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Revising the Rulebook, Revamping an Industry: Objectivity and Professional Journalism in Transition in the Modern Media Ecology

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REWRITING THE RULEBOOK, REVAMPING AN INDUSTRY: OBJECTIVITY AND
PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM IN TRANSITION IN THE MODERN MEDIA ECOLOGY

by

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written by Christina Lefevre-Gonzalez
has been approved for the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

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Date _____

The final copy of this dissertation has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Abstract

Lefevre-Gonzalez, Christina (Ph.D., Communication)

Revising the Rulebook, Revamping an Industry: Objectivity and Professional Journalism in
Transition in the Modern Media Ecology

Dissertation directed by Professor Emeritus Robert Trager

Journalistic objectivity, a key journalism ethic in American newsrooms for much of the twentieth century, is a concept often taken for granted in journalism ethics. Despite its seemingly unimpeachable role in mainstream newsrooms, recent publications by media scholars and critics have interrogated the concept's continued applicability in today's more fluid, digitized media ecology. Little research, however, has clarified whether journalists continue to adhere to the objectivity standard in their work. Likewise, little research has investigated whether objectivity continues to be taught, or how educators address the concept in journalism ethics classrooms at the university level.

By interviewing journalists based in the Washington, D.C. area, this research assesses whether the concept has ever been reified as a practice within newsrooms. Additionally, it explores how and why objectivity challenges the way journalists construct their dual identities as reporters and as citizens, and how the concept influences the way reporters manage the impressions they make in order to adhere to prescribed public expectations for press behavior.

By interviewing university educators who specialize in teaching journalism ethics, this research explores how educators address the concept of objectivity to their students.

It also explores alternative conceptualizations of the term by educators, particularly transparency, pragmatic objectivity, and the critical political-economist perspective.

This research exposes an important construct for future journalism research: the modern media ecology, which is both horizontally and vertically fluid. The modern media ecology parallels the rise of a post-Fordist American society, signaling an epistemic shift in journalism away from a professionalized, objective model to a more subjective, “fair” reporting model. In essence, the waning of journalistic objectivity is only a symptom of much larger socio-economic changes underway in not only journalism, but in communication work as a whole. In response, journalism education at American universities is experiencing an epistemic shift of its own. This research ends with an exploration of how post-Fordist ideology has impacted journalism education at the University of Colorado, as the University seeks to build a new interdisciplinary college that better fits the new fluid media ecology.

Dedications

For Jorge, My Sail... *through waters both steady and turbulent. These last two decades of personal and professional growth have been your gift to me. I look forward to decades more. Let's see where our journey takes us next.*

And for Dr. Derek J. Main (1971-2013), My Dear Cousin... *gone much too soon. The other "Dr." in the family. A gifted paleontologist and a loved family member. Your passion for discovery could fill one-hundred dissertations and countless young minds.*

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PART 1: OBJECTIVITY IN THE MODERN AMERICAN NEWSROOM

Chapter 1: Defining Objectivity as a Journalistic Value

“So much for Objective Journalism. Don't bother to look for it here – not under any byline of mine; or anyone else I can think of. With the possible exception of things like box scores, race results, and stock market tabulations, there is no such thing as Objective Journalism. The phrase itself is a pompous contradiction in terms.”

- Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*

Introduction

On the morning of January 12, 2012, *New York Times* Public Editor Arthur S. Brisbane stirred the hornets' nest with a simple question: “Should the Times be a Truth Vigilante?” A letter to the editor had asked him, “If the newspaper's overarching goal is truth, oughtn't the truth be embedded in its principal stories?” In response, Brisbane deliberated whether journalists should “challenge ‘facts’ that are asserted by newsmakers they write about.” Typically, the *Times* separates research into politicians' falsehoods from its primary coverage of political campaigns; Brisbane wondered whether joining the two reflected the desire of a majority of readers. “Is this the prevailing view?” he asked. “And if so, can the *Times* do this in a way that is objective and fair? Is it possible to be objective and fair when the reporter is choosing to correct one fact over another?” (Brisbane, 2012a).

Journalists and media scholars became apoplectic at the idea that Brisbane described a fundamental principle of journalism – fact-checking – as vigilantism. In an email to Brisbane, *Times* executive editor Jill Abramson responded, “The kind of rigorous fact-checking and truth-testing you describe is a fundamental part of our job as journalists. We do it every day, in a variety of ways” (Brisbane, 2012b). In a Twitter post, media scholar Jay Rosen of New York University wrote, “Everyone in my feed now saying, ‘Huh?

Calling out falsehoods is a reporters JOB! hasn't quite grasped how deep the View from Nowhere runs," (Silverman, 2012). Rosen's allusion to the "View from Nowhere" underscored his belief that mainstream journalism's orthodox adherence to journalistic *objectivity* chances the creation of a false sense of balance in political news stories. By inviting the "View from Nowhere," objective reporting supplants truthful reporting.

The heat created by Brisbane's blog entry overpowered the potential light hidden within the rhetoric—one that invites a public discussion into why mainstream journalism ethics seems so disjointed from scholarly and political expectations for how journalism should function in the American public sphere. This conflict exists, because the desire for finding truth in the face of inadequate public perceptiveness, while sifting through politicians' artistic coloring of reality, remains the holy grail of journalism. Hannah Arendt wrote, "No one has ever doubted that truth and politics are on rather bad terms with each other.... Lies have always been regarded as the necessary and justifiable tools not only of the politician's or the demagogue's but also of the statesman's trade" (Arendt, 1967/1968, p. 1).

Brisbane's awkward attempt to elicit debate unearthed the presumption among many journalists that objectivity serves as an adequate tool for proper political coverage. Greg Sargent of *The Washington Post* identified why this standard has become so problematic. He described three moments in which the *Times* quoted GOP presidential candidates Mitt Romney and Rick Perry falsely asserting that President Barack Obama "apologizes for America," and did so without any in-text rebuttal. He could see how "any *Times* customer reading [the articles] comes away misled." He continued,

In other words, in all those three cases, the *Times* helped the GOP candidate mislead its own readers – with an assertion that has become absolutely central to the Republican case against Obama. Whatever

the practical difficulties of changing this, surely we can all agree that this is *not* a role newspapers should be playing, particularly at a time when voters are choosing their next president (Sargent, 2012).

But Brisbane's initial question remains unattended to. If journalists choose to correct certain facts over others in the interest of identifying truth, then how can they do so from the detached, objective position that has become a normalized ethical practice in newsrooms?

A disconnect between the scientific notion of objectivity and the American public sphere's desire for truth persists. More specifically, a disconnect exists between how traditional newsrooms and educational institutions train journalists, and the conventional expectations for journalism that Americans have become socialized to understand through classroom civics lessons and through political discourse. Journalists must, according to American public ethics, serve as symbolic interpreters within the public sphere, and through that interpretation enable the public to form a public interest that leads to political engagement. As Walter Lippmann explains, journalism must assist an inadequate public to look beyond the unseen and transcend the stereotypes through which it makes sense of the world. Politicians appeal to public stereotypes through the use of symbols so that "mass escapes from its own inertia, the inertia of indecision" (Lippmann, 1922/2010, p. 166). Yet this also renders the public as vulnerable to symbolic manipulation. It is the journalist's job to interpret such symbols so that the public can achieve an understanding of the world that more closely resembles the truth. Many Americans carry the embedded belief that objective journalism serves this purpose.

During the last decade, debates over the future of news have focused on the ethical norm of objectivity as both a villain worth defeating and a precious artifact worth preserving. The disagreement centers on whether objectivity as a professional standard

practiced in newsrooms, and as a fundamental norm taught to journalism students in universities, facilitates the discovery of truth in the modern American public sphere. Critics have explicated objectivity as an antiquated and unachievable ideal (Cunningham, 2003) or as a cultish reporting standard that has long been out of fashion in other professions (Kinsley, 2006).

However, critics and proponents argue over a concept with no universal meaning, or with a reductive meaning disconnected from the scientific philosophy that first birthed it. For example, Michael Schudson distinguishes the “naïve empiricism” of objectivity in the 1890s from the modern twentieth century conceptualization in which journalism serves as an unachievable, but necessary, response to “the disappointment of the modern gaze” (Schudson and Anderson, 2008). Nonetheless, the question remains as to whether objectivity still serves as a useful mediator of symbolic exchange between journalists and the public, and as a norm that should continue its stay in newsrooms and in journalism degree programs.

This research will address the condition of journalistic objectivity in today’s digitized, fragmented, and decentralized communicative environment. But first, this work will conceptualize objectivity by exploring its genesis in scientific positivism, its historical development into a journalistic norm, and its disintegration during the twentieth century.

Genesis of Journalistic Objectivity: From the Ancients to a Positivist Science

Defining Objectivity

Most mass media critics define objectivity as the conscientious commitment to factual accuracy, a result of journalistic benevolence toward craft and country (Reeb, 1999, p. vi). A faith in “facts,” a “distrust of values,” and a commitment to their segregation does

indeed define a part of objective reporting (Schudson, 1978, p. 6). However, operationalizing journalistic objectivity for analysis requires breaking down the concept into a history of behaviors: the growing detachment and partisanship of the 1830s and 1840s; the “objective” style of writing called the inverted pyramid first used during the Civil War; the idea of naïve empiricism in the middle of the nineteenth century; and claims of balance in the 1890s (Mindich, 1998, p. 12). In doing this, it is important to avoid conflating terms such as “objectivity” and nonpartisanship. As David Mindich explains, “‘Objectivity’ and nonpartisanship are so closely linked that they are often confused. But they are different.... [T]rue objectivity as a goal is unattainable, but nonpartisanship... is quite possible” (p. 41).

So defining objectivity as a universal concept becomes problematic when addressing its use in symbolic production. As George Herbert Mead explains, journalism reports on situations through which one can enter into the attitude and experience of others (Mead, 1934/1962, p. 257). This occurs because language is the symbol and the mechanism for inducing responses in others (p. 268). So defining journalistic objectivity epistemologically, instead of ontologically, better fits a model in which a journalist utilizes objectivity as a means for symbolic interpretation for the sake of a public’s collective interest.

