more striking. (Farhi, 2017)

It's not, then, that journalists refused to pick a side in heated disputes over the quick abolition of

longstanding norms in Trump's press room – it's rather that most journalists took the side of

Trump, continuing the self-abasement they demonstrated during the campaign (see, again, the

introductory chapter). All the while, reporters covered the unprecedented new administration in

relatively routine fashion, often revealing details that reflected unfavorably on Trump and his

aides – his fabricated claim to a record inaugural crowd, early legal defeats for his anti-

immigration orders – but neglecting to drive home the scope of Trump's aberrations. Such

coverage fit into acceptable patterns of "objective" reporting: "Journalists are authorized to

interpret the President's efforts, so long as they do so in terms of political motives rather than

underlying social causes" (Schudson, 1995, p. 31).

Critical coverage engendering mutual distrust and often vocal presidential animosity

toward the press dates to the beginning of the republic (Douglas, 2018) and more recently

includes the Nixon administration's legal, extra-legal, and rhetorical attacks on journalistic

activity (Lewis, 2010) and the Obama administration's implication of reporters in leak

investigations (Downie, 2013). In 2017, adhering to the accepted practices of habitus in this

longstanding normative presidential-press tension allowed reporters to maintain their constructed

autonomous identities amidst their disciplined capitulation to Trump's direct and sustained

assault on political and democratic norms (Zelizer, 2018), including calling journalists "the

enemy of the American people" (Russell, 2018). Such journalistic behavior, absorbing abuse to

legitimize their own processes, is emblematic of "a newsroom culture that substitutes pseudo-

masochism for sincere self-examination" (Lewis, 2010, p. 106).

The news media has always butted against other fields such as political institutions for

authority over the public agenda. Due to journalism's autonomous, unregulated nature,

> reporters cannot boast of any formal credentialed training … Journalism vends its wares
> in the public arena and misses all those professional traits which might grant it an
> exclusive authority to depict our social world. Furthermore, the press confronts other
> public speakers – *most notably the President* – who have their own legitimacy, their own
> mandate to define what is important and true about our social reality. (Kaplan, 2002, p. 4,
> emphasis added)

Before the Internet took off, and well before social media began providing politicians and

institutions with direct access to publics – substantially weakening journalists' gatekeeping

authority – Schudson posited a hypothetical case in which "governments, businesses, lobbyists,

candidates, churches, and social movements [could] deliver information directly to citizens on

home computers." Under such circumstances, Schudson predicted, the president "would gain

greater power to set the national agenda than he has even today" (Schudson, 1995, p. 1). Surely

in the past few years, the American news media have ceded agenda-setting supremacy to Trump,

who if he's good at anything is good at using Twitter to decide what everyone's going to talk

about.

But what is it about the U.S. presidency, even a bizzaro administration that threatens national sanity and global civilization, that so overwhelms journalists with disciplinary zeal that they cannot declare, even if they see, that the emperor has no clothes? Through the analysis in this chapter, I argue that a century's worth of journalism textbooks have observed and reproduced an aura of myth around the presidency, an unenumerated but ultimately supreme news value that naturalizes any and all acts of presidents and presidential aspirants as mandatory elements of the public domain, such that all of these acts and actors *must* be covered, and even the most dangerous and unworthy pretenders *can't* be ignored.

Textbooks, Public Affairs, and the Presidency

Through the 20th century, textbooks grew increasingly concerned with providing thorough coverage of public affairs news, to help people make decisions as citizens. "Reporters of city government, the courts, the schools — these and other beat specialists *cannot afford to ignore* the spot news happening in their realms every day" (Izard, Culbertson & Lambert, 1973, p. 89, emphasis added). Likewise, Harris, Leiter, and Johnson (1981) argue that "[n]o aspect of the state legislature, city council and governing body of the county *should be ignored*" (p. 311, emphasis added). Fedler et al. (2001) assert that "[j]ournalism is built on coverage of government, especially local government" (p. 364). Mencher (1991) writes, "The public *must* have access to the statements and activities of its officials" (p. 227, emphasis added). The imperative phrases in these assertions imply a type of disciplinary regime imagined by Foucault: The discourse of public affairs journalism does not contain the possibility of ignoring a prominent political figure or of declaring such an official's statements un-newsworthy or unfit for civic discussion. It is within this discourse that political figures can so easily take advantage of journalistic convention: "[T]he newspapers treat politicians as *dramatis personae* in a half-real

drama, and allow the politicians to present untrue pictures of themselves in the newspaper columns. Most successful politicians are also successful showmen," writes Bush (1940, p. 349). "… [S]o-called biographical material is submitted to newspapers by the party propagandists and is published regardless of whether it is true..."

If politicians in general are essential subjects of journalistic coverage, the U.S. presidency is the pinnacle of such disciplinary obligation. Symbolically and metaphorically, the president embodies the U.S. Constitution, unparalleled military power, and the moral authority of the United States as a democratic republic. As such, fairly consistently through much of the past century, the president and prominent candidates for the presidency have been regarded as supremely and omnipresently newsworthy. "The President of the United States is the most important single news source in the country" (Hohenberg, 1962, p. 344). "*[E]very one* is interested in reading *anything* that the President says, although he may have read the same thing many times before" (Hyde, 1912, p. 176, emphasis added). "Every word uttered by the President of the United States is news" (Warren, 1929, p. 80). "[N]o public appearance of a President is ignored" (Charnley, 1966, p. 193).

Not only presidential statements, but presidential activities, assume this primacy. For Benson (1937), "A slight accident concerning the president of the United States would be given more space than the same sort of accident ... of the average citizen" (p. 58-59); for Izard, Culbertson and Lambert (1973), "the President of the United States can scarcely sneeze without getting front-page attention" (p. 15); for Fedler et al. (2001), "If the president of the United States catches a cold, the stock market may lose 500 points" (p. 110); and for Harwood (1927), "[T]he death of the president of the United States is worth infinite space" (p. 37). MacDougall (1935 [1932]) asserts, with literal intent, "Even the bait which a president of the United States

uses is news, because the fisherman is the chief executive" (p. 54). Hough (1975) explains,

"Most people can go to church on Sunday morning ... without getting their names in the

newspaper. When the President goes to church, even if he goes every Sunday, it is news" (p. 34).

"*The New York Times,*" Lanson and Stephens (2008, p. 374) note, "once ran a short front-page

story about the president being hit by a pea." Robertson (1930) quotes from a case of early 20th

century reporters and photographers in a frenzy to capture a train stopover in Chicago by the

president and his wife, even though the president had nothing to say:

> There is little news there, to be sure. But before the President leaves Chicago, school lets out; the President appears again, and a little schoolgirl is lifted to him. He is silent. She is speechless. But the reporters bombard the little girl as soon as she is turned loose by the president. [The reporter] also manages to achieve an interview with the cook on the special train and learns from him that the President at breakfast offered a pancake to a little tot who was lifted to the window of the dining-car. With this information he goes to the office and writes 800 words, playing up the new cap and the pancake incident, and producing a very creditable piece of copy. (Robertson, 1930, p. 25)

Such examples, which often appear in textbook sections detailing the news value of

prominence and contain no guidance for assessing the *relative* value of presidential activities,

facilitate an implicit conflation of style and substance in politics and render commonsensical that

all presidential statements are equally noteworthy, legitimate, and valid. The ensuing

expectations and routines inspire a certain discipline not only among journalists, but also news

audiences. Arguing in another context, over how media hype built popularity for college football,

Neal (1949) writes that editors argue they are only giving the public what it wants. "However,"

Neal adds, "the public was *trained* to look for 'that kind of news.'" (p. 395) Journalists similarly

train publics to expect ubiquitous coverage of presidential candidates. As Schudson puts it:

> The news story informs its readers about politics, but in a specific way. Its meaning lies in the instructions it tacitly gives about what to attend to, and how to attend, within the going concern of American political life. It asks readers to be interested in politics, but politics as the community of journalists conceives it. (Schudson, 1995, p. 70)

Perhaps one of the reasons executive power has grown so substantially over the past 100 years is the president's rising status as an immanent and pop figure, facilitated by news gathering and dissemination technology. Stephens (1988) argues that the rise of national radio networks helped the federal government in general assert communication primacy over local institutions that were not so efficiently covered: "The president's fireside had become more accessible than the mayor's" (p. 279). Schudson (1995) uses a longitudinal study of coverage of presidential State of the Union messages to argue circumstantially that the president's exalted place in political culture began in the early 1900s. Throughout the 19th century, Schudson notes, newspaper accounts of the president's annual message focused not on the president or the content of his letter (from Thomas Jefferson until Woodrow Wilson, presidents did not deliver their annual message in person) but on congressional reaction to it. As late as 1900, Schudson notes, while newspapers printed the presidential message in full, the actual news story about the reconvening of Congress contained "no mention of the content of the President's message … nor was the President mentioned by name" (Schudson, 1995, p. 60).

By 1910, Schudson observes a decisive shift in reportorial emphasis, as *The New York Times* leads its story with the substance of William Howard Taft's message and a succinct interpretation of its strategic intent ("'obviously aimed at giving reassurance to business'" [p. 60]). For Schudson, this period signals the dawning of a journalistic form that "emphasizes the preeminence of the President … [and] incorporates the assumption that the President is in some sense a representative of the nation, a national trustee, rather than merely the leader of a political party" (p. 60).

Schudson's findings are supported by the earliest textbooks in my sample. The word "president" does not appear at all in Shuman's seminal *Steps Into Journalism* (1894), and

presidential references are largely incidental in books published during the first decade of the 20th century. But in Ross (1911), a human interest feature on William Howard Taft visiting the Washington Monument is pulled out as an example of effective headline writing, demonstrating without stating that minor presidential activities are considered newsworthy. Hyde (1912) codifies this norm by explicitly asserting, "[T]he slightest thing that President Taft does is printed in every paper in the country" (p. 23).