In his historical analysis of the concept, Stephen Ward explains that ontological notions of objectivity were the primary sense of objectivity in antiquity and modern Europe (Ward, 2004, p. 37). Out of ancient Greece came two forms of objectivity: an objectivity of theory, that derived from philosophical reflection; and an objectivity of practice, that involved the pursuit of reasonable (but fallible) judgments in public

assemblies, courts, and professions (pp. 40-41). In the former, Plato, in his *Republic*, constructed a form of absolute, ontological objectivity in which only a philosopher whose reason is not distracted by his own appetites can judge what is truly valuable and real. The latter version accompanied the political structure of the Greek city-state, which required public discussion and evaluation of ideas. That, and the spread of literacy and written news, promoted a more ontologically objective approach to the understanding of events (pp. 43, 45).

But with the rise of modern science, epistemic objectivity became the dominant meaning of objectivity from the seventeenth century on. The eighteenth century introduced a methodological, empirical form of objectivity based not on philosophical speculation or casual observation but on experimental fact and mathematics (pp. 54-55). Objectivity, therefore, required facts and intersubjective agreement. A fact didn't exist until it met the norms of the relevant scientific community (p. 64).

Comte and Mill

As an accompaniment to the rise of modern science, objectivity stems from the development of scientific positivism and its entry into the social sciences. In recent decades, writes Michael Schudson, "the term 'positivist' was thrown around as a damning epithet" in the social sciences. Anyone who believed in a conventional means of gathering data to get at the 'truth' suffered the condemnation "of being hopelessly naïve and probably dangerously reactionary.... Positivism was definitely out of fashion" (Schudson, 2009, p. 106). But positivism first developed as a scientific means of arriving at objective truth, and eschewing positivism when discussing journalistic objectivity removes the concept from its grounding in empirical inquiry, essentially rendering the concept abstract and untenable.

Nineteenth century philosophers Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill identified the need for an objective truth reified into statehood. They believed that the French revolution, while beginning as a negation of the French aristocracy, failed to develop a positive outcome that synthesized universal ideals developed before and during the revolution. For Mill and Comte, positive science depended on the cooperative effort of Western nations to carry through on their ideals through common endeavors and reforms.

Comte defined this process as such (Haac, 1995, p. 5):

- 1) a synthesis of knowledge serving a common purpose, to relate man to the world, subject to object;
- 2) a common body of positive knowledge, the sciences being viewed from a social perspective; altruism replaces egoism, as individuals serve other individuals, not society as such;
- 3) the realization that history is a continuum and solidarity a social fact; nation states must unite in the common goal of positive polity, conceived so as to improve modern society

Comte then endeavored to connect positive philosophy to the social sciences in three logical steps (Wernick, 2001, p. 27):

- 1) From the history of the preceding sciences (including the histories of how they *became* sciences) is distilled a conception of scientificity, which
- 2) is then applied to the founding of a new, and in point of fact the only remaining, branch of science. This new science, sociology, in turn,
- 3) forms the theoretical basis for a transformation of the practice corresponding to it: politics.

Positivism's entry into sociology, therefore, gives nation-states the political means through which they can improve modern society.

While the connections Comte makes at first appear elegant, scholar Andrew Wernick believes that Comte's construction contains two peculiarities. The first peculiarity concerns the movement from theory to practice. At first, Comte describes positivism in his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* as an all-embracing philosophy intended not only as an intellectual contribution but also one useful for the establishment of social order. However, he later tautologically presents that same assertion as a practical conclusion drawn from a sociological analysis based on a new science rendered from positivism itself (that being

sociology) (Wernick, p. 28). The second peculiarity displays a similar circular logic between the philosophical system and sociology. Comte asserts that sociology arises from applying the principles of “scientificity” established through positivist philosophy to the social sciences. While he claims that a positivist synthesis of knowledge must exist before the sociological process begins, Comte also asserts that positivism depends on its own conceptual existence within that same scientific advance. Hence, Wernick argues, no linear relation exists between establishing the principles of “scientificity” (step 1 above) to applying those principles to the founding of sociology (step 2) (p. 29).

Comte’s tautological links between positivist science and sociology call into question whether an objective method of inquiry can lead to the discovery of truth and the improvement of the human condition. Wernick believes that Comte’s construction does not occur in a linear fashion, but more as a single, complex event: “... an irruption (in the name) of positivity that occurs simultaneously, and with both theoretical and political effects, on two interlocking planes... a *coupure* which would have brought about into being, all at once, Positive Philosophy and a Positive science of society” (p. 35).

Describing positivism as a spontaneous occurrence couples theory and practice in such a way that joins universal ideas with their political manifestations. Using this logic, the French Revolution’s deconstructive role would have immediately introduced a “positive” sociological outcome, although in hindsight, it is difficult to ascertain what that would have been. Furthermore, Wernick fails to address why such spontaneity would fail in France but progress in the United States. Enlightenment philosophy underpinned both revolutions, but only one generated a specific sociological shift that, in turn, became a new republic.

Comte saw Enlightenment philosophers as critics of church and religion whose “critical metaphysics” induced the French (and American) Revolutions. While the Enlightenment’s “negative” role served to destroy, according to Comte, positivism served to rebuild (Haac, 1995, p. 3). In a letter to John Stuart Mill written on January 17, 1842, Comte explains:

By now, all social progress that could be accomplished under the system of negative metaphysics which governs our constitutional existence has just about been exhausted. Today discredited even in France where it once stood triumphant, what could it be elsewhere? It is not even sufficiently strong to fulfill its critical role, to contain the retrograde movement against which only the positive school will be able to fight with truly irreversible success, because it alone will assume a fully logical position with respect to the reactionaries: it does not grant their principles and then reject their consequences, like today’s typical “revolutionary routine” (Haac, p. 46).

He later concludes:

In short, positivism will perhaps soon be welcome as a support to [law and] order because it alone can sufficiently protect it today at least insofar as progress is concerned, the true conditions of which are neither evident nor clearly felt (p. 49).

Not only did Comte separate the negation of the old system from the positive development of the new one as two separate functions, he also separated subjective from objective methods of understanding. On the issue of subjective reasoning, he makes his belief quite clear: Interior observation is not just difficult or biased, but it is also an illusion that has only furthered metaphysical doctrines of the soul and bad epistemology. Whereas the fundamental aim of positive philosophy centers on advancing human sciences for the sake of social enhancement, interior observation serves as “a most important enemy” of these goals (Scharff, 1995, pp. 34-35). Comte’s rejection of psychology became a point of criticism among his contemporaries, namely his friend John Stuart Mill. Like William James, Mill believed that a person relies on introspective, or psychological, observation first (p. 36). But, Robert Scharff believes, Comte and Mill failed to first define their terms. While Comte opposes introspection as a spurious metaphysical procedure derived from

Descartes and medieval theology, Mill referred to introspection as a function of the science of psychology (p. 11).

But when assessing the viability of journalistic objectivity in the discovery of truth, one cannot ignore the departure between Comtean positivism and the Millian conception of free expression. The positivist concept of objectivity creates a binary that separates a subjective observer from an objective observer. A subjective observer uses one's own attitudes and values while an objective observer does not. Hence, explains Charlotte Wien, "it is a precondition of positivism that one can distinguish between facts and opinions" (Wien, 2005, p. 4). Like scientists, journalists have found this process difficult to tackle. The problem, she explains, is that the journalist must undertake a choice of context in which to place the facts, and this choice is a subjective choice (p. 5). Walter Lippmann alluded to the objectivity of the scientist by implying the subjectivity of the non-scientist, such as the statesman and the citizen. A reporter must overcome his or her perspective as a citizen in order produce good reporting (Reeb, 1999, p. 195).

Positivism's impact on journalism standards and practices materializes in the historicist and empirical ways reporters use sources in order to scientifically get closer to the truth (Wien, pp. 6-7). As Wien explains, reporters use sources in order to piece together the past into a puzzle that, when collected in the right way, would portray a true and comprehensive picture of how events actually transpired. Also, reporters' classification of sources as "first-hand" and "second-hand witnesses" attaches itself to the naïve faith that a first-hand witness possesses a higher truth-value than a second-hand witness (p. 7). As Schudson explains, "... the ideal of objectivity in journalism [was] founded on a confidence that the loss of faith [read: the quest for scientism] was

irretrievable” (Schudson, 1990, p. 294). This loss of metaphysical faith, and embracing of scientific faith, continued through the nineteenth century, and entered the works of other social theorists, such as Karl Marx. David Mindich argues that Marx grounded his philosophy in neither religion nor abstractions, but on careful scientific analysis of social conditions, hence, giving weight to the cause of journalistic objectivity.¹ In fact, hundreds of Marx’s scientific analyses of European society and politics entered the American public sphere while he worked as a European correspondent for Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*, from 1852-1862. Mindich presumes, of course, that Marx’s writing may have influenced American discourse concerning the state of journalism (Mindich, 1998, p. 106).

Objective Truth Derived from the Separation of Facts from Values

A belief in objectivity centers on the Comtean separation of subjective and objective perception. In journalism, that separation manifests itself in the separation of facts from values. Michael Schudson defines facts as “assertions about the world open to independent validation.” Values, on the other hand, “are an individual’s conscious or unconscious preferences for what the world should be; they are seen as ultimately subjective and so without legitimate claim to other people” (Schudson, 1978, pp. 5-6). In 2009, Michael Schudson described the process of separating the two as imperfect but necessary:

We cannot escape trying to make sense of our world. But we are forbidden from trying to do so without making a conscientious appeal to the facts. As imperfectly as we are able to know them. As mute as they sometimes are. It is the least bad system of knowing that we have (Schudson, 2009, p. 113).

Furthermore, Hannah Arendt posited the question of whether one can separate facts from one’s personal values, and if not, whether facts exist in the first place. She asks,

¹ Mindich also makes clear that at least one journalism historian has pointed out that Marx believed that “objectivity” serves the elite. Indeed, in his *Manuscripts*, Marx describes objectivity as “an *estranged* human relationship which does not correspond to the *essence of man*, to self-consciousness.” Annulling estrangement, to Marx, also means annulling objectivity, so that man is regarded as “a *non-objective, spiritual* being” (Mindich, p. 106; Tucker, 1978, p. 113)

But do facts, independent of opinion and interpretation, exist at all? Have not generations of historians and philosophers of history demonstrated the impossibility of ascertaining facts without interpretation, since they must first be picked out of the chaos of sheer happenings... and then be fitted into a story that can be told only in a certain perspective, which has nothing to do with the original occurrence? (p. 107).

But this is no excuse for blurring the lines between fact and opinion, she explains, “or as an excuse for the historian to manipulate facts as he pleases” (p. 107).

Because of this, journalism cannot be a perfect vessel for truth. As long ago as 1920, Walter Lippmann believed that American journalism did not possess the intellectual resources to present an accurate picture of the world, instead relying on reports from “political observatories” for reporters to relay to the public (pp. 107-108). Given that journalism’s legitimacy derives from public faith in its ability to present facts, it cannot eschew the practice of separating facts from personal values, however flawed, in the pursuit of an objective truth. Nor can journalists merely claim objectivity in order to demonstrate their commitment to the truth. In fact, “there is no acceptable way of establishing the reporter’s reliability except the public’s knowledge that he subscribes to good political principles or that he has sound political judgment” (Reeb, 1999, p. 314).

Therefore, despite its roots in positivism, journalistic objectivity depends on the non-scientific faith of the public in order to exist as an identifiable entity. In order for the public to empirically validate whether objectivity exists, the journalist must conscientiously separate facts from personal values in a way that *appears* objective to the eyes and ears of the public. However, as Schudson, Lippmann, Arendt, and others have noted, this process lacks any scientific certainty and admits that subjective perception often clouds how the journalist separates facts from opinion. So the public has few examples on which to validate the existence of objectivity, and therefore, loses faith in its existence and in journalism’s ability to identify truth. Stephen Ward argues, “Traditional

objectivity is rejected as an incorrect theory of journalistic inquiry, built upon an indefensible epistemology and a false characterization of reporting as passively empirical... In practice, traditional objectivity lacks the ethical force to guide journalists because criticisms of objectivity have cast a pall of doubt over the ideal” (Ward, 2004, p. 261). Comte’s application of positivism to the social sciences disintegrates in journalism because of human fallibility. This has not, however, broken the belief that journalists must serve as scientific arbiters of separating fact from fiction.

Truth Derived Through Freedom of Expression

Enlightenment ideals emphasized the sciences as the path to truth, and to reforming society, on the basis of humanitarian principles that are guided by scientific knowledge instead of superstitious authoritarianism (Jacquette, 2007, p. 104). According to Dale Jacquette, science allows investigators to inquire as freely as possible, subjecting their conclusions to public scrutiny and criticism. “It is not only the best way,” he writes, “but ultimately the only way of arriving at the truth” (p. 111). But Jacquette presumes that a diversity of opinion and information within the public sphere yields discussion that introduces enough evidence from which objective truth will arise, whether that information enters the public conscious by voice, ink, radio waves, or computer algorithms. John Stuart Mill describes this process as necessary for the vetting of competing opinions. “There is the greatest difference between presuming an opinion to be true, because, with every opportunity for contesting it, it has not been refuted, and assuming its truth for the purpose of not permitting its refutation,” he writes (Mill, 1992/1996, p. 60). Even “[w]rong opinions and practices gradually yield to fact and argument; but facts and arguments, to produce any effect on the mind, must be brought before it” (p. 61).

In *On Liberty*, Mill explains his four “grounds” for truth-oriented freedom of expression (p. 65):

- 1) If any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. *To deny this is to assume our own infallibility.* [italics added]
- 2) Though the silenced opinion be in error, it may, and very commonly does, contain a portion of truth; and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied
- 3) Even if the received opinion be not only true, but the whole truth; unless it is suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will, by most of those who receive it, be held in the manner of a prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds.
- 4) The meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost, or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct; the dogma becoming a mere formal profession, inefficacious for good, but cumbering the ground, and preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction, from reason or personal experience.

Mill means to use free expression as a process of scientific discovery on the journey to truth. Enlightenment-based rationalism informs his belief that unrestricted speech serves as the only basis for justified truth claims, in which truth has an evident value and works as an undoubted force against superstition and authoritarianism (Campbell, 1996, p. 196). His construction leads to the problematic belief that public discourse functions as a marketplace of ideas. Legal scholar Tom Campbell argues that the market model better serves not the discovery of truth, but its distribution within the public sphere, that “such a model presupposes the ownership of ideas and the right to control their circulation, concepts which are intrinsically inimical to freedom of speech” (p. 197).

Therefore, Mill presumes that all potential participants share a homogeneous legal, social, economic status, and a shared interest, that enables equal access to the means of communication. If all people in a society agreed (and were able) to meet and discuss a statement under the guise that every possible perspective will reach the ears of every other participant, then perhaps that society can verify whether that statement is true. But Schudson points out that, even in the absence of such an impractical, ideal situation, “this

doesn't mean we can't accept some things as facts when there's broad agreement among experts operating with integrity" (Schudson, 2009, p. 112).

Furthermore, Mill's reference to human "fallibility" in his first ground indulges the subjective in a way that Comte rejects. As discussed earlier, Comte dismissed subjective perception while Mill believed that one could not dismiss self-inquiry as a part of positivist science. But by addressing human fallibility, Mill does not present an objectivist approach to discovering truth. He argues that we cannot use such certainty to suppress an allegedly false belief because, without hearing all opinions, we cannot claim to know that it is false (Campbell, 1996, p. 199). Through his "subjective fallibilism" Mill undercuts unrestricted truth-oriented communications as an objectivist epistemology, hence undercutting the positivist belief that reporter is able to separate facts from values (p. 200).

Mill's departure from Comte's rejection of the subjective, coupled with his own conceptualization of the public sphere, creates a paradoxical relationship between journalistic objectivity and truth-oriented freedom of expression. Comte's version of positivist science struggles in the context of journalism, because Comte fails to account for human fallibility; whereas, Mill's acceptance of fallibility only underscores the reality that a journalist or citizen cannot always discern facts from personal values. Over the years, the marketplace metaphor has defined much of US Supreme Court precedent (*see* Campbell, p. 197). Additionally, journalistic objectivity arose in the decades after Comte and Mill as a fundamental part of journalism ethics. The idea that an objective journalist can inform a non-objective marketplace of ideas, while preserving objective truths, seems contradictory, unrealistic, or both.

Objectivity as a Journalistic Norm: From the Civil War to the Progressive Era

Development of Objective Journalism in the United States

Revolutionary War-era press possessed clear partisan affiliations, but their strong affiliation with the independence movement increased their standing in the eyes of revolutionary leaders. Their reputation with the nation's founders, coupled with Enlightenment thinking, created a powerful case for a free press (Ladd, 2012, p. 20). However, at the time, the journalism profession did not exist, so politicians did not consider protections for such a profession (p. 21). So, with professional standards subordinated to political objectives, and with newspaper owners' extensive involvement in politics outside of newsrooms, newspaper writers of the partisan era suffered from a severe lack of prestige (pp. 26-27).

Signs of professional practices did not surface until the antebellum period. The self-contained, single-article story with beginning, middle, and end gave way to the structured news "story"—with facts and quotes from authoritative sources—now associated with professional journalism (Dardenne, 2000, p. 163). By the mid-1800s, "timelessness" in storytelling began defining news reports, as newspapers focused more on real events involving real people in real time. Also, the telegraph offered newsrooms the technological means for more expedient reporting (p. 169), but the spatial limitations of the telegraph required a more efficient prioritization of information. During the Civil War, Edwin Stanton of the U.S. War Department developed the now common practice of the "inverted pyramid" form, in which the news story supplies information in a reverse-hierarchical format, beginning with the most important or pertinent information at the beginning of the article (Mindich, 1993, as quoted in Dardenne, 2000, p. 169). As Sachsman, et. al., explain,

the inverted pyramid form “appears to strip a story of everything but the ‘facts,’ and changes the way we process news” (Mindich, 2000, p. 180). Not only did this contribute to the growing standard of neutrality in reporting, but it also permitted Stanton and the U.S. government to maintain control over the tone and tenor of information during the war. Because it lacked a traditional narrative structure, the inverted pyramid form became easier to manipulate than traditional story formats (pp. 199-200).

In tandem with government reports during the Civil War, the Confederacy’s secession from the republic, and the war itself, changed public expectations of the press. The public’s desire for war reports transformed into a desire for up-to-the-minute news afterward. By the 1870s and 1880s, the growth of the telegraph and wire news services such as the New York Associated Press and the United Press expedited stories to papers across the country (McGerr, 1986, pp. 110-111). In turn, journalism began to specialize as a separate trade from the party establishment, indicating the growth of a professional consciousness. Reporters, rare before 1860, began to fill newsrooms, and both reporters and editors were more likely to have attended college than their antebellum predecessors (p. 109). During the 1860s and 1870s, a group of newspapermen reconsidered their relationship to the parties. Historian Michael McGerr underscores the significance of having college-educated journalists in the newsroom, writing, “[T]hey brought the press more firmly within that upper-class social group most troubled by traditional partisan politics after the Civil War” (p. 113). As the nineteenth century waned, the newspaper became less a medium for traditional partisanship and more a location for independent news. In the 1870s and 1880s, the post-Civil War generation of editors established

“independent journalism,” which offered less partisan, more restrained and factual news, akin to an educational campaign (p. 107).

Responding to the changing economics of the newspaper industry and the improvement of publishing technology, sensational newspapers grew alongside independent publications. “Give them what they want, the newspaper publishers decreed, and thus the ‘human interest’ newspaper developed” (Crawford, 1924/1969, p. 111).