The longstanding fascination with minute presidential-level interactions helped give rise to the scripted, politician-serving pseudo-event described by Boorstin (1961/1987), in which journalistic conventions and news values can be lassoed by savvy publicity-seekers to convert public relations messages into legitimized news. MacDougall (1938) writes of a publicity coup that took advantage of reportorial discipline, the Light's Golden Jubilee in Dearborn, Michigan: "Ostensibly to honor the late great Thomas A. Edison on the fiftieth anniversary of his invention of the incandescent lamp, the celebration actually was a publicity stunt for the electric light industry. When the president of the United States and many of the country's leading industrialists, scientists and politicians attended, *how could the press ignore* the occasion, or even minimize it?" (MacDougall, 1938, p. 30, emphasis added). Mencher (1991) similarly quotes Dick Harwood of *The Washington Post* describing the president's influence on campaign coverage decisions (and note the similarity of this passage to the above example from the early 20th century):

> "We salivated over the Republicans last fall for one reason only — the president was out campaigning for them. No matter he had very little to say that was significant or unpredictable at the whistlestops along the way. No matter that he *did* very little beyond waving at crowds. … [T]he mere fact that he was out there was page one news in *The Washington Post.* What he was doing was 'important,' we told ourselves, because presidents are 'important' men. That kind of circular reasoning frequently affects our news judgments…." (Mencher, 1991, p. 59)

Presidential Paradoxes

The president's special status invites not just outsized coverage but also contradictory norms that produce measures either to protect or damage the president's reputation through quotation choices. Because the president and presidential candidates are under a constant spotlight, and obligated to speak nearly everywhere they go, the potential for them to say something awkward, impolitic, or ignorant now and then is enormous. Textbook authors appear to be ambivalent (as is so often the case) over how to handle inelegant presidential speech. This stems from broader normative ambiguities regarding how to balance natural speech, accurate reporting, and sources' dignity and reputation in direct quotations. Generally, textbook authors grant substantial leeway to journalists in determining the extent to which politicians' sloppy speech should be repeated verbatim or massaged to apply a sheen of respectability. Speaking of local officials with whom beat reporters must maintain cordial relationships, Neal (1949) writes:

> A carelessly phrased remark may stir a controversy that kills an official's job. "Those South-Siders are a bunch of pikers," the zoning commission chairman says in a moment of huff. He didn't mean it quite that way, and the moment he has finished saying it he realizes that he has made himself a target for South-Side patriots. "Tone it down," he pleads. "Make it sound right." The news man does. (Neal, 1949, p. 476)

At the presidential level, Mencher (2006) invokes the frequent misstatements of George W. Bush and appears to argue that accurately conveying a president's meaning is more important than illuminating his intellectual foibles: "Mercifully, reporters overlooked the mangled syntax and the misused nouns and verbs and paraphrase Bush so that his meaning is presented" (Mencher, 2006, p. 322). Mencher doesn't reconcile this endorsement of journalistic mercy with his repeated arguments elsewhere that journalists' job is to hold the powerful to account, rather than cover for their embarrassments.

Charnley (1959) is more coy in his suggestion of how presidential speech should be

addressed. He inserts a parenthetical about the president into a larger discussion about when to

repeat versus correct a source's speech. But the stance Charnley is taking is not entirely clear:

> [T]o reproduce the language mannerisms of the interviewee exactly, down to the last "he
> don't," is good reporting and likely to be revealing of personality. But if the interviewee
> is a high school teacher, this kind of reporting will certainly be embarrassing and may
> cause undeserved penalties. (Presidents of the United States have been known to make
> syntactical errors in public.)" (Charnley, 1959, p. 224)

Is this an indication that misspeaking presidents usually get a break from the press, so high

school teachers should, too? That's my best guess. But, again, the notion that journalists should

cover for the president contradicts other norms without explanation.

On the other hand, some authors suggest that surprising presidential utterances are worth

emphasizing, even if they conflict with standards of decency:

> Usually it is unnecessary to use profanity or blasphemy merely as a matter of straight
> reporting. But if the President of the United States uses profanity to describe a music
> critic, of course the particular word is at least indicated to the public. Then profanity
> becomes news, and there is a sound excuse for violating the canons of good taste.
> (Hohenberg, 1962, p. 90).

This situation came up during the 2000 presidential campaign when George W. Bush was caught

on a hot mike calling *New York Times* reporter Adam Clymer a "major league asshole."

Washington Post media writer Howard Kurtz (2000) reported a range of editorial decisions about

how to play that language: "A handful of newspapers this morning make a big deal out of the

Texas governor calling Clymer an 'asshole' – a word not usually published in family newspapers

– but many played it down...." The word appeared unedited in Kurtz's piece.

Oh, and I can do that example one better, because even as I was about to send this chapter

to my committee, Donald Trump said out loud that he wanted the U.S. to stop accepting

immigrants from "shithole" countries where people of color live, and news organizations

proceeded to wrestle with whether it was cool to use the word "shithole" because the president said it. Many decided yes: The *Washington Post*, unprecedentedly, put it in a headline, and CNN ran it right on the onscreen chyron (while Wolf Blitzer, on camera, refused to pronounce the full word and said "S-hole" instead) (Mazza, 2018). Meanwhile, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (2018) tweeted defiantly that its publisher asked editors to remove Trump's "'vulgar language' from the lede in our @AP story about his vulgar language." The incident opened a spigot of metajournalism about how newsrooms were handling Trump's specific language and the general degradation of discourse he inspired in others (e.g. Gottlieb, 2018). For the *Post*, the supreme news value of the presidency made the "shithole" headline an easy call. As Executive Editor Marty Baron told the *Washingtonian,* "When the president says it, we'll use it verbatim. … That's our policy" (Freed, 2018).

Obscenities aside, recent textbook authors generally appear reluctant to take on the contemporary practice in which reporters are less eager to mercifully preserve a president or candidate's substantive meaning and more willing to pounce on any inartful phrase as a newsmaking "gaffe," generating a shallow but persistent controversy that overshadows any policy message the candidate sought to convey. Barack Obama faced this scrutiny in 2008 when he used the phrase "lipstick on a pig" to deride opponent John McCain's policy platform, only to have partisans spin the term into an accusation that Obama was disparaging McCain's running mate, Sarah Palin. The news media ran with these accusations, with a wink and a grin (e.g. "Lipstick…", 2008), even though it was clear Obama's critics were intentionally de- and re-contextualizing his remarks. Hillary Clinton was haunted by her use of the term "deplorables" in a statement that actually sought to empathize with the majority of frustrated Trump supporters. Meanwhile, journalists in the early part of the 2016 campaign were repeatedly flummoxed when

gaffe upon gaffe of Trump's, which turned out not to be gaffes at all but rather unfiltered soul-

bearing, somehow managed to elevate instead of disqualify him (e.g. Mayer, 2015). As

Republican speechwriter Matt Latimer (2016) writes:

> Time and again, Trump has survived what only a few years ago would have been
> considered career-ending gaffes—from calling women "pigs," to boasting about his
> sexual prowess, to repeatedly insulting war heroes, to offending Mexicans during his off-
> the-cuff announcement speech, to misspelling basic vocabulary words like "lightweight"
> and "honor" on his Twitter feed. … The gaffe hasn't destroyed Trump; it's made him
> stronger.

This reality should have been a signal to journalists that the standard common sense of campaign

coverage was no longer operative, but it did little to change their practice.

By early in Trump's presidency, reporters had ceased portraying his errors, lies, and

contradictions as potentially crippling gaffes and instead began trying to wrestle his statements

into a coherent policy or strategy narrative (see Roberts, 2017; Guilford, 2018). Textbook

justification for such activity emerges from Mencher (1991), writing generally about any brand

of speech coverage: "Now and then a reporter sits through an incoherent speech in which illogic

and vagueness prevail," Mencher writes (p. 346). "What should he or she do — confuse the

reader with an accurate account? The reader will only blame the reporter." Perhaps another

motive was a desire to shoehorn Trump into an exemplar of the enduring values (Gans, 1980)

mythically attached to the presidency. It is particularly difficult normatively for journalists to

dismiss or disparage a high-level elected official, which is why they frequently found evidence

or excuses in 2017 and early 2018 to characterize Trump's less shocking speeches and actions as

"presidential." Yglesias (2018) for instance, noted multiple reporters approving of how Trump

handled himself at an open meeting with Democrats on immigration, praising him essentially

"for the feat of not suffering from any obvious symptoms of dementia." Yglesias wryly advised

that "[t]hose touting Trump's ability to remember the names of the members of Congress he was

talking to .... should probably note that everyone was seated around the table with name placards." On other occasions, stories on Trump appeared to actively coach him toward normative behavior. One item published after Hurricane Harvey struck Houston recounted how Ronald Reagan had taken on the mantle of "consoler-in-chief" after the 1986 space shuttle *Challenger* explosion (Montanaro, 2017). The headline on this story, addressed to a president who had already dismissed the millions in Harvey's path with a casual "good luck" (Smith, 2017), was, "Can Trump Show A Nation He Cares?" The phenomena of reporters lowering the bar to legitimize Trump got so common that commentators tried to pre-empt such behavior ahead of the 2018 State of the Union address under headlines such as "Please Don't Call Him Presidential" (Goldberg, 2018; see also Rubin, 2018). "Like most Americans," textbook authors Izard, Culbertson and Lambert (1973, p. 21) note, "journalists want to respect their leaders."

Trump and the Presidency: A Common Sense Contradiction

The mythic and newsmaking power of the presidency helped create conditions for journalists' continued coverage and efforts to normalize Trump as his campaign built media-abetted momentum in 2015-16. His very success was a legitimizing force that increasingly precluded reporters from deviating from the narrative and coverage patterns of their peers. But the legitimizing route was not inevitable: Journalism textbooks and cultural common sense such as Gans' (1980) enduring values provide ample cover for more aggressive or dismissive coverage, had political journalists chosen that route.

The principle of objectivity notwithstanding, many texts dating to the mid-20th century encourage journalists to repudiate politicians and public acts that violate basic standards of democracy or decency. Bush (1940), for instance, argues that one of "[t]he chief functions of the newspaper … [is] to stand vigil for the public to guard it against unscrupulous exploiters,

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demagogues, and other real public enemies" (p. 2-3) and suggests that "[b]ecause the modern

newspaper has failed so frequently to identify the true and false public leaders, politics has

gradually shifted into the realm of the unreal" (p. 349). Wolseley & Campbell (1949) argue that

the journalist "must have the legal and historical right to criticize those in power and authority.