Although sensational newspapers (particularly the earlier Hearst papers) still blurred the line between fact and opinion, they remained institutionally independent of party control. Even partisan newspapers began to water down their political skew. An editorial in the loyally Republican *New York Herald Tribune* described the new, noble role of the party editor in the late nineteenth century:

“Partisan, as he is certain to be, so long as the party system endures and politics are inseparable from the heartbeats of journalism, he nevertheless maintains in the essential governance of his functions a freedom from partisan bias which transcends the mere word ‘independence.’” Journalism, the paper concluded, “is the most objective of all the professions save surgery. How could it be otherwise?” (McGerr, p. 132).

By the 1880s, independent papers had become well-established in the United States. In 1884, *The Newark Evening News* wrote, “The duty of all newspapers at such a time is to give the people the latest news without coloring or bias. It is the truth that the people craves” (p. 119).

The advent of the Progressive movement gave the daily press the impetus for establishing greater political independence. Drawing upon the rhetoric and ideals of the Progressives, dailies began to elaborate a new philosophy of “public service” without regard for any particular group’s political or economic interests (Kaplan, 2002, p. 141). “No longer ‘official organs’ of the party,” writes Richard Kaplan, “they disavowed their past exuberant, political journalism” and instead adopted “a rigorous ethic of impartiality and

public service” (p. 2). The *Des Moines Register* in 1924 described partisan journalism as “old-fashioned” and an “obsolete method” (McGerr, p. 131). By emphasizing public service and independence, the papers of the Progressive Era rejected subjectivism in place of a Comtean objectivist connection between theory and praxis.

World War One stimulated popular public relations campaigns for war bonds, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and other government and public service initiatives. Publicity and propaganda became a concern for journalists who realized the malleability and manipulability of information (Schudson, 2011, p. 76). In 1929, John Dewey described publicity as “perhaps the most significant symbol of our present social life” (Dewey, 1930, p. 44, as quoted in Schudson, p. 76). An early form of parajournalism arose, alarming independent daily editors who moved to assert their collective integrity. Journalism societies formed, creating professional standards based on practices already circulating through many newsrooms.² The American Society for Newspaper Editors (ASNE) started in 1922, followed by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) in 1926 (Winfield, 2008, p. 12).

Following the scientific logic that defined the Progressive Era, objectivity became a formulated occupational ideal within many newsrooms, asserted in many textbooks, and taught in newly forming journalism schools. As Michael Schudson explains, the post-World War One view reflected an American society that seemed both troubled and hopeful during a time when many had lost confidence in the public systems that seemed not to work,

² Walter Williams, an editor and founder of the Missouri School of Journalism, first issued his “Journalists’ Creed” in 1914. Beginning with the phrase “I believe in the profession of journalism,” he asserted that journalism should serve the public trust, and that anything less than serving the public meant a betrayal of that trust (Farrar, 1998, p. 203). The ASNE, SPJ, and other societies mirrored much of Williams’ language in their codes of ethics.

where corporations controlled the supply and demand, where machines controlled elections, and when powerful publishers and the needs of mass entertainment, not the need for truth, governed the press (Schudson, 1978, p. 158).³

Michael Schudson writes,

At the same time, objectivity seemed a natural and progressive ideology for an aspiring occupational group at a moment when science was God, efficiency was cherished, and increasingly prominent elites judged partisanship a vestige of the tribal nineteenth century (Schudson, 2011, p. 77).

Objectivity in journalism reflected a belief in imminent progress, assuming that never again would America experience such a great loss of faith. Objectivity became a response to modernity, a prescription for an eclipsed public incapable of forming the Great Community. As John Dewey, unflinching in his own dependence on positivist science, writes in 1927, “We have the physical tools of communication as never before... Without employing those tools, the public will remain shadowy and formless...” (Dewey, 1927/1954, p. 142).

Arguments for an Objective Journalism in the “Public Interest”

Objectivity spread through newsrooms and journalism academic programs during the 1920s and 1930s, shaping a new identity for the journalist as a purveyor of information important to the “public interest.” But doing so (in the post-positivist manner that editors defined ‘objectivity’ as a professional ethic) meant that journalists must conscientiously set aside their co-identities as citizens. However, doing so also meant that they also could set aside the ambivalence of the era in which they reported. Journalists came to believe in objectivity, Schudson maintains, because they sought escape from their own “deep convictions of doubt and drift” (Schudson, 1978, p. 159). Famed *New York Times* editor

³ Although Schudson, writing in the 1970s, described a disenchantment that existed in the 1920s, the scene he paints bears a striking similarity to the America of the early twenty-first century, where corporations and the upper classes control an unprecedented percentage of total wealth, public services seem dysfunctional, and political cynicism has reached its apex.

Adolph Ochs, after purchasing *The New York Times* in 1896, set the example followed by many newspapers after him, and for news organizations of all media in the following decades. In an editorial on August 18 of that year, he wrote:

It will be my earnest aim that *The New York Times* give the news, all the news, in concise and attractive form, in language that is permissible in good society, and give it as early if not earlier, than it can be learned through any other reliable medium; to give the news impartially, without fear or favor, regardless of party, sect or interests involved; to make the columns of *The New York Times* a forum for the consideration of all questions of public importance, and to that end to invite intelligent discussion from all shades of opinion... (Johnson, 1946, p. 146).

An analysis of Detroit-based newspapers following the Civil War reveals a shift toward objectivity within newsroom editorial policy. Richard Kaplan notes that between 1868 and 1916, partisanship as a percentage of editorials during both presidential election and non-presidential election seasons decreased from 81% to 17%, and from 54% to 3%, respectively (Kaplan, 2002, p. 148).

Professional ethics became an important part of journalism programs. In 1924, Nelson Antrim Crawford, head of the Department of Industrial Journalism at Kansas State Agricultural College (now Kansas State University) became one of the first educators to codify objectivity as part of a curriculum in journalism ethics. His *The Ethics of Journalism* identified deficiencies, namely the cost and commercial function of the press. He prescribes objectivity as a remedy in three doses: maintaining balance and proportion, avoiding sensationalism, and providing editorial leadership to the public. His description of the objective method of newsgathering uses the syntax of investigative science. Regarding maintaining balance, he wrote, "The advance made in the natural sciences since they abandoned the chiefly speculative and adopted the investigative method is evidence of what may be accomplished in a human institution even against the most implacable opposition" (Crawford, 1924/1969, p. 99). Unless a reporter adheres to a prescribed

standard of conduct, the reporter will likely be misled “at a critical moment by his own philosophy of life or his own private interests” (p. 101). By avoiding their subjective perceptions, journalists free themselves from the political passions of their fellow citizens, but at the same time, bear little of political responsibility for what they report to the public. By marrying idealism with scientism and historicism, journalists transformed themselves into social scientists who identified problems but no longer solutions. They became the detached storytellers of all forms of pride and pain within American society, and yet never bore the effect that such news would have on the general citizenry.

Crawford also describes objectivity as avoiding sensationalism. He explains that frequently misrepresentation “is the fault of reporters who, in the balance of instructions from their paper or even to counter such instructions, write sensational stories in the hope... that it will enhance their value to the paper” (Crawford, p. 108). Through eliminating misrepresentation and the invasion of privacy, Crawford explains, sensationalism becomes ultimately a question of balance. Selecting stories that conceal from the people facts that pertain to their welfare is “utterly unjustifiable.” Such editorial decisions fail to serve a “human interest” (p. 110). Publisher George G. Booth summed up best the virtue of avoiding scandal and melodrama:

A newspaper desiring a position of prominence, influence and profit in its field must learn to serve. The more thoroughly and efficiently it serves the uplifting of constructive life of the community, the greater its financial reward and the longer it will enjoy life... Make your newspaper SERVE, constructively serve the public interest first; your reward will come without great effort (Kaplan, 2002, p. 16).

Neither Crawford nor Booth provides a definition for “public” or “human” interest, but both write to confront the dehumanizing aspects of modernism. It is notable, however, that they write from the progressive, Deweyan perspective that believes in the crucial role of communication as a creator of publics and of a public mind. So to them, a newspaper’s

serving the public interest means providing information that enables the public to confront the capitalist abuse of labor, for improving social and human services, and for a more active civic role in affairs that impact the human condition.

Crawford's third definition for objectivity concerns the newspaper's editorial leadership in the service of public opinion. During the eighteenth century, the terms "public" and "public opinion" represented novel concepts, but a new identity emerged among the literate members of the bourgeoisie that transcended the basic identity of "people." The journalist and the public began acting out roles that superseded the separation between private and public life. The "public" began informing itself about the performance of government and the general state of their country. Through newspapers, individuals saw themselves as linked with other individuals (Ward, 2004, p. 129 & 132).

The idea of "public agreement" derives from the Kantian notion of a public of private people engaged in rational-critical debate. Building on Kant, Hegel considered the establishment of "public opinion" the end of any unity of objective truth, with truth degenerating into the subjective opinions of many individuals. The public sphere served to thereafter reintegrate these subjective opinions into a new objectivity assumed by the state (Habermas, 1969/1989, pp. 120-122).⁴ During the twentieth century, several thinkers, particularly progressives and members of the Chicago School of Sociology, conceptualized the public in more pragmatic and materialist terms. Sociologist Gabriel Tarde believed that journalism nationalizes and internationalizes local opinions into a "public mind" (Tarde,

⁴ Marx departed from Hegel's connection of state with property, criticizing the notion of public opinion as a "false consciousness" masked by bourgeois class interests. Marx first introduced the theory that "political" estates existing prior to the revolutionary era had merely dissolved into "social" classes in civil society, contradicting any notion of universal accessibility to a public discussion (*see* Habermas, 1969/1989, pp. 122-124). It is notable that Congress ratified the First Amendment well before this challenge to German idealism, and that legal precedent based on the First Amendment has yet to bridge the gap between Hegelian property-based statehood and the Marxist emphasis on class inequality.

1969). Social psychologist Herbert Blumer claimed that “public” refers to a collective action, and that a “public opinion” derives from the “central tendency” of several opinions (Blumer, 1946). Jürgen Habermas described the bourgeois public sphere as a sphere of private persons who have joined to create a public authority through discourse, and hence, enabling the public to act toward specific goals (Habermas, pp. 27-28).

The common denominator of nearly all conceptualizations of the public, and of the public interest during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, involves a) a large discursive process, and b) a collective political goal. This connection between discourse and action reflects a more materialist notion of “public” in what Max Horkheimer and Habermas describe as a *praxis*, or a common action toward a political end. In a refutation of the German idealism that shaped much of American conceptions of free speech in the eighteenth century, Horkheimer criticized the predominance of subjective reason in the American political conscience, claiming that “reason has never really directed social reality.” “Deprived of its rational foundation,” he writes in *Eclipse of Reason*, “the democratic principle becomes exclusively dependent upon the so-called interests of the people, and these are functions of blind or all too conscious economic forces. They do not offer any guarantee against tyranny” (Horkheimer, 1947/1974, pp. 9 & 28).

As discussed earlier, Comte and Mill introduce a paradox between positivism and free expression—between the scientific discovery of objective truth and the futility of setting aside subjective values in order to discern facts from opinions. Here, that same paradox appears within a more pragmatic context. Although objective journalism developed in order to serve a materialist notion of the “public interest” conceived during the progressive era, it does not fit entirely into a constitutional framework that defines free

speech only in terms of how people reason, despite whether or not they can truly afford access to the public sphere. As Schudson explains in *Good Citizen*, the progressive era value of the informed citizen exerts enormous influence on today's journalism: "It is the lamp held aloft by journalists committed to their profession, it directs civic education in and out of the schools, and it still dominates public understanding of civic obligation at election time" (Schudson, 1998, pp. 294-295). Despite journalistic objectivity's purported service in support of the "informed citizen," a question arises as to how objectivity flourished during the twentieth century despite its antithetical presence in the American public sphere.

Objectivity During the Twentieth Century

As soon as objectivity became established as a professional value, it disintegrated because of the coterminous understanding that a reporter could not overcome subjectivity in presenting the news, and as Schudson explains, "because subjectivity had come to be regarded as inevitable." Essentially criticism of the "myth" of objectivity accompanied its enunciation (Schudson, 1978, p. 157). But as expressed earlier by *The New York Times* editor Adolph Ochs, journalism educator Nelson Crawford, and other editors and reporters during the turn of the twentieth century, newspapers sought legitimacy in response to the scorn generated by the sensationalist and party presses. Establishing and maintaining credibility as a profession became very important to journalists during the 1930s, and associating the profession with science and historicism through the ethic of "objectivity" provided them the rhetorical power to support that claim.

For a newsroom to sustain its authority as an accurate and truthful source of information, it had to preserve an image of maintaining independence from any sort of social or political agenda. Dale Jacquette compares this sort of social agenda neutrality to

the constitutional separation of church and state, such that journalism remains “an unofficial part of the checks and balances that help preserve the liberal democracy in which a free press flourishes” (Jacquette, 2007, p. 262). In principle, objectivity created openness in the press’s reporting agenda by not providing automatic coverage to any group or individual. However, as Richard Kaplan explains, two factors undermined this “ideal of openness”: First, remaining independent meant that many journalists focused their narratives on facts instead of on a broader political standpoint or a broader community; second, journalists worked as mere technicians who sifted the evidence to discover the whys and wherefores of the day’s events. By fetishizing facts, reporters’ judgments rested on a flexible array of taken-for-granted social norms and common sense. The news, therefore, became a “fragmented mosaic” of stories (Kaplan, 2002, p. 192).

By establishing a universal script for journalism ethics, journalists created cohesion and occupational pride on the one hand, and internal social control on the other. Newsrooms benefitted from the combination of self-conscious professionalism and external pressure generated from ethics being a part of widely accepted newsgathering practices (Schudson, 2009, p. 75). In this sense, journalism ethics, objectivity particularly, meant that a person’s statements about the world can be trusted if they adhere to established rules deemed legitimate by the broader professional community (Schudson, 1978, p. 7). Journalism’s professionalization meant that editors now had the ideological power needed to control reporters’ behavior, establishing what Max Weber considered “bureaucratic authority.” As he explains: “The purely impersonal character of office work, with its principled separation of the private sphere from the official work of the office, facilitates the official’s integration into the given functional conditions of a fixed

mechanism based upon discipline” (Gerth and Mills, 1946, p. 208). Objectivity not only provided the symbolic capital that journalists used to create identity salience and improve their standing in the American public sphere, but it also became a tool for improving efficiency within the newsroom. By removing reporters from political participation, and by enforcing a professional standard that focuses on surfacing facts instead of dipping into political conversations surrounding the day’s events, newsroom editors have been able to protect the profitability of the news organization during the post-war days of capitalist expansion, which in turn “protects the official against the often sharp fluctuations in the purchasing power of money” (p. 205).

Furthermore, because reporters lost their past capacity to interject their own evaluations and judgments, they therefore “lost the ability to independently set the news agenda” (Kaplan, 2002, p. 193). Objective journalism focused more on the reporting of government rhetoric than on the translation of that rhetoric into political praxis.

Rhetorician Richard McKeon considered the adjoining of rhetoric and praxis as important to the resolution of problems, into what he termed an “architectonic productive art”:

If rhetoric is to be used to contribute to the formation of the culture of the modern world, it should function productively in the resolution of new problems and architectonically in the formation of new inclusive communities. Rhetoric can be used to produce a new rhetoric constructed as a productive art and schematized as an architectonic art... What rhetoric should be and to what conditions it is adapted are not separate theoretical questions but the single practical question of producing schemata to guide the use of the productive arts in transforming circumstances (McKeon and Swenson, 2005, p. 198).

Hence, the press rapidly assimilated to the role of official interpreter and purveyor of government publicity. Reporters served less often as a governmental watchdog than as a lapdog to political rhetoric (Kaplan, p. 193). News became “all information, no form”—what Kenneth Burke distinguished as “all semantic meaning, no poetic meaning.” Semantic meaning aims to “evolve a vocabulary that gives the name and address of every event in the

universe” without attention to its values or structures, instead *assuming* that its form contains certain values and structures. Semantic meaning, “then, involves the established procedures of the mails, and is in the instructions it gives for the performance of desired operations within this going concern” (Burke, 1973, p. 140 as quoted by Schudson, 1995, pp. 69-70). This alludes to the “taken-for-granted” norms that Richard Kaplan applies to objective newsgathering. News focuses more on the status quo than on making progress—on what *exists* than on what *could* or *should be*.

Based on this analysis, objectivity may have actually *harmed* news production by diluting a reporter’s ability to contextualize the day’s events into a narrative useful for political praxis. American political discourse has suffered in kind. As quoted at the beginning of this writing, Mead stipulates that language is the symbol and the mechanism for inducing responses in others. If journalists, working as symbolic producers, offer mostly semantic meaning to the symbolic exchange within the American public sphere, the result points to a political discourse dominated by symbolic violence but little real political activity. A public sphere that operates this way divorces theory from practical action, privileges rhetoric as the primary means of political power, and neuters American political life in such a way that citizens feel estranged from any notion of self-governance. Democracy weakens at the hands of the few capable of dominating public discourse with their own symbolic content.

The Current Condition of Journalistic Objectivity

The 20th and 21st Centuries: Diminishing Homogeneity in the Public Sphere

Mill’s conceptualization of the public sphere presupposes universal access without regard to capital or class. Mill also taps into Kant’s belief in the existence of an *a priori*

universal truth that pre-exists the discussion needed to unearth it.⁵ As examined earlier, an objective truth discovered by a journalist disintegrates because of the rampant subjective opinions at play within the public sphere, rendering objective journalism ultimately dysfunctional. But a unique situation developed following World War Two that enforced the objectivity standard.

Political scientist Jonathan Ladd believes that the existence of “an independent, powerful, widely respected news media establishment” is an historical anomaly supported by low levels of economic competition in the news industry and the lack of party polarization (Ladd, 2012, p. 6). Fragmentation in the news industry and ideological distance between the parties during the latter half of the twentieth century increased competition in the news business and diminished the viability of an independent press (p. 7). Ladd points out that relative economic and political homogeneity in the American public sphere during the middle of the twentieth century may have breathed life into journalistic objectivity.

From 1967 to 2009, the top 20% of income earners in the United States experienced a 6% increase in their share of total household income at the expense of the bottom 80%. Much of that income went to the top 5% of income earners, who saw their average income rise by 4% at the expense of the bottom 95% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Those figures at first don't seem significant until one looks at total wealth distribution. In 2007, the top 20% controlled 93% of total wealth, while the bottom 80% controlled only 7%. (Domhoff, 2012). That same year, the top 10% of income earners captured 49.7% of total wages—a

⁵ Mill alludes to the existence of an *a priori* understanding when he argues against the suppression of specific opinions in *On Liberty*: “If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error” (Mill, 1992/1996, pp. 58-59).

level that is “higher than any other year since 1917 and even surpasses 1928, the peak of the stock market bubble in the ‘roaring 1920s” (*Huffington Post*, 2009).

Furthermore, the number of news outlets has increased dramatically over the last few decades during the growth of digitization. In 1961, political scientist V.O. Key noted the “uniformity” of news content during the mid-twentieth century (Key, 1961, p. 394). In contrast, Richard Davis and Diana Owen identified increased competition for traditional news outlets in the face of cable and internet entertainment, talk radio, and internet news sources (Davis and Owen, 1998).