He must have the right — and with it the responsibility — to expose and oppose the government,

church, business, or labor when in his judgment he thereby serves public interest" (p. 14). The

Associated Press Managing Editors Association's undated "Criteria of a Good Newspaper"

declares that such papers "[o]ppose demagogues and other selfish and unwholesome interests,

regardless of their size or influence" (Rivers, 1964, p. 338). Mencher (2006) argues that

journalists hold "reverence for shared values, rules, codes, laws and arrangements that give a

sense of community. Such concern causes the journalist to keep careful watch for any action that

can divide people by groups, classes or races" (p. 553). Harriss, Leiter, and Johnson (1981) argue

that an unmindful reporter "may find himself being 'used' by one candidate or the other. … The

public more or less depends upon him to expose the bad and commend the good deeds of public

officials" (p. 319).

Neal (1949) presciently anticipates Trump's candidacy, with a warning to reporters to

avoid precisely the trap into which journalists fell in 2015-16:

> Here is a candidate so bright with color that he seems spectroscopic. He amounts to
> nothing, but he's a glorious relief from the other candidates. They declaim about tax rates
> and other mathematics; the sideshow lad jumps on the table, rips off his shirt, sings
> hymns, and swears lustily. The reporter must present him as what he is, a good show, but
> must make it evident that the show is vaudeville rather than drama. (Neal, 1949, p. 513)

Should the reporter get carried away by such a candidate's enthusiasm and suggest there is more

substance than meets the eye, that candidate eventually "will address throngs of 1,200 rather than

200 and, regardless of how disquiparant his platform, he will be taken seriously. Why? Because the reporter has built him up from a clown to a prophet" (Neal, 1949, p. 513).

But the paradox by which reporters are expected to exercise the requisite judgment to cull destructive candidates and defend civil discourse while at the same time remaining "neutral" makes this work all but impossible. Although Bond (1961) asserts that "all Washington correspondents are given leeway as interpreters and, indeed, in the expression of opinion" (p. 132), most accounts of presidential campaign coverage from that period differ. Mencher (1991) quotes a political reporter from the 1960s saying, "We could not, without 'editorializing,' tell the readers that [Sen. Barry] Goldwater was not getting a strong reaction from the crowds, that he was in some cases boring them. We couldn't say that some of what he said didn't make sense, in terms of being bad logic expressed in sentences that didn't say anything" (p. 39). Timothy Crouse, author of *The Boys on the Bus* (1973), which chronicled coverage of the 1972 presidential campaign, "concluded that a strict anti-interpretation rule was imposed on most journalists. ... 'A reporter was not allowed to make even the simplest judgments; nor was he expected to verify the candidate's claims'" (Hage et al., 1976, p. 18). Hage et al.'s choice of the words "rule" and "imposed" to introduce Crouse's quotation is interesting, because Crouse's book identifies no written rule or human agent behind these reporters' perceived constraints. It was rather "the old formulas of classic objective journalism" that led reporters "to feel caged in" (Crouse, 1973, p. 305) to common-sense practices. This feeling of involuntary confinement bears a strong resemblance to Foucault's use of the panopticon metaphor: the sense of needing to conform one's behavior to an invisible guardian whom we feel bound to obey, even in the absence of any formal requirement and often against our own preferences.

Even when textbooks grant journalists some room to interpret, reporters are often advised to sugarcoat characterizations that might help audiences confront the brutal nature of certain political behavior: "Reporters assume audience members are intelligent and capable of reaching their own conclusions... Reporters avoid loaded words, such as 'demagogue,' 'extremist,' 'radical,' 'racist,' 'segregationist' and 'zealot'" (Fedler et al., 2001, p. 46). Paradoxically, three dozen pages later, the same authors congratulate a Louisiana newspaper for being blunt while covering gubernatorial candidate David Duke: "When Duke urged a return to 'neighborhood schools,' the Times-Picayune reported that Duke was using the phrase as a euphemism for 'segregated schools'" (Fedler et al., 2001, p. 80). Contemporary journalists faced a similar no-win dilemma in deciding whether to characterize Trump's falsehoods as lies during the campaign and his early presidency (Barry, 2017; Greenberg, 2017; Weiss, 2016).

A reporter's personal opinion of a candidate, even one derived from the insight of proximity to which most voters have no access, must also be hidden, according to textbook discipline. "'It's inevitable that if you travel with a candidate, you'll develop some feeling one way or another for that candidate,' notes David Espo, who has followed presidential candidates for the Associated Press. 'You have to check yourself'" (Lanson & Stephens, 2008, p. 301). As with so many other disciplinary techniques, this one deprives audiences of important affective data. If a candidate comes off as a jerk, don't citizens have a right to know that? If she is frequently warm and genuine in private, isn't that worth reporting? Why should the real lived experiences of reporters who represent citizens in these situations be kept secret, when this could be the most original and valuable information they have to offer (see Merrill, 1996, p. 90)?

The answer lies in the discipline of balance, the requirement that journalists appear strictly neutral on matters of public controversy. During an abortion protest in Wichita, Kansas,

for instance, a local paper "tried so hard to give balanced coverage that some of the editors actually measured the number of inches of type given to the pro-choice and anti-abortion sources to make sure that they had equal treatment" (Rich, 2007, p. 365-366). Similarly, "During political campaigns, editors try to balance — in some cases down to the second of air time or the inch of copy — candidate A and opponent B" (Mencher, 1991, p. 42). This discipline helps explain why Hillary Clinton's manufactured or inflated scandals – her non-regulation email server, her relationships built through the Clinton Foundation – were covered at least as much as the documented illegal activities by Trump's foundation and "university" (Faris et al., 2017). Such false equivalence – assuming that the two major-party candidates are always equally, if sometimes differently, unsavory – is justified in journalistic culture by the dubious truism voiced by Harrower (2010): "If no one ever calls your stories biased, you probably aren't doing your job; if, over the long run, you get comparable numbers of complaints from both sides of the aisle, there's a good chance that you are" (p. 111). There is no room in this formulation for one candidate, party, or platform to be less truthful, lawful, or helpful than the other.

A component of the autonomy to perform the discipline of balance is the authority to weigh the timing of political claims. Through longstanding practice, journalists have disregarded attacks identified as taking advantage of news or electoral cycles to deprive reporters of the opportunity to get "the other side." For instance, Neal (1949) writes, "Some papers have a copper-riveted rule that no personal attacks will be printed later than the Sunday before election. That prevents a gutter candidate from issuing on Tuesday, election morning, a *feu d'enfer* so late that the opponent cannot reply" (p. 515). This consideration was more relevant during the slower news cycles of the mid-20th century, when instantaneous or anticipatory responses were not available to campaigns, and citizens were not potentially wired into news feeds throughout their

waking hours. It also predates the early voting processes that have rendered quaint the notion of

a unique "Election Day" on which nearly all citizens were expected to vote, everyone drawing

from the same body of available political knowledge. But while approaching obsolescence, this

principle suggests that normative standards avail journalists of the freedom to ignore political

statements they consider to be unfair or manipulative. If the field collectively determines that a

certain message is out of bounds, it makes no claim to *having to cover* that message.

Textbooks also make clear that this autonomy to disregard unsubstantiated assertions has

often been usurped by the discipline and urgency of news values, as politicians have manipulated

journalistic routines to land unrebutted attacks or unverified claims. One Washington reporter

from the 1960s "said his early deadline meant he had to write about [Barry] Goldwater's charges

without knowing whether they were true or false" (Mencher, 1991, p. 39). Hage et al. (1976) cite

a further example from Crouse's *The Boys on the Bus* regarding

> [Richard] Nixon's practice of including a sensational, if suspect, charge in his speeches.
> The objective tradition persuaded reporters to use the accusation as the lead of their
> stories. Time for rebuttal or denial was not available because Nixon not only knew what
> made a good headline and lead, but also the deadlines for Eastern papers and networks.
> (Hage et al., 1976, p. 18)

Trump's tweets now serve as the icon of unfiltered and unanswerable presidential

communication – diffused through social media without the need for journalistic gatekeeping,

and often retweeted or otherwise amplified without context or correction by mainstream

journalists hours before clarifying and explanatory stories are reported and published.

Journalists *Can't* Ignore Candidates – Or *Can* They?

As I have noted in Chapter 1 and repeated elsewhere in this dissertation, a principle

journalistic rationalization for covering Trump as extensively and normatively as he was in

2015-16 was a definitional invocation of basic news values: He's a candidate for president; he's

drawing people to rallies; he's rising in the polls; he won the nomination. We *can't* ignore him.

As I have also noted, journalistic discipline and governmentality suggest that the more frequently and broadly this rationalization is applied, the more likely it is to prescribe journalistic practice and preclude any aberrant individual judgment. Journalists process these rationalizations as natural and common sense, which makes it easy not to notice that the same disciplining forces allow them to rationalize the exact opposite practices when those are interpreted as natural. It turns out that journalism textbooks, and journalistic precedent, allow plenty of opportunity to ignore candidates in most of the circumstances listed above.

As early as 1940, Chilton R. Bush's *Newspaper Reporting of Public Affairs* empowered journalists to select which campaign messages were worth amplifying to citizens: "To what degree newspapers ought to censor campaign propaganda it is impossible to say, but a strict censorship of a portion of the obviously exaggerated material would go far toward making politics more real to the voter" (Bush, 1940, p. 350). MacDougall (1957) argues that "There is nothing in the constitutional guarantee of freedom of the press to obligate any individual journalistic enterprise to present all of the possible contrasting viewpoints on any matter, an impossible task" (p. 25). Charnley (1975) insists that decisions about what to include in a news report should not be driven by public demand: "The reporter or editor … has to decide to present facts that interest few of his audience but that nevertheless should be made available to all; on the contrary, he may withhold facts of enormous interest because he feels he cannot justify the results their publication would bring" (p. 25). And Mencher (1991) challenges the notion of absolute mathematical balance: "If candidate A makes an important speech today, the speech may be worth page one play. If, on the same day, opponent B repeats what he said yesterday or utters nonsense, the newspaper or station is under no obligation to balance something with

nothing" (p. 42-43). Instead, Harrower (2010) argues, "Readers depend on you to cut through the campaign rhetoric" (p. 110), often "with a declarative sentence that reflects your own authority and knowledge" (p. 111).