Demonstrating ideological polarization in the American public sphere is relatively more difficult. Studies of trends during the latter half of the twentieth century show a mixed picture. Baladassari and Gelman discovered that, since 1972, issue partisanship has increased between Republicans and Democrats (Baladassarri and Gelman, 2008). Fiorina and Abrams disagree with this approach, indicating that any measurable polarization occurs among political elites and not among the political masses (Fiorina and Abrams, 2008). However, Ladd triangulates elite voting habits with the economic condition of the voting masses. Accounting for congressional voting trends over the middle of the last century, he discovers that declining income inequality from the mid-1950s through the 1970s coincided with a reduction in the economic basis of partisan conflict, which indicates stronger ideological cohesion in the public sphere (Ladd, 2012, p. 40).⁶

Through this method, Ladd provides a relatively homogenous picture of the political culture in which journalists operated during the middle of the twentieth century. With less

⁶ Ladd cites DW-NOMINATE scores, which measure ideological trends based on congressional voting records. For more information, he points his readers to www.voteview.com or to Poole and Rosenthal (1991; 1997) and Rosenthal (1997; 2006).

distance between economic classes, greater ideological agreement between partisans, and low levels of competition between news organizations, the immediate post-war American public sphere likely experienced a unique era that more closely reflected Mill's concept of political speech in which objective truth could survive. During the late 1970s, as ideological polarization among the parties strengthened and income inequality increased, the homogeneity in the public sphere enjoyed by journalists dissipated, rendering objectivity, and the existence of the scientific journalist, impracticable.

The Viability of Journalistic Objectivity

Despite the historical clues that indicate otherwise, newsrooms continue to embrace objectivity as an important journalistic norm. However, few organizations use the term "objectivity." An overview of codes of ethics in a cross-section of newsrooms and professional organizations clearly indicates a continued commitment to journalistic independence. National Public Radio's code explicitly tells its reporters "Don't sign, don't advocate, don't donate" as doing so "would call into question NPR's journalistic independence and impartiality" (National Public Radio, 2012). The Radio Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) lists "independence" as a fundamental value, and that electronic journalists "will resist pressures to change or alter the news" (RTNDA, 2012). In two sections, *The New York Times* enforces maintaining "detachment" from sources and lists methods of "protecting our neutrality," including steering clear of providing advice or public relations services to individuals or organizations (*New York Times*, 2012).

While partisan newsgathering is ubiquitous on the Web, a few online news sites continue to adhere to the objectivity standard. The online investigative reporting site ProPublica refers to "accurate" and "fairly presented" facts. They also stipulate that

“ProPublica does not contribute, directly or indirectly, to political campaigns or to political parties or groups seeking to raise money for political campaigns (ProPublica, 2012). The Online News Association, a professional organization for online journalists, lists “editorial independence” among their professional values, and that online journalists should “maintain the highest principles of fairness, accuracy, objectivity and responsible independent reporting” (Online News Association, 2012).

The bureaucratization of the newsroom depends on educational institutions to reproduce professional ideologies within the classroom. From the 1890s to the 1940s, objectivity became a naturalized and legitimated part of the education of journalists (Vos, 2011). Nelson Crawford’s *The Ethics of Journalism* is but one example of countless texts produced over the years that codified and normalized journalism as an objective science. Therefore, research into the condition of objectivity must focus on both the news industry and educational ISAs.

How editors and producers construct their newsroom policies, and how they employ specific terminology when describing objectivity in its variations, invites a question as to whether journalists view their professional duties, and themselves, differently under different language. A question also concerns how educators discuss objectivity within their curriculum, and whether both journalists and educators can envision a post-objective journalism. Foucault considered this sort of discursive construction of habits as a means of power through which the elite creates an ‘episteme’ to which all future organizational behaviors comport—through the “Little things” that bodies do (Rabinow, 1984, p. 184). If journalistic objectivity, as a branch of positivist science, has never been functional within the American public sphere—a condition that becomes more and more apparent every

year—its dimming influence within modern newsrooms and classrooms has great implications for how news ethics are practiced and taught.

Researching the Current Condition of Journalistic Objectivity

Research Issue Explored

How journalists and educators view the condition of objectivity is an untapped area of inquiry about the viability of objective journalism in the modern American public sphere, especially in the coverage of American politics. Little inquiry has been made into whether individual journalists and educators still believe in the positivist precepts of separating facts from personal values, and whether they believe that objective journalism still has value in today's fluid, digitized, and economically heterogeneous public sphere. Furthermore, "citizen journalists" and "crowdsourced" newsgathering techniques challenge the notion that the American public sphere requires the kind of rationalized, professionalized journalism that has been the standard for well over a century.

In turn, this calls into question whether the norm of objectivity continues to be useful to the practice and study of journalism. If it does not, can journalists and educators envision a post-objective journalism that maintains a professional legitimacy for journalists?

This research will focus on how individual journalists covering American politics, and journalism educators, describe objectivity as a professional standard. The goal for this work is to avoid treating "objectivity" as a topic of abstract debate, instead focusing on how journalists and educators define and employ the concept within the newsroom and classroom, and how they associate the term with journalism in the public interest. Thus, the focus of this work will be an assessment of the current state of journalistic objectivity

as both a concept purportedly practiced in newsrooms and taught in journalism education classrooms. Furthermore, this research pays particular attention to the political, economic, and technological factors that influence the degree to which objectivity continues as a key ethic in American journalism.

Objectivity will be treated as a concept based in Comtean positivism, defined as a method of inquiry that avoids subjective perception, separates facts from values, and arrives at an objective truth that can be used to further human progress. Also, the public sphere will be treated as a heterogeneous discursive space that acknowledges class, ethnicity, and gender differences. However, it's important to acknowledge that the First Amendment, and virtually all pertinent legal precedent, does not account for class differences in its approach to free expression. This reality has become especially apparent (and disturbing) with the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* (130 S. Ct. 876, 2010) that equated financial contributions with political speech.

Research Methods

This research will be primarily exploratory, and secondarily predictive, in its scope. Because it endeavors to uncover the current state of objectivity as a professional ethic that is both practiced in newsrooms and taught in journalism classrooms, the primary means of research will be one-on-one interviews with Washington-based journalists who cover politics and faculty members who teach journalism ethics at the university level. Interviews will permit the researcher to understand the subject's experience and perspective through the narratives they tell, elicit specific language forms used within their social settings (in this case, the newsroom and the classroom), gather information about

specific processes within their environments, or inquire about their past experiences (*see* Lindlof, 1995).

Interview subjects will entail journalists who cover Washington politics, as well as instructors or academics who teach journalism ethics on the university level. The interview subjects will serve as surrogates for larger discourses concerning objective journalism occurring in newsrooms and in university journalism programs. The limited personnel, and limited time available to conduct the interviews, will curtail the number of informants in this study, so the informants will include twelve journalists and ten academics, for a total of twenty-two interviews.

A short pre-interview will be conducted by email for all potential research subjects, inquiring about their areas of specialization in reporting and in teaching. Subjects will be chosen based on a) their current focus as either a reporter who covers Washington politics, or as an educator who teaches journalism ethics, and b) their availability to participate. Journalists will be chosen for pre-interviews based on contacting reporters who regularly write professionally on Washington politics, but all pre-interviews will request whether the potential subject can offer additional names, as a snowball sample. Educators chosen for pre-interviews will derive from contacts here within the researcher's university, and will also be asked to offer names of other potential subjects.

All interview subjects will participate in an approximately hour-long interview covering both practical and theoretical issues related to journalism objectivity. In order to avoid any possible threats to employment, all subjects will sign a confidentiality waiver. All interviews will be conducted in person when at all possible. However, a handful of

interviews, especially with educators, will likely occur by telephone because many of the subjects will be scattered at various institutions across the country.

Ultimately, this study will conclude with a look at possible “post-objective” forms of journalism (such as transparency or forms of public journalism) and how they might become normalized in newsrooms and classroom curriculum. Not only does this research have implications for how journalists conduct their work, but it also may indicate that significant changes are possible regarding communications education at American universities. Digitization has broken down barriers for who define themselves as journalists, which in turn impacts how journalism programs are structured, and whether the traditional ethical concept of objectivity can remain a part of the journalism curriculum.

Chapter 2: Casting Aside Objectivity for Fairness in American Journalism

"He reproduced himself with so much humble objectivity, with the unquestioning, matter of fact interest of a dog who sees himself in the mirror and thinks: there's another dog."

- German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, in a letter written October 23, 1907

Introduction

Mike Doyle, a legal affairs correspondent and regional reporter in McClatchy Newspaper's Washington bureau, enjoys telling the truth for a living. "I feel in doing so, in keeping to a job where I get to tell the truth... that that is keeping my conscience clear in a way that I'm not selling off my soul bit by bit," he says in an interview. An avid reader of the Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius, he sees "holding oneself off from the flurry of the world" as an ideal he strives for yet fails to achieve as a journalist. "It's a crock for me, because I'm caught up in everything's that's going on," he explains. "...[But] that's what drives me, is not having to lie for anybody."

Garner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Damon (2001) describe this as maintaining one's "moral identity." It's a "vocation," or a "calling," in which a person thinks about the self, or the self's occupations, in moral terms. "A journalist whose major motivation is to pursue the moral mission of the journalistic domain is acting out of a sense of moral identity," they write (pp. 163-164). Doyle's belief in the moral mission of telling the truth speaks to how he views his social purpose as a journalist; but how do Doyle, and other journalists who cover political life in Washington, pursue the truth? Do they do so through an objective, value-free lens? Comte's positivist science entailed the moral imperative of pursuing improvements in the human condition, but do journalists pursuing a similar mission describe their work as an objective, positivist science in this same tradition?

This chapter addresses how Washington-based journalists define objectivity, and how they reify the concept into their daily practices as journalists. It crystallizes the suspicion of many media observers such as Brent Cunningham and Michael Kinsley: that journalistic objectivity does not hold as much ideological weight as other values within the newsroom. As briefly mentioned towards the end of Chapter 1, Michel Foucault described how discourse disciplines organizational behaviors through the “Little things” that bodies do. “How dangerous it is to neglect little things,” Foucault quotes Jean-Baptiste de La Salle. “It is a very consoling reflection for a soul like mine, little disposed to great actions, to think that fidelity to little things may, by an imperceptible progress, raise us to the most eminent sanctity: because little things lead to greater...” (Rabinow, p. 184). Therefore, in order to understand the current state of journalistic objectivity in the modern American newsroom, it is very important to establish what terminology journalists use in order describe the process of separating facts from values, and the reflexive habits that coincide with that terminology.