Journalists have, in certain circumstances, displayed remarkable autonomy in collectively establishing which candidates are and aren't worthy of robust attention. Reporters and editors do, in fact, selectively neglect candidates they deem unserious or unlikely to succeed, belying the notion that journalists *have to cover* or *can't ignore* political actors. Schudson (1995), for instance, points to a *Columbia Journalism Review* article detailing "how the press systematically avoided covering Democratic presidential candidate Larry Agran" (p. 230) in 1992. Communication professor Joshua Meyrowitz argues in the article that, "With Catch-22 logic, Agran has been told by news media executives that he has not earned the right to media exposure because, among other things, he has not received enough media exposure" (Meyrowitz, 1992, p. 46). Ironically, Agran, a long-time elected official in Irvine, California, was ignored in part because he had never held state or national office – a condition that hardly persuaded journalists to dismiss Trump. Even as Agran rose in the polls, news outlets continued to ignore him until his public support dropped back into oblivion, which suggests that momentum alone does not necessarily mandate coverage. What's more important to journalists' decisions, Meyrowitz suggests, is panoptic discipline: He quotes newsmagazine editor Alvin Sanoff saying, "[I]t's always safer to stay with the pack and be wrong than to risk going out on a limb and covering someone who then turns out to be not that important" (p. 47). What Agran learned, Meyrowitz writes, was that "to become visible, he has to be disruptive" (p. 46); what little attention Agran got came when he inserted himself into events to which he wasn't invited.

In a similar example, textbook authors Lanson and Stephens (2008) recount an anecdote from Paletz and Entman's (1981) *Media Power Politics* in which Jimmy Carter's narrow 1976 successes in the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary all but banished New Hampshire runner-up Morris Udall from meaningful coverage, as reporters and editors rushed to establish a presumptive favorite. "The media had fashioned a version of reality based on their own needs, practices and imaginings, and foisted it upon actual campaign events," write Paletz and Entman (p. 35). "Is that fair?" Lanson and Stephens ask in response to the anecdote. "Is that reporting the political climate or creating the political climate?" (p. 21).

A case from the very campaign that catapulted Donald Trump to the presidency is Rocky De La Fuente, a millionaire businessman who in 2016 competed for the Democratic nomination on ballots in more than 30 U.S. states and territories, including Michigan; and then ran as the Reform Party candidate on ballots in 20 states; and whom you've likely never heard of. De La Fuente was not altogether ignored: He was featured in a couple of last-minute local stories explaining why his name would show up on certain states' primary ballots (he gathered sufficient petition signatures rather than earning institutional support). He got a little attention when he acted "disruptive" by suing for access to certain other states' ballots. He was even lampooned by Miami Herald humor columnist Dave Barry (2016): "[B]efore you dismiss him as merely a loon, consider this: He is a loon with *four buses* in Iowa." But De La Fuente garnered almost zero coverage from the national news outlets responsible for shaping campaign discourse. I couldn't find any metajournalistic commentary explaining *why* journalists felt safe to ignore him; unlike Agran, De La Fuente did not even merit a critical *Columbia Journalism Review* piece.

I offer this example not to argue that De La Fuente, whose hobby appears to be running for any office anywhere, deserved more journalistic attention than he got (in the above examples,

Meyrowitz [1992] and Lanson and Stephens [2008] make strong cases for why Agran and Udall *did*). The case, rather, demonstrates that, for all their bluster about the bedrock news values that determine who they *must* cover and *can't* ignore, journalists as a group tend to arbitrarily construct and select the personalities to whom those values apply.

Of course, Trump, unlike De La Fuente, was a prominent person and publicity magnet well before the campaign. But as a contender for president, with no prior public service and no demonstrable policy knowledge, Trump deserved the Dave Barry treatment, not daily interviews with major media. Once the stamp of legitimacy is set on a presidential hopeful, qualifications don't matter: The supreme news value of the presidency kicks in.[17] "Aggressive candidates are going to claim more space than cautious candidates; major party candidates are usually a bigger story than minor-party candidates," write Lanson and Stephens (2008). But, they warn, "Too much time spent tracking front-runners and predicting their victories can make those predictions self-fulfilling" (p. 21). Journalists do not appear to have heeded the authors' advice on this matter in 2016, but they were sensitive to Lanson and Stephens' next argument: "It's also better to bend a bit to make room for the views of so-called extremists and splinter groups than to condemn them to silence because their views seem extreme" (p. 21).

Conclusion: "Minimize Harm"

In this final chapter analyzing how textbook news values help construct disciplinary regimes by which reporters attend to or amplify certain kinds of phenomena while leaving others

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[17] The idea that journalists don't help promote presidential candidates through editorial choices, and that they don't play favorites based on habitus and news values, is patently ridiculous. Journalists' rooting is based not on political ideology but on their collective sense of a good story. On January 9, 2018, nearly three full years before the next presidential election, the USA Today insert for local Gannett newspapers featured a section-front centerpiece dominated by a photo of Oprah Winfrey at the Golden Globe awards and the headline "#Oprah2020." The readout was, "A run for president may be a big 'if,' but it seems a seed has been planted." The package practically pleads for Winfrey to announce a campaign and set up a clash of entertainment titans for one of the most important political and policy jobs in the world. The maxim I learned to describe this tendency is, "Vote for good copy."

unexplored, I looked specifically at the contradictions surrounding coverage of the U.S. president and presidential candidates. I have shown that while the presidency is not listed as a distinct news value in any text, it is portrayed by many authors as the epitome of explicit values like prominence and conflict, conferring an air of supreme and ubiquitous newsworthiness on the office and those who seek it. Such a hegemonic value repeatedly overwhelms journalists' claims on autonomy, rendering them easy marks for political operatives savvy enough to leverage journalistic norms toward their own political or policy ends (Parks, in press-a). Journalism textbooks provide numerous ways for journalists to assert their autonomy in the face of this disciplinary juggernaut – duties to clarity, to fairness, to community values, to independent judgment – but these appeals tend to wither in the face of presidential prominence.

In making news decisions about Donald Trump's candidacy and first year in office, journalists forsook available alternative norms and traditions as they acted to preserve the supreme newsworthiness of the presidency. News organizations in 2015, 2016, and 2017 did not, as many textbook authors implore, keep careful watch against action that divided people by groups, classes or races, but rather amplified and enabled such action (see, for instance, Yglesias, 2016). They did not stand vigil against exploiters and demagogues, but rather handed them a megaphone and stood back (see Mazza, 2016), to the point of covering rallies at which their own legitimacy was assailed and personal safety threatened. Journalists' disregard for their textbook responsibility to defend civil and democratic institutions when covering Trump suggests that the presidency as a mythical news value prevails, and that authors' more high-minded admonishments have been unable to secure the current journalistic culture against the gravitational pull of presidential news, even in the face of a galactic assault on the foundations of U.S. democratic society and systems.

In my concluding chapter, I suggest three extra-normative frameworks that offer opportunities for journalists and citizens to shake out of the habit patterns that have led American democracy to its current sorry state. But to end this chapter, I've been holding one journalistic norm in reserve whose broad application could also disrupt journalists' tendency to apply traditional news values without regard to those values' consequences. The Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics, reprinted in numerous textbooks from the past four decades (e.g. Brooks et al., 2008; Burken, 1979; Charnley, 1975; Gibbs & Warhover, 2002; Harrower, 2010; MacDougall, 1982; Mencher, 1989; Scanlan and Craig, 2014), has since 1996 included a section titled "Minimize Harm." The section's sub-points are narrowly written and interpreted, with a focus on showing compassion to crime and disaster victims and being sensitive to the impact of reporting on private citizens (see Plaisance & Deppa, 2009). But imagine if this mandate to minimize harm were construed broadly and applied to the social implications of reporting.

"A journalist can ask several questions when facing an ethical decision," write Fedler et al. (2001). Such questions include, "Who will be hurt, and how many?" and "Who will be helped, and how many? … Weighing the hurt against the benefits, and justifying that hurt, can help journalists make the right choice" (p. 538). Of course, these questions require speculative and subjective reasoning on the journalist's part, not to mention a bias against harming people (as opposed to the complete absence of concern for humanity one textbook nodded to in Chapter 6). But they create opportunities for public service journalism that journalists are generally disciplined to avoid.

To take the SPJ code, and Fedler et al.'s questions, at face value would open up all kinds of ostensibly forbidden journalistic choices. Journalists, for instance, could have approached the

2016 election by asking, "Who will be hurt or helped if Trump is elected, and how many? Who will be hurt or helped if Clinton is elected, and how many?" and then proceeding with coverage based on informed conclusions about which candidate would be more likely to hurt or help the country. I've seen no evidence that it ever occurred to a journalist with decision-making authority to apply the "minimize harm" standard to something so monumental as a federal election or a debate over national tax and health policies. Too many countermanding disciplinary regimes intercede to make such a choice discursively possible. But I'm here to encourage more possibilities for more people by showing how we've artificially limited our possibilities to date. In the concluding chapter, I present a more generative approach to news values than our textbooks have heretofore afforded.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION: TOWARD NON-REPRESENTATIONAL NEWS VALUES

"We have more possibilities available in each moment than we realize."
– Thích Nhất Hạnh

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."
– usually attributed to Albert Einstein

There is a long and storied history of entertainingly blistering critiques of the modern American press, from the works of Sinclair, Mencken and Lippmann a century ago to the Hutchins Commission in 1947 to journalism professor Jay Rosen and comedian/social commentators Samantha Bee and John Oliver in the contemporary era. (For some summaries of press criticism, see Chagnon, 2015; Graber, 2003; Merrill, 1996, Chapter 4; Patterson, 2013). The critique has not changed much in a century: American journalism – while capable of producing illuminating, moving, civically important work – is too often shallow, sensational, depressing, manipulative, and subsumed in profit-seeking and conformity. In this dissertation, I have set out not to replicate these critiques but to accept them as propositional and delve into social and cultural explanations for journalism's recalcitrance, with an eye toward exposing roots of habit patterns that might be productively pulled.

I have learned from my own critiques and prescriptive advice (e.g. Parks, 2006) that unsolicited soliloquies on journalism's shortcomings rarely motivate reporters and editors to substantially change their work (see Handley, 2012). Though quality varies widely, public affairs journalism overall has arguably improved little, or has gotten worse, despite decades of haranguing about how negativity, strategic framing, and a conflict-at-all-costs mentality is corrosive to personal psyches, civic discourse, and democratic processes. My goal here, then, while recapitulating some of these same observations, has been to assess the conditions under which journalists discipline themselves to produce such widely unwelcome journalism. I've done

so while embracing little hope that practicing journalists will dramatically change their ways, and a bit more hope that future journalists might see alternative possibilities and future publics might expect something new.

Foucault "wrote history in order to help us gain surprising insight into our present circumstances" (Fendler, 2010, p. 42). It is my hope that the foregoing history of textbook news values has provided some insight, not a causal link, into journalistic choices in our contemporary political environment. My guiding research questions focused on journalism textbooks' treatment of news values from 1894 through 2016. To answer the first and second questions, regarding how textbooks have defined and enumerated news values and how those values have changed over time, I showed in Chapter 3 that, while various authors brought several dozens of terms to bear on their ideas of news, a simple handful of identified concepts emerged as the consistent guideposts of news judgment since the early 20th century. These key markers of journalistic ethos – timeliness, prominence, proximity, unusualness, impact, conflict, and human interest – have proved remarkably resilient tools to rationalize and justify news decisions over time. But in my detailed examination of human interest in Chapter 4, I also showed that while news values have been named and defined consistently for more than a century, they have been used in ways that demonstrate their arbitrary and constructed nature. Human interest was once a dominant value that encouraged reporters to mine everyday incidents for humor and pathos to please affect-starved readers, but it waned in significance through the 20th century as the values of conflict and impact were increasingly applied to coverage of public institutions for the ostensible benefit of informed citizens. Coverage of private suicides, originally potent fuel for human-interest stories, decreased in prominence and became products of harder news values such as impact and unusualness as news organizations adopted a stance of social responsibility

and sensitivity to grieving families. My analysis, then, suggests that prevailing news decisions have shifted dramatically among eras, even as rationalizing terminology has remained relatively fixed.

The patterns described in Chapter 4 also help answer my third research question, regarding how textbooks help introduce journalists to the professional ethos, or what Bourdieu calls *habitus*, of journalistic decision-making. Because news values are arbitrarily deployed, newer reporters follow the cues set for them by more senior journalists and begin to take part in the discourse of news judgments that help determine what types of stories *must* be covered or ignored; that discourse – in the case of suicide – changed dramatically from the late 19th to the late 20th century. Similarly, rationalizations afforded by news values such as conflict and unusualness, as described in Chapter 5, help create conditions under which journalists direct disproportionate attention to violent, depressing, and politically disempowering coverage that they justify as common sense.

My fourth research question focused on the extent to which textbook news values acknowledge, and guide reporting on, the affective dimensions of human experience above or apart from bare facts. Chapter 4 shows how the human interest value has been used as a wedge to separate affect and emotional content from "important" factual news by defining human interest in opposition to policy issues and significant events. This dichotomous split allows journalists to pursue public affairs news "objectively" by stripping it of all emotional power, while still acknowledging human feeling in trivial features that focus on joy or sorrow outside civically significant contexts. As I discuss in Chapter 6, the discipline of emotional detachment extends to reporters themselves, who are habituated into practices of standing apart and suppressing their personal responses to even highly traumatic events. The textbook discourses described in

Chapters 4-6 encourage the replication of practices that produce a broadly sanitized news report – one that presents a world of bewildering pain and suffering at arm's length and discourages emotional engagement with society's most vexing injustices.

My final two research questions examine the paradoxically interacting qualities of journalistic autonomy and field-enforced discipline as presented in journalism textbooks, and the consequences of regularly subverting the former to the latter. As I argued in Chapter 6, representatives of the journalistic field often talk a great game about freedom and independence, but in practice they tend toward a panoptic self-governance that artificially limits the choices they appear willing and able to make. This discipline constructs from whole cloth the universe of stories that journalists *have* to cover and *can't* ignore absent any written code or procedure of requirement. Chapter 7 further argues that journalists' self-perception as an independent bulwark of democratic ideals and good governance is frequently breached by the mythic discourses of the U.S. presidency, whose supremacy as a news value creates a gravitational field normalizing any activities within its orbit.

Collectively, these findings suggest that news values are neither natural, residing under rocks for diligent journalists to unearth; nor essential, a set of conditions without which news cannot manifest. There exists in the canon of journalistic principle and practice sufficient justification for virtually any decision. The necessary catalyst is a critical mass of journalistic will (Ryfe, 2006), a will which shifts according to the vagaries of habitus and becomes reified in specific cases as journalists discipline themselves according to the developing and presumed future expectations of their managers and peers. Watch a flock (or "murmuration") of starlings responding en masse to subtle stimuli and recalibrating each individual's movements to its

neighbors' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4f_1_r80RY), and you get a sense of the flow of prevailing judgment across the journalistic field.

The present moment offers opportunities to nudge this mass of iterating judgments toward something new. Digital and social media permeate public life and disrupt nearly every traditional means of communication (e.g. Anderson, 2013; Harsin, 2015; McGregor & Mourão, 2016). Recent research indicates shifting attitudes toward governance and citizenship in democracies, particularly among younger people, who have been found to be less interested in traditional democratic rituals such as elections (e.g. Kligler-Vilenchik & Thorson, 2015) and even less intrinsically invested in the very idea of democracy (e.g. Foa & Mounk, 2016). Papacharissi (2015) notes that "[n]ews organizations have a long history of slow and reluctant adjustment to the affordances of newer platforms, frequently employing technological innovations but not incorporating the new media 'affect' into the dominant form of news" (p. 40). But if people no longer produce, distribute or consume news according to 20-century models, and if they no longer conceive of self-governance according to 20th-century norms, what anchors us to the idea that the dominant form of news itself is static – that the performance of news in people's lives is not also ripe for change?

In light of digital and social upheaval, contemporary textbook authors have issued tepid calls for changes in journalistic practice. "Newspapers, magazines, radio stations and television stations — the traditional media — find that many of the habits and techniques used for decades no longer work," writes Stovall (2012, p. 7). "The people sitting in college classrooms today will be making new rules and beginning new traditions…" Stovall proceeds to discuss writing and language in a manner that would suit most of his predecessors, and to pass on the discipline of old rules and traditions. But rhetorical shifts such as Stovall's now might presage more

substantive shifts soon. As entrenched as modern news values and their surrounding practices might be, they are not immutable, and frankly they are not sustainable.

What would it take to expand conceptions of newsworthiness, to multiply the phenomena journalists *could* attend to, or *might* ignore? In the remainder of this conclusion, I will examine three nontraditional and potentially revolutionary frameworks to conceive of news values – the essential ontological ethos constituting what becomes news and what doesn't. The frameworks are (1) what Merrill (1996) terms "existential journalism," a call to radical independence; (2) a news conception based on the ontological and ethical commitments of Buddhism; and (3) an epistemologically expansive style of research called non-representational theory, or NRT. I will spend the most time with NRT, which in my view is most powerfully equipped to facilitate a true revolution in news ethos.

Non-Traditional News Frameworks

"Is it surprising that the concerns of the news appear to have changed so little?" asks Mitchell Stephens (1988, p. 34). "To what other topics could the news devote itself? Can we imagine a news system that disdained the unusual in favor of the typical, that ignored the prominent, that devoted as much attention to the dated as the current, to the legal as the illegal, to peace as to war, to well-being as to calamity and death?" Ryfe (2006) suggests a related flight of fancy regarding professionalism, a disciplinary technology that *"makes the use of discretion predictable"* (Soloski, 1989, p. 209, quoting Larson, 1977, p. 168, original emphasis). Taking professionalism as a "constitutive rule" that defines and delimits journalism practice, Ryfe (2006) asks, "It is not inconceivable to imagine something other than a professional form of journalism. … But can you imagine what it would look like in practice? Can you imagine an occasion on which you might argue for a 'nonprofessional' form of journalism (and not be

automatically dismissed)?" (p. 211). Both Stephens and Ryfe suggest that what holds journalism back from escaping its harmful and stultifying habit patterns is a failure of imagination, first in ways of seeing the world and then in ways of seeing journalists' role in it. To inject some imagination into our conceptions of journalism, we might look more closely at those who have already engaged in imaginative leaps, with a nod to fields such as history that have moved at least partly from teleological and "great man" theories of the past to examine the lives and practices of average people and marginalized populations (e.g. Zinn, 2015 [1980]). The three frameworks I put forth below offer varying levels of imagination and promise for practice; but all encourage us to reconsider what most people in the field would consider the bedrock of journalism habitus.

Existential News Values

One different way to think about news values is to consider them through what John Merrill calls *Existential Journalism* (1996). Merrill's polemic, first published in 1977 and brought into a second edition near the end of the century, argues that journalists are increasingly losing their individual identities in a corporate and collectivist culture that stifles creativity and demands conformity at all costs. The argument, which asserts rather cavalierly (in both editions) that things are as bad as they've been in modern times and are only getting worse, is in many ways a blunter, less nuanced take on Foucault's concepts of discipline and governmentality.

Merrill does not cite Foucault, who had published *Discipline and Punish* at about the same time, but he draws heavily on Nietzsche, one of Foucault's inspirations, along with numerous other existential thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Karl Jaspers. Merrill asserts, as Foucault does, that journalists submit to a discipline they are not truly compelled to follow. Ordinary journalists, he writes, "live only in the sense that they breathe, communicate only in the

sense that they utter the expected platitudes, commit themselves only to their regularized duties, and act only in predictable and institutionalized ways designed to stabilize and harmonize" (Merrill, 1996, p. 75). As an example of this panoptic discipline, Merrill writes that student journalists on the University of Missouri newspaper frequently commiserated with him about the (unspecified) bold journalistic acts they wished they could commit but presumed they could not. "'Have you tried?' I ask. The answer is usually that [the student] has not. He has *simply assumed he could not do it*; he felt it useless to ask, or to try. In this way, many journalists enslave themselves by their own inaction, their timidity, and reluctance to try anything that departs from the norm" (Merrill, 1996, p. 93, emphasis added).