The Real Objective: Striving for Fairness

According to Fahretten Altun (2011), the ideal of objectivity is troublesome, because throughout four centuries of journalism, journalists “have been asked to show partisanship,” and in epistemological terms, “it is evident that there are higher values than truth and objectivity to the media” (pp. 22-23). Altun is only partly correct. Not only do the Washington-based journalists interviewed for this work express an emphatic commitment to the truth, but they also believe the truth to be the ideal end that they pursue everyday. As Doyle alluded to at the beginning of the chapter, locating the truth is what defines the moral imperative of modern journalism.

When I was covering the New Hampshire primary in January [2012], one of the voters was asking me, you know, what I stood for. I stand for the truth. It's not up to me to tell you who's right or who's wrong. It's up for me to tell you what they are doing and how it impacts you (Stephanie Condon, CBS Interactive).

For the most part, a lot of journalists (not all by any means), but a lot, don't have particularly strong ideological leanings. They have a passion for, if you will, the truth. They have a passion to tell the story. They have a passion to do good for their news organization, their community, or whatever (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*).

... there are some very fundamental, old-fashioned obligations, the first of which is to distinguish truth from falsehood, to adjudicate what claims made in the public sphere appear to be true, and which ones appear to be false, and which ones are mere exaggerations in between (Doyle McManus, *Los Angeles Times*).

And yet, Altun suggests that journalists steer away from objectivity as a guiding principle.

Objectivity remains an ideal that they do not realize in practice—an unrealistic concept that rejects subjective reasoning, however noble the goal. As Michael Schudson wrote in *Discovering the News*, objectivity disintegrated as soon as newsrooms established it as a professional value during the 1920s, but newsrooms maintained the standard for its symbolic significance as they sought legitimacy in the face of the sensationalist and party presses.

Objectivity is both something to strive for, and in some sense it's a relic... Objectivity, I think, is something of a phantom. I mean, it rests on the premise that people have no opinions of their own (Alex Altman, *Time*).

Objectivity is still a word I use, although I grant and stipulate immediately that there's nothing in what we do—there's no such thing as pure objectivity (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*).

That's one of those circular debates in journalism. Can you ever be truly objective, can you—as long as you present both sides, have you gotten to the essential truth? You know, we try to report fairly, we try not to inject opinion, we try to provide context, and so I'm not sure what vocabulary you would attach to that (Rebecca Corbett, *The New York Times*).

Despite its precarious role in the newsroom, objectivity continues to be an espoused value by many newsrooms as well as an object of criticism. "Journalists do not need a novel doctrine or philosophy to replace objectivity. Rather, they simply need to give up the act," writes Sarah Hinchcliff Pearson, senior counsel at Creative Commons (Pearson, 2010).

Journalists will maintain, however, that they have indeed given up the act. In fact, many

would contend that they have never really been in the act in the first place. David Berry, in *Journalism, Ethics, and Society*, asks if “it’s reasonable to argue that if objectivity isn’t applied at the newsgathering process then how can an event be justified as news once we assume that news differs from both gossip and opinion?” (Berry, 2008, p. 111). Many journalists would balk at this question. The discovery of truth to them is less a philosophical, and more a material, process—the subjective judgment of information coupled with the anticipation of audience reaction. Almost all journalists interviewed for this research describe this process as “fairness.”

Fairness, I think, is really the more legitimate way to describe what I think a reporter ought to strive for, and that is, if you are doing a straight news piece on some event that involves controversy, then a) do both sides feel that they have been treated fairly, and b) does a reader get, or a viewer get, an accurate understanding of where things really are? (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*)

Well, a word that comes to my mind is fairness. I want to be fair to the people involved and fair to the facts, and not slant them or tailor them in a certain way.... Fairness, telling the truth, finding the truth, and not falling for the same narrative that other people buy into, are all values that I try to follow (Mike Doyle, McClatchy Newspapers).

I would say that fairness is the paramount standard. You always want to be fair to people, even when you say you’re arguing that you disagree with them (Alex Altman, *Time*).

I keep in mind fairness. More than objectivity and neutrality, because I don’t think anybody is really objective about reporting... I think fairness is what you strive for. Make sure that you cover all sides fairly (Roger Wilkison, Voice of America).

The reporters interviewed for this research embrace fairness for the same reason they question objectivity: because they accept that subjective understanding comprises at least a part of constructing a story. Paranjoy Thakurta (2009), in *Media Ethics: Truth, Fairness, and Objectivity*, claims that “objectivity” is not the same as being “objective.” Being objective “requires a person to ‘see the world as it really is’ by shedding the shackles of subjective interpretation” (p. 46). Here he alludes to Comte’s rejection of interior observation, but he also suggests the existence of a Kantian *a priori* universal truth. Doyle explains why this is problematic for journalists:

Objectivity—it sounds like the holy grail to aspire to. For some reason, I like the word neutrality more than that. Because why? Because there is a [hits table] the table's real, right? There is an objective truth in the world, but objectivity seems to be a misleading notion that there is an objective political truth for reasons I can't really put my finger on. I prefer another word than that.

We return to the contradiction established by the exploration of Comte and Mill in Chapter 1: that objective truths cannot always realistically inform a non-objective marketplace of ideas. Mill's conceptualization of the public sphere acknowledges the subjective and its fallibility. Although objective truths scientifically retold by empirical observation exist, public opinion, which relies on the subjective discourse between many minds, is in no way objective. When Doyle maintains that journalistic objectivity implies (falsely) that an objective political truth exists, he is underscoring the fact that the reporting of purportedly "objective" political truths will die when they enter debate within the public sphere.

A recent study by media scholar Jelena Petrovic validates this point. She conducted a content analysis of more than 100 articles looking for evidence of objectivity. Her definition of objectivity entailed three indicators: the balanced representation of all sides, the fairness of representation, and factuality. She discovered an inconsistent presence of the three factors, demonstrating that journalists do not use any universal method in order to produce "objective" stories (Petrovic, 2008). "Few practices such as [a] balanced number of references to both sides in a story are consistently present through time," she writes, "while many more, including fairness and presence of the authors' neutral opinion, can significantly be different" (p. 20). Her research demonstrates how relying on such prescribed definitions for journalistic behavior can be troublesome—that the values many scholars, such as Petrovic, attribute to "objectivity" are not objective at all. Journalists are just as likely to be as fallible as their readers, and they must employ significant subjective

judgment, and much reflexivity, in how they approach and construct a news story. As one reporter describes it:

It's not like science where you set a hypothesis, and then you prove it, and then you do empirical tests, and then you get the results. It's a craft; it's not a science. I would even say pursuing perfection through practice, because it's a constant pursuit. It's not about attaining the destination (Radio Reporter).

Although the reporters interviewed for this study expressed fairness as the more “legitimate” and “paramount” standard than objectivity, it is important to note that they also delineated fairness from similar terms, such as balance. Thakurta (2009) defines fairness as the conscientious employment of language, context, and balance, and avoiding partiality by giving “one side” of the story greater coverage (p. 43). While mainstream reporters would agree with three parts of Thakurta’s definition, they would prefer to leave the work of weighing conflicting arguments to their readers.

“Fair” is a whole different thing. You don’t pay me to rule that one person is right and one person is wrong. That this person—that this argument is a better argument. You pay me, once we decide that this is a story, that this is interesting and our readers will find this interesting, to go do the broadest, fairest, most rich description of what’s going on, so that the reader is empowered to understand the issue, understand the various viewpoints on the issue, and make a decision on their own (Paul Singer, *USA Today*).

There’s a famous line by one of our former editors, which is, “Give the reader one clear crack at the facts before you do your analysis or try to tell them what to think.” Tell people what happened, as objectively and fully and truthfully as you can do, and upon that everything else is built (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*).

“Communication can alone create a great community,” wrote John Dewey. “Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible” (Dewey, 1927/1954, p. 142). Journalists ascribe more to this ideal than to the scientific, elite expertise proposed by Walter Lippmann. With “one clear crack at the facts,” the once inchoate public can build a great community through collective action. Reporters provide the symbolic content, and by connecting discourse and action, the public can pursue political goals through praxis.

At first glance, this would suggest that the reporters' view of the public—as one that connects discourse and action through communication—is more materialist, in the tradition of Max Horkheimer and Jürgen Habermas, than it is a reflection of the Millian conception of free expression. If this were the case, we would encounter the second paradox presented in Chapter 1: that such materialist notions of the “public interest” do not entirely fit into a public sphere defined by individual reason and inequitable access. However, journalists understand that while they leave the job of making normative judgments to their readers, those readers make frequent errors in judgment and often fall prey to subjective fallibility. Therefore, the way they envision the public fits well into the Millian view of free expression.

Almost every political story gets so much blowback that there will always be somebody who's unhappy with however we've handled it (Rebecca Corbett, *The New York Times*).

Boy, to me [the current journalism climate] is extraordinarily difficult, and it really eats into the time you need to think about what you are writing, instead of just responding to a bunch of angry, illiterate comments. There's so much of that. It's very discouraging to read the comments that appear after a news story. Even in *The New York Times* you'll find, you know, sloppy, angry people (Fred Brown, *The Denver Post/Society for Professional Journalists*).

What is the notion of bias in journalism? Well, nobody seems to care anymore, because there actually are facts but no one's really interested in them. People are interested in, “Can you make these facts into an argument?” (Paul Singer, *USA Today*).

People will read what we produce and bring their own biases to it, and draw conclusions about the values, the intentions, the biases of the authors that are not grounded in anything (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*).

But this underscores an incongruent relationship between how journalists describe the ethical goals of reporting—providing information to the public for political decision-making—while also acknowledging the public's flawed reasoning skills. The reason for this inconsistency may be found in how journalists envision their readership. Journalists do not seem to think of their readers as a collective “public” or “publics.” Their claim that they would prefer to give readers “one clear crack at the facts” before “telling them what to

think” does not suggest the possibility of a public mind. Rather, they seem to be addressing the rational individual who can arrive at his or her own conclusions, however imperfect. As discussed in Chapter 1, a public develops from the combination of a) a large discursive process, and b) a collective political goal. Journalists may either not see or neglect to see their readership as having a public mind. Instead, they may see their readers as a collection of minds that may or may not congeal into political activity. One major clue arises from how journalists describe what constitutes “fair” reporting.