Unlike Foucault, Merrill is decidedly prescriptive about how journalists should respond to disciplinary regimes. He does not address news values directly, but his innovation is to argue, in a spirit of libertarianism, that no codified values or professional standards should restrict a journalist's judgment or guide her decisions. Rather, journalists should bring their full selves to bear on reporting and writing: engaging with their subject, tapping into their passion, incorporating their affective responses into their work, bucking institutional constraints on personal conscience. "Although it is contrary to most American journalistic practice and to most teaching in journalism schools, the concept of good reporting must also stress the *feelings* of the reporter," Merrill writes (1996, p. 90, emphasis in original). One might argue that the independent-minded journalists I listed at the beginning of Chapter 6 share traits with Merrill and his disciples' exemplary existential journalists, who include I.F. Stone and Texas political columnist Molly Ivins.

Parallel with Foucault's views on freedom, Merrill writes, "The existential journalist knows that he can always refuse to do something, to write some story, to interview some person,

to change some headline. He can always say No, which for Sartre is the ultimate and final freedom that cannot be taken away" (Merrill, 1996, p. 72). Merrill offers this freedom in the sense of asking journalists to conceptualize autonomy not just at the field level, but at the individual level: "He has come to think of journalistic freedom as meaning only freedom of the press (as an institution) from outside forces; he seldom permits himself to think about journalistic freedom *as it relates to him as he works within journalism itself*" (Merrill, 1996, p. 100, emphasis in original). From this perspective, the idea that any given journalist *must* cover or *can't ignore* Donald Trump – or anything else – is heresy.

By asserting autonomy for individual journalists, Merrill does not suggest these individuals face no limits or can do anything. Rather, "the existential journalist ... must exercise controls on himself and must feel responsibility to others and a concern for others. The existentialist is not against controls; he simply rebels against these controls coming from *outside* agents" (Merrill, 1996, p. 114, emphasis in original). It is here that Merrill's existentialism exhibits less nuance than Foucault's discipline, which is suffused in the possibility of existential resistance but also suggests that an individual's "controls on himself" are not necessarily intrinsic but rather technologies of social and cultural expectations. One's responsibility to others does not spontaneously generate from within; personal choices are not made in existential vacuums. Expressions of conscience are the products of what we expect others to expect of us.

Lack of nuance aside, Merrill (1996) offers some broad possibilities for upending the traditional professional ethos of news values by fusing the divide between the affective power of human interest and the detached reticence of "important news." He argues that existentialist thinkers "have attacked the emptiness of empirical, pragmatic objectivity so beloved of American journalists. They have said that this sense of reality is too matter-of-fact, automatic,

and functional – and that such a concept of objectivity causes a loss of admiration for the human person" (Merrill, 1996, p. 87). With the existentialist focus on the individual, reporting is necessarily subjective and dependent on the point of view of the journalist:

> The existential journalist …must learn, like the poet, to make his sentences say just as much as possible, and he must describe people and objects in the light of his own feeling about them. As the poet, he must try to create something that goes beyond pure objective description; the writer must add the other dimension of *self*, which manifests itself in journalistic style. (Merrill, 1996, p. 85, emphasis in original)

Existential journalism, then, removes news values from the profession of journalism, where they can facilitate a form of external control (Soloski, 1989), and places them in the hands of the individual journalist, acting according to her conscience, sense of personal responsibility, and stylistic craft. Merrill does not suggest what kinds of news might emerge from such an aggregation of independent arbiters, only that it will be a quickened form of journalism unencumbered by collectivist restraints. Our second non-traditional news framework, informed by the values of Buddhism, offers a radically different approach to Merrill's. This framework prescribes a very specific type of news content, produced with the very collectivism Merrill disdains in mind.

Buddhist News Values

Interestingly, Merrill (1996, p. 44) includes a brief reference indicating that existentialism bears some relationship to Zen Buddhism, among other social and philosophical traditions. Buddhism and existentialism share certain strong moral affinities (Teo, 1973) but also significant ontological differences. Regarding similarities, Teo notes that both philosophies emphasize the power of individual responsibility for one's actions and the consequences of those actions. Through "ethical fictions" – karma in Buddhism and Sartre's conceit of "choosing for all mankind" in existentialism – both philosophies intensify the weight of individual choices and

project their consequences into distant futures. However, these similarities on the practical and moral level give way to polar distinctions on the absolute or spiritual level, because existentialism centers the subject on the realization of the self and the renunciation of collectivism, while a primary goal of Buddhism is to realize there is no independent self and to dissolve barriers between self and other (e.g. Goldstein, 2013; Gunaratne, 2009). Buddhism, therefore, might provide refreshing alternative insights into news values conceived through the emergence of modern Western journalism that I described in Chapter 2 and enumerated in Chapter 3.

Gunaratne (2009) took on the project of comparing Western and Buddhist news values, based on the Buddha's Four Noble Truths (suffering is unavoidable; it is the result of attachment to impermanent conditions; it can be transcended; the practice of wisdom, ethics, and mental concentration enable transcendence). Citing an essay by independent U.S. journalist Doug McGill (2008), Gunaratne points out that Buddhist news decisions would be oriented toward easing people's suffering. Consider this aim as a contrast to the prevailing sentiment described in Chapter 5 of this dissertation and its attendant "World of Pain," in which suffering is sensationalized, the potential harm that may result from news judgments is disregarded, and journalists are encouraged to foment conflict amid relative harmony to make stories more "interesting."

Journalistic principles arising from the first noble truth would include a concession to impermanence in which journalists "assume the role of constructive change agent rather than that of the defender of the status quo" and "refrain from over-emphasizing individualism" (Gunaratne, 2009, p. 63). From the second and third noble truths come invocations to recognize the complexity and interconnectedness of events and their causes. The fourth noble truth consists

of an eightfold path of practice which Gunaratne argues could inform news decisions. "As an overall ethical guideline," journalists could "[f]ollow the Middle Way, and avoid the extremes on any issue" (p. 64) – a direct challenge to the Western news values of conflict and unusualness. Specific instructions of the eightfold path include effecting speech and actions that oppose greed, hatred, and ignorance and encourage their opposites.

Gunaratne (2009) argues that Western and Buddhist news values agree that "the elements of a 'newsworthy' event change every moment," but "[t]he two approaches differ to the extent that the [Western] news paradigm treats the event as a fixed entity whereas the Buddhist approach sees it as a continuing *process*" (p. 67). In interpreting professional news values derived from textbook author Mencher (2006) through a Buddhist lens, Gunaratne notes of *impact* that Western approaches to cause and effect are too simplistic:

> For example, the reporting of violence and killings in Iraq as daily events attributable to the Sunni-Shiite rift fails to analyse the mutual causality of many co-arising factors: U.S invasion of the country on false pretenses; resentment against Judeo-Christian domination; religious and ethnic rivalry triggered by 'democratic' elections, the social and economic disparity between the invaders and the invaded, psychological trauma of a war-weary people, and so on[.] (Gunaratne, 2009, p. 68)

Meanwhile, the news value of *prominence* "is antithetical to Buddhist values, which see no-selfness … impermanence … and sorrow … as the three characteristics of existence. Personality journalism signifies individualism or atomism, which breeds egocentrism and sorrow" (Gunaratne, 2009, p. 68). Further,

> Buddhism holds both the individual and the society responsible for an individual's deviance. It prefers rehabilitation of the deviant rather than imprisonment and execution. Thus *violence, war, crime, and punishment are not newsworthy* from the perspective of Buddhist philosophy although explaining these phenomena as a mutually interacting process is permissible. (Gunaratne, 2009, p. 73, emphasis added)

Given these views on news values, a Buddhist approach to journalism would reject the notion that Donald Trump *must* be covered because he is a prominent, powerful, or deviant individual.

But it might take as imperative that journalists examine the historical and social causes and conditions that led to Trump's rise to power and explain his use of it.

Buddhism's idea of objectivity also departs from the standard professional journalistic ethos, but it is partly compatible with Merrill's position through existential journalism. Merrill (1996) considers objectivity to be "one-dimensional" (p. 25), the province of the "prosaic" journalist, who mistakenly considers even "isolated, irrelevant or minuscule" facts to be the essence of valid knowledge (p. 18). Instead of remaining detached from these facts, "The true existentialist in journalism gets *into* the story, becomes part of the story. His perceptions, his sensitivity to the stimuli of the story infiltrates the story; in short, the existential journalist is part of the story and the story is part of him" (Merrill, 1996, p. 37). This last description in particular comports with Gunaratne's (2009) conception of a Buddhist outlook on journalism, which "asserts that the knower (observer) and the known (observed) are interdependent" (p. 70). However, Merrill is not consistent on this ontology; he also suggests a definitive split between the knower and the known, arguing that existentialism "is a philosophy of the subject rather than of the object… The subject is the initiator of action and the center of feeling; this *subject* is the journalist" (p. 29, emphasis in original). But Merrill returns to the idea of interdependence when, following Erich Fromm's (1966) *Man for Himself*, he argues that true objectivity "requires the observer to become related in some way to that which is being reported. The nature of the object and the nature of the observer must be merged and considered equally important…" (Merrill, 1996, p. 91). From the Buddhist perspective, the relationship between the observer and the observed is the only path to truth: "What the Buddha meant by objective knowledge was experiential knowledge that one could acquire through concentration and mental development …

and wisdom… This interpretation is far different from the notions of objectivity and truth in the [Western] news paradigm" (Gunaratne, 2009, p. 70-71).

Gunaratne summarizes the differences between Western and Buddhist/Oriental journalism priorities this way: Western journalism "emphasized atomism, individualism, finite time, center-periphery space, subordination of nature to man, and reification of news values"; while Buddhist journalism "exemplified holism, interconnectedness, infinite time, diversity within unity, harmony with nature, and flexibility of news values" (p. 71).[18] Ultimately, Gunaratne argues, "From the Buddhist perspective, all strands of journalism are interrelated and interdependent. They are the outcomes of dependent co-arising" (p. 72). But the Buddhist model, while holistic, is also directive: "The journalist's obligation is to promote social well being, not the capital accumulation of conglomerate media. … The Buddhist-oriented journalism model … provides a normative model for those who aspire to elevate news from a commodity to a social good" (p. 72).

Gunaratne suggests there is little that we would think of as public affairs journalism that is conducted according to these norms even in Buddhist cultures; his essay is aspirational rather than descriptive. Perhaps the closest Western practitioner of these values is Doug McGill, a former *New York Times* reporter and Bloomberg foreign bureau chief whose own essay imagining a Buddhist journalism was cited by Gunaratne. McGill, now a meditation teacher, has left traces of Buddhism-inspired reporting and writing on his mostly latent website (www.mcgillreport.org). One current example of his work is a commentary on Donald Trump

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[18] A key citation Gunaratne relies on for this passage is Galtung and Vincent (1992). It's interesting and fun to point out that the first author of this reference, Johan Galtung, is also the first author on the storied Galtung and Ruge (1965) analysis of Western news values, considered the seminal academic study on this topic (see my Chapter 1). Western scholars have had a field day with Galtung's news values research but have paid short shrift to his seminal work in peace journalism – work that could help Westerners transcend the very values Galtung helped explicate in the first place.

(McGill, 2017), which pulls no punches but advocates approaching Trump in a spirit most opponents don't evince: with compassion. "We take this step in order, just for once, this one time, to see Trump not through our fears but through our empathy for a man who so obviously is suffering, internally, terribly. It's important that we do so not so as to feel superior to him but, rather, that we see the similarities between his own humanity and our own."

Non-Representational News Values

The two alternative frameworks for news judgment discussed above – existentialist news values and Buddhist news values – both depart from the consensus values presented in U.S. journalism textbooks in significant ways. Existentialist news values center the individual journalist and insist that she construct news reports around her subjectivity. Buddhist news values insist that individuals be de-centered and news be reported not as a series of discrete events but as an unfolding process. Both argue that the journalist is inevitably intertwined with the object of her reporting and not a detached observer who can simply place people and events into pre-defined categories: this story has prominence, this story has impact, this story has conflict, etc. And both approaches are highly prescriptive and proscriptive: Merrill (1996) belittles and ridicules common journalists who subsume their identity to corporate culture and groupthink; they "cower in their corners … or trudge the noisy corridors of life like rusty robots…" (p. 75). Gunaratne (2009) writes that a Buddhist journalism "*cannot* be the purveyor of titillating news intended to arouse the darker side of human beings" and "*must* … situate itself within the framework of interdependence" (p. 73, emphasis added).

The third nontraditional framework for conceiving news values I want to discuss is inspired by a research style known as non-representational theory or non-representational theories (NRT). This approach emerged through cultural geography (e.g. Anderson & Harrison,

2010; Dewsbury, 2010; Lorimer, 2008; Geohegan & Woodyer, 2014; Thrift, 2008) as a way of coming to terms with the ineffable and ever-shifting "realities" of contemporary life, including the Internet's capacity to make nearly any form of knowledge or experience present for nearly anyone at nearly any time (Fendler, 2016). Like this inchoate jumble of comings and goings that characterize digital-age existence, NRT is difficult to succinctly define or pin down; its essence kind of sneaks up on you as trouble through efforts, like this one, to describe it. The term NRT, sometimes offered as "more-than-representational" theory (Lorimer, 2005), is often used as a paradigm-straddling umbrella for research approaches that "do not prioritise the role of representation in their accounts of the social and the subject" (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 2). That is, these approaches aren't trying to tell you precisely what happened in the past or why it happened, because they acknowledge too many overlapping, entangled, inscrutable variables were involved to make such assured claims. Instead, non-representational researchers embrace pre-cognitive conceptions of affect, embodied experiences, performative impulses, and open-minded attention to overlooked possibilities for change (Thrift, 2008; Vannini, 2015a, 2015b). NRT is notable for its emphasis on present-moment awareness, affective intensities in and among bodies, and a resolute agnosticism as to what might make a difference in any set of relations at any given time. It shares with existentialism a rejection of social- or habit-induced behaviors and responses, and with Buddhist philosophy an orientation toward the immanence of the present.

NRT's emphasis on affect – which here means not measurable, sortable emotion concepts but rather the swirling unnameable impulses that propel bodily feelings and actions – can help journalists recognize a wider scale of forces that leave imprints on newsmakers and the news they make. Feelings and cognitive processes interact in complex ways to motivate political

behavior (Papacharissi, 2015), and journalists' compulsion toward facticity at the expense of affect ignores a primary mover in public life. Wetherell (2012), following Berlant (2005), argues that "we are trained to believe that good arguments matter[,] but social and political change seems more frequently based on emotional valence" (p. 141).

Affective forces dominate not just the social occurrences that tend to become news, but the ways in which audiences receive and respond to news reports. New digital and social media habits mean audiences nowadays are less likely to seek out news in any systematic way and more likely to stumble upon it (American Press Institute, 2015), which means they don't receive the kind of coherent programmed reports that were delivered with a daily paper or aired for everyone at the same time each evening. Instead, most contemporary citizens encounter incidental, unsolicited content amidst a social media flow that mixes serious news, false propaganda, personal correspondence, and viral attractions that tumble through their lives in unique and unpredictable ways (Harsin, 2015). Such chaotic spontaneity diffuses the concept of a unified public collectively awaiting actionable information into constantly arising and receding impromptu publics formed through undulating circumstance. Dewey (1954 [1927]) conceptualized publics emerging in this way around fluctuating social and economic issues that might unify certain groups for certain times to solve problems of varying complexity. But he never postulated such patterns iterating at Internet-level speeds across global populations, propelled less by collective information processing than by viral memes. News consumption under present circumstances is not about a rational habitual intention to become informed but rather a surrender to rolling waves of virtual intensity that sweep people in and drop them aside in quantum bursts. Wetherell (2012), while differing slightly from NRT's conceptions,

nevertheless similarly describes affect as a fleeting range of feeling that pinballs among social

and mediated encounters:

> Picking up a newspaper, turning on the television, or talking to someone on the bus, you can find that you are suddenly shifting from one affective zone to another, swept up, for example, in frets of communal anxiety and panic, by the warm ooze of sentimental pity, or the benignity of a shared joke. [p.140] … With a flick of the page, a change in channel, or a shift into another conversation, one can sometimes surface somewhere else, in a different affective region or affective practice. (Wetherell, 2012, p. 140-141)

NRT is built to handle this flow in ways that more rigid and reductionist paradigms are not.

Instead of attempting to fix affective moments in place or historicizing them through mere

representation, NRT seeks to surf affect into potential futures. It "aims to rupture, unsettle,

animate, and reverberate rather than report and represent," writes Vannini (2015a, p. 5). "[N]on-

representationalists are much less interested in representing an empirical reality that has taken

place *before* the act of representation than they are in enacting multiple diverse potentials of

what knowledge can become *afterwards*" (p. 12).

As an example of how NRT can work, I offer my experience of reading Nigel Thrift, one

of the founders of this approach. Thrift writes in a manner that is not quite stream-of-

consciousness, but also certainly not traditional academic style or cadence. He makes arguments

and presents commentary, but his evidence is often indirect and his points oblique. He expounds

on concepts such as affect and performance, but his exposition does not always launch me into

some semantic reflection. Rather, Thrift can set me afloat on a stream of somatic experience. If

this whets your appetite, here's a taste:

> [T]his book keeps faith with the small but growing number of determined experimentalists who think that too often we have been asking the wrong questions in the wrong way: those who want to re-materialize democracy, those who want to think about the exercise of association, those who want to make performances in the interstices of everyday life, those who are intent on producing new and more challenging environments, those who want to redesign everyday things, those who, in other words,

want to generate more space to be unprecedented, to love what aids fantasy, and so to gradually break down imaginative resistance. (Thrift, 2008, p. vii)

Thrift claims to reject "the spirit guide approach to social science" – that is, he does not seek to provoke the kind of "religious conversion" in researchers that he suggests occurs among some born-again adherents to non-representational forebear Gilles Deleuze (p. 18). But reading Thrift can (for some) produce a kind of intellectual catharsis: The process builds cognitive intensity; it makes me restless and eager; it changes the way I *feel*. These changed feelings have changed my research agenda, which has changed the nature of my publications, the exposure to which might in turn change the way other scholars feel about journalism and science communication, which might change their research and practice, which might change the world.[19]

It is this *indirect* approach to change that I presently find most generative, and most realistic, for journalism and social scholarship alike. As I summarized recently (Parks, 2017), there is a strong body of research suggesting that facts on their own do not change people's minds about things and that affective responses to information can mingle with or overwhelm rational ones. Journalists cannot hope to induce a Habermasian deliberative democratic republic through their existing normative beliefs and practices (Anderson, 2013). But they *can* aspire to affect people. And this affect, evoked in the absence of preconceived norms and expectations, might help more people experience a taste of freedom to think and react outside the boundaries of their own discipline and habitus. This expansion might help people feel less constrained and therefore less inclined to constrain others. It might allow for new kinds of political activity, what Thrift (2008) calls "a politics of hope" (p. 4), "hope that, in amongst the poisons of prejudice and general paranoia, some small beginnings can be made" (p. 21).

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[19] Or it might not. I'm managing expectations.

NRT is not an inherently ideological project. Is not conservative, because it rejects stasis and the mere reproduction of existing constructions. It is not liberal, in that it proposes no agenda for emancipation or resource distribution. Its biggest vulnerability to conservative critique is that it can come across as postmodern nonsense, "the most apropos synonym for non-funded and non-published research" (Vannini, 2015, p. 1). From a liberal perspective, it is critiqued for its renunciation of pre-existing categories of identity and difference that help to illuminate structural inequities in society. What NRT offers across the ideological spectrum is a release from intellectual and affective ossification and an invitation to let something new into the picture.

Nor is NRT an elitist project. While conceptually challenging in scholarly writing, NRT experientially is universally accessible. In fact, it celebrates concrete, mundane, and historical experiences that most scholarship dismisses or disparages. A fine example of non-representational values applied to news can be found in Corwin Ericson's (2013) *Checked Out OK*, a minimalist compilation of actual benign police log briefs assembled from small New England newspapers without context or commentary. These accumulated accounts of not much happening privilege the everyday and upend the news values of unusualness and impact:

> 9:21 p.m. - A person told police that a slippery substance was placed on the sidewalk near the Unitarian Church. Police determined that the substance had been placed by the Department of Public Works to provide better traction for pedestrians. (Ericson, 2013, p. 5)

> 11:37 a.m. - A large swarm of bees near St. Brigid's Church was gone when police got there. (Ericson, 2013, p. 6)

> 10:33 p.m. - A person with a flashlight at the Cherry Hill Golf Course was looking for bluebird nests. (Ericson, 2013, p. 6)

Contrary to the standard police briefs in a metropolitan daily newspaper, or the typical lead story on local TV news, reading these briefs – which Stewart (2015) describes as "smooth, speculative little clumps of phenomena" (p. 29) – induces (at least in me) feelings of reassurance, well-being,

and generative curiosity. These items are fair and accurate reports of the life of a community; the fact that they don't privilege pain and chaos, or elite official actors, need not be cause for journalistic alarm. They are a celebration of the little mysteries that lie latent in the mundane.

Non-representational news, then, might focus on affective power propelled by momentary intensities and presented, without habitual prejudice, as immanent and ripe. From a non-representational perspective, there are no enduring or pre-existing news values – nothing for the journalist to look *for*, only things to look *at*. "[I]t is possible to attribute change to any object in the universe; it is also possible to attribute change to any subjective state in the universe, or to anything else" (Fendler, 2016, p. 42). The implication for news values is that no one person, place, thing, event, or idea is necessarily more prominent, proximate, or impactful than another. Human interest can be human or non-human. Nothing is isolated as a body in conflict. In NRT, then, the question of whether journalists *have to* cover or *can't ignore* Donald Trump is irrelevant. He exists, with everything else, on a single "plane of immanence" (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Fendler, 2016).

Non-representational news values can be non-prescriptive and non-normative. They don't assume a particular civic, entertainment, or commercial goal for news content or presume that a particular fact or image will have a particular effect on an audience. This absence of normative goal-setting or preconceived notions can open journalists to new and immediate possibilities. Their content can take on the role of performance, binding neither the journalist nor the audience to an expected outcome but inviting participation in what happens next, creating space for what Deleuze and Guattari (1988) call "lines of flight." Fendler (2016) likens the expanded realm of possibility to a shift from low- to high-definition experiences. This is a helpful metaphor to lead us from Galtung and Ruge's (1965) conceit that professional news values help journalists to tune

and filter discrete informational "frequencies," to the more "multidimensional and multi-phase ways" (Fendler, 2016, p. 40) in which NRT encourages us to encounter the world – in a sense letting the intensity wash over us.

How can a non-representational style of journalism be practiced? I tried it out toward the end of the 2016 presidential campaign, when I went to a Bernie Sanders rally for Hillary Clinton on the MSU campus and intentionally took pictures and video of people and things that did not comport with my well-honed professional news judgment (Parks, in press-b). Straightforward, routine accounts of political pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1987 [1961]) do nothing to engage dispirited publics or to enlighten the already engaged, who line up against such coverage like so many iron filings adhering to opposite poles. Thrift describes such stultifying routines as

> Landscapes of space, time and experience that have been ceded too readily to powerful naturalizing forces which erase the prospect of political action even before it starts by producing *backgrounds*, latent worlds that, by virtue of their routinized … natures, make certain aspects of the events we constantly come across not so much hard to question as hard to even think of as containing questions at all. (Thrift, 2008, p. 19, emphasis in original)

My work at the Sanders rally was to illuminate the background, to denaturalize the event with images that would not elicit routine responses. I took pictures of objects in the outdoor field where the rally was held, video of laughing women running with children, clips that captured Sanders' voice against images of clouds and buildings, video of people departing the event as trucked-in speakers blared Pharrell Williams' "Happy." I fed these images and videos onto Twitter to complement the traditional reporting that was taking place around me. Such a more-than-representational approach does not require us to forsake the linear and rational; it invites us to consider everything else along with it. The goal of my posts was to evoke affective responses that did not necessarily align with traditional political predilections, thereby disrupting heuristic reactions and creating space for new ways of seeing and hearing politics.

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Trump, whose relationship with conventional reality is tenuous, might actually be easier to process through such a non-representational reporting strategy than through straight-up representational stenography. As a bubbly *Washington Post* analysis notes, Trump is "a performance artist" who "realizes that the best way for him to control his message is to *be* the message" (Rucker, 2017, emphasis added). Trump does not *represent* a nation, a political party, an ideology, a "base," or himself; he *presents* these according to his prevailing affective state (see Fendler & Smeyers, 2015). Likewise, try as they might, journalists cannot represent Trump, because no aspect of him holds steady through a news cycle. As I noted in Chapter 7, there have been numerous efforts to render him presidential, but they collapse before they take hold. A non-representational report of Trump, one that accounts for surreal asides and affective whims, might be more accurate than any effort to simply represent him by regurgitating his words.

Reporting in this way – looking for the genuinely new and surprising aspects of experience instead of conforming to the scripted and pre-ordained, taking each assignment as an opportunity to perform unconventionally, and finding ways not to ignore but to celebrate the everyday – can lead journalists to join many non-representational theorists in reflecting on how small, overlooked phenomena can be sources of wonder and joy: two words that don't often come up in journalism or scholarship but which lurk in the margins awaiting activation. Thrift (2008) writes of "the joy … of living as a succession of luminous or mundane instants" (p. 5) and of "taking some of the small signs of everyday life for wonders" (p. 2). Vannini (2015b) notes that non-representational ethnographers "are captivated by – and aim to captivate with – a transformative sense of wonder. … Their methodological orientation … is not 'am I doing this right?' but rather 'how else can I do this?' and 'why not?'" (p. 121). Geoghegan and Woodyer (2014) ponder "what it would be like to live every day excited by the world" (p. 218). Probyn

(2015) writes, "[I]nterest and wonder are powerful forms of embodiment; they are dependent and direct our bodies to be open to the world" (p. 80). Textbook authors Gibbs and Warhover (2002) apply such a mentality to journalism practice like this:

> The act of "seeing" a community in different ways requires practice and experimentation. It's the difference between looking at an object straight ahead or out of the corner of your eye; the difference between seeing an object five feet in front of you and then looking at it from 50 feet away. Photographers make their livings doing this. Take a look at a sign indicating that parking is just ahead, for instance. You could drive by it every day and see the arrow pointing down the street. But stop someday and look at it while lying on the ground. You'll see that it points straight up into the sky. (Gibbs & Warhover, 2002, p. 88)

Probyn also calls attention to iconic naturalist author Rachel Carson's "sense of awe" (p. 80), a word which, instrumentally, can help answer your question, "What's the point of all this?" There need not be a point, other than joy and wonder for their own sake, but for the normative case that journalism could or should make a positive difference in the world, note that the experience of awe has been experimentally shown to make people kinder. Awe – such as experienced in nature, through witnessing a human birth, or participating in communal activities like political protest or attending a football game – "leads to more prosocial tendencies by broadening the individual's perspective to include entities vaster and more powerful than oneself and diminishing the salience of the individual self" (Piff et al., 2015, p. 895-96). Helping people experience awe, in other words, can mitigate or reverse mean world syndrome (see Chapter 5).

It is partly a result of this promise that NRT now manifests in how I try to project myself into the world. My Twitter feed, for instance, is pretty analytical and focused on politics, journalism, and science communication. But I also follow and frequently share some accounts for aesthetic and experiential reasons, most notably Rabih Alameddine (https://twitter.com/rabihalameddine), a writer who tweets out poetry and works of art as a form of procrastination (Blitzer, 2016). I also once disparaged the genre of adorable or amusing

distractions known as the "cute cat video" (this is inclusive of dogs, squirrels, babies, large-eyed robots, etc.), but I don't anymore. Instead, I'll quibble with the word I just chose – "distraction" – because my point is that an empathetic mammal face, in NRT terms, can be as meaningful and significant as a news story on tax policy. Both can, and do, change the way I approach the world, and neither has to be considered as conceptually or even ontologically distinct from the other. That both types of content, and many hybrids, move indiscriminately through my Twitter feed is the very kind of affective motion that NRT draws attention to.

For one last example of how this sensibility can mingle affect and civic illumination, take a look at Doug McGill's beautiful piece of what I would call non-representational journalism about his aging mother and her artistry (http://leafartist.tumblr.com/). The story, a series of photographs connected with little bits of descriptive and expository text, details how Jean McGill lives with "severe cognitive deficit" by producing art with gathered leaves and everyday objects, interacting with dogs, and reveling in simplicity. This is not a linear, coherent narrative imbued with expert analysis or broad social context. It's much more of an effort to present his mother's life through affective moments than to represent it through explanation or chronology. Yet the story also yields important intellectual insights on what it's like to age, to care for an aging loved one, and to confront art that lead to interesting questions about social discourses, mental health, and the qualities of a good life. It's like a *New York Times* trend story about long-term care without the *New York Times* getting in the way.

I'll end this project here – on joy, wonder, and awe – because these experiences can proliferate in journalism if enough people want them to. There is nothing to say they can't, except a hundred years of professional discipline passed on through newsroom habitus and journalism's body of knowledge available through artifacts such as textbooks. But this means

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that opportunities to open up generative and joyful approaches to news lie in the laps of journalism scholars, tasked with helping to teach new generations of journalists. If, indeed, "textbooks and other primers establish orthodoxy in a field" (Vos, 2011, p. 437), then the texts journalism scholars write and select to introduce students to journalism practice could be sites of tremendous change that help release our clenched society from its rutted political paths.

These changes don't have predetermined trajectories. NRT is not a road map; it's an anti-gravity device. Non-representational theorists suggest that change is most possible through the bubbling up of countless, individual, experiential moments in which conditions entangle (see Barad, 2007) to make something new happen. That means every news story, every classroom session or departmental meeting, every Tweet, and every dissertation can become part of an immanent atmosphere that provokes more awareness, compassion, and understanding. Small, concrete actions undertaken through innumerable avenues may do more than large-scale efforts at comprehensive change. My job is to keep taking small actions (Amin & Thrift, 2013). As a *New Yorker* writer (Heller, 2016) argued in an essay applying an unarticulated non-representational sensibility to the limits and elasticity of language: "It is sometimes said that the last decade was the age of Big Ideas. Let this one be the era of Small Process, done for real."

APPENDIX

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