I try to think of the people who are going to be reading the article. And particularly the people who are going to be reading the article who are not in the middle of the story I'm writing about. People who wouldn't be sources. *Just the normal reader, and what does that reader need to be informed about this particular, small piece of the world today.* So I think that's the main thing I bring to it (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*, emphasis added).

... anyone reading a newspaper story, anyone reading a portrayal of themselves or their own positions in a newspaper story, ought to be able to say, "Yes, that's a reasonably accurate description of my position." (Doyle McManus, *Los Angeles Times*, emphasis added)

I think there is a historical truth there *that informs the listener and the consumer of news* that is more fair to the subject matter, and more useful to the listener, than just doing a kind of tit-for-tat balancing act (Radio Reporter, emphasis added).

All of these statements express a moral conscience while newsgathering: *Who* does a journalist keep in mind as he or she assesses whether the story is “fair?” But absent from these statements about fair reporting is any mention of an objective “public good.” Rather, these statements focus on how readers, viewers, and listeners individually and subjectively interpret news stories.

This analysis in no way suggests that journalists do not possess a moral commitment to democracy, or to the lives of their readers, by failing to identify a public mind. All of those serve as fundamental aspirations that construct their moral identities. It does suggest, however, that American journalists who work in newsrooms that strive for impartial, fair reporting view the public sphere as a Millian battleground of information,

opinions, and everything in between. Their conception of public discourse mirrors the German idealism that gave rise to the American “negative” conception of free speech. A journalistic value such as “fairness,” which embraces subjective judgment, fits better within this landscape than does the more scientific value of objectivity.

Staying Fair: Reflexive Habits of Modern Journalists

Most journalists adopt fairness over objectivity as their primary journalistic mission because of its practicality, so it is important to articulate the practical methods that journalists use in order to be fair. According to how journalists describe the process, fairness involves extensive reflexivity while newsgathering. Returning to an earlier quote by Mike Doyle of McClatchy Newspapers:

Objectivity—it sounds like the holy grail to aspire to. For some reason, I like the word *neutrality* more than that (emphasis added).

Alex Altman of Time raises similar themes:

Fair is the standard to which you must aspire... and *I think neutral is a guiding approach*. It's not something you achieve, but it's the guiding approach of coming to this and saying, “I'm not bringing my own opinion to this. I'm trying to explain facts as they are” (emphasis added).

Both Doyle and Altman suggest that pursuing truth is a blending of theory and practice—of acting as a *fair* reporter by maintaining a *neutral* mind. While constructing a story, reporters turn their inquisitive natures inward, and on an unconscious level, ask themselves whether they have employed syntax, voice, and context without prior prejudice. Many of these questions come as a natural part of the writing process.

Yeah, it generally has less to do with opinions that are generated from within my own thinking, and more to do with whether I've been seduced by the people I'm interviewing.... And so those are the questions that I constantly ask. Am I doing this subject the justice that it deserves? Do I need to do a couple of more interviews? Do I need to go back to this person? Do I need to write this in a different way? Is the word that I'm using—rather than saying, “he said,” “he argued,” he suggested,” “he insinuated”—do those words carry a particular slant that I might not intend? (Radio Reporter)

Well, the first thing is obviously, “Is the story well-written? Does it make sense? Is it well-structured?” And, of course, part of that—an important part of that—is “Are we giving as many sides of a story as possible?” (Roger Wilkison, Voice of America Radio)

I guess I try to often, like I’ll write something and then read through it again. And I’ll often just tone down the language, because it often doesn’t need it (Alex Seitz-Wald, Salon.com).

Journalists also rely on their editors, or on informal peer review, to watch for any reporting that has lost its bearing.

And there is a constant double-, triple-checking, and that is also partly why an editor is so useful, because editors sometimes see those things that I don’t see. And sometimes I’ll even take a script to an editor and say, “So here’s what I’ve written. I want to make sure that it doesn’t lean too much in this direction, or that it doesn’t give this person a free pass on this issue, or that I’m not glossing over that. So listen to this and tell me what you think.” So it’s useful to have a second set of ears in that respect (Radio Reporter).

I’ve always been interested in the level of concern our small group of political reporters shows to even about the smallest word choices, and I think it’s great that we have a very open discussion about it amongst our team.... But even, just recently, we were having this discussion about whether—when a politician refrains from taking an action—whether it’s fair to characterize it as “so and so failed to do this,” or whether that’s casting judgment on them (Stephanie Condon, CBS Interactive).

Like all institutions, news organizations house ideologies that inform how reporters should do their jobs. In recent journalism history, while objectivity remains an often expressed yet rarely realized ideal, fairness has developed as the episteme for ethical journalism. The editing process and peer review systems described above present moments when the fairness episteme is reinforced in the minds of reporters. Michel Foucault characterized this process as a part of the institution’s disciplinary power, which manifests through “the use of simple instruments: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it—the examination” (Rabinow, 1984, p. 188).

The editing process works as a kind of examination, as do senior reporters when they peer-review the stories of their junior counterparts. Through “its rituals, its methods, its characters and their roles, its play of questions and answers, its systems of marking and classification” is found “a whole domain of knowledge, a whole type of power” (Rabinow, p.

197). Perhaps this presents a more grounded reason for why objectivity never materialized as a practicable journalistic value—what rituals do journalists perform in order to be objective? Who in the newsroom enforces that standard, and which questions do they ask? Journalists have not articulated answers to these questions for objectivity in the same way that they have for fairness.

Sometimes, the disciplinary system active within newsrooms causes internal struggles for reporters. Alex Altman, a political reporter for *Time*, sees journalism as an opportunity to spend his job learning. “Writing was something I could use well in a professional capacity,” he says, “and the idea of getting to travel around the country and learn about different things, you know, one becomes a fleeting expert on this topic and that.” Sports became one of the first topics that interested Altman, but after graduating with a Master’s in Journalism from Northwestern, he found himself on general assignment, and then on the political beat in *Time’s* Washington bureau.

Altman admits that he doesn’t have a “native fascination” with politics, but as a political reporter, that interest developed on the job. Although much of his work concentrates on straight news, he also writes for *Time’s* political blog, which allows him a bit more leeway to inject his opinion. Even then, he is careful to couch even strident criticism in a way that does not compromise his ability to return to a neutral perspective when writing hard news. “Some of the stuff would just compromise your future position as a neutral journalist to cover people who disagree,” he explains.

But those moments during which he can “let loose a little” when blogging provide only momentary relief from what he describes as “tensions between the demands of the profession.”

There have been plenty of times when I have been writing about issues that—no one is going to pretend that they don't feel strongly about the issues that they're writing about in a neutral fashion—so sometimes I come away from the day kind of disgusted that I wrote a neutral piece on a topic that I would feel people would be better informed to have my true opinion on (Alex Altman, *Time*).

Despite this struggle, the effects of institutional discipline on his work shine through.

It happens in some way in virtually every story you do. You just want to bang your head against a table because you disagree with something that a source or a politician has said, and you think that they're stupid or that they're lying... So when you see a rally of people espousing opposite views for apocryphal reasons, it kind of makes you want to shoot yourself. But you just have to swallow that, because you have a job to do (Alex Altman, *Time*).

Arguably, having to shelve one's political views causes conflict in the mind of a reporter, but another reporter admits finding relief in remaining neutral.

There are some subjects that I do have an opinion on, and there are some subjects that I've covered in tremendous detail that I don't have an opinion on.... I have friends who are opinion journalists for the editorial page of this or that publication, and sometimes I think they have a harder job than I do, because they actually have to come up with some conclusion on what they think the right answer is. And I don't have that pressure [laughs]. I just get to describe what other people think the right answer may be (Radio Reporter).

The development of digital media has created a more fluid environment for journalists, who can now easily switch hats between serving as a hard news reporter, a news analyst, and an opinion columnist or blogger in a single workday. As the radio reporter above explains, opinion journalists “have to come up with some conclusion” on what they think the right answer may be, which means they set aside maintaining a neutral mind. In this case, the blending of theory and practice discussed earlier—acting as a *fair* reporter by maintaining a *neutral* mind—changes in part. A columnist or advocacy journalist can still remain a fair reporter while offering his or her opinion or analysis on an issue. *Los Angeles Times* columnist Doyle McManus explains that remaining fair is “a different calculus. It's a different decision for a columnist than for a reporter.” A reader who has a stake in the issue should still be able to tell himself or herself, “Yes, that's a

reasonably accurate description of my position” when reading an opinion column.

Speaking from the perspective of the reader, McManus continues,

It’s not loaded. It’s not—it may not be how I would prefer to sell my own position myself or describe it myself, but I recognize my own position in that description, whether flattered or not, whether it’s the way I prefer to be described or not.

The calculus to which McManus alludes is a variation in the combination of theory and practice, in this case acting as a *fair* reporter by offering an *opinion* or analysis couched in factuality.

Advocacy journalists, such as Alex Seitz-Wald of Salon.com, approach their work using this method. A graduate of Brown University, Seitz-Wald became attracted to journalism while writing for his college newspaper. As he finished school, narrative-driven reporting in feature programs such as NPR’s “This American Life” opened his eyes to “a whole new way to do journalism from what was the more drier newspaper copy” that he was reading. After completing an internship for PBS’s The News Hour and for the Hotline at *National Journal* in Washington, DC, he worked for the Think Progress blog at the Center for American Progress before becoming a political reporter for the progressive online publication Salon.com.

Seitz-Wald comes from a newer set of reporters who entered a news industry already immersed in digital newsgathering. Dan Balz of *The Washington Post* explains that, because we are in a period in which “all those lines [between news and opinion] are a little blurrier than they used to be, everybody’s in a slightly different place depending on when they got into the business—what kind of news organization they began with.” Younger journalists, such as Seitz-Wald, witnessed aggressive propagandizing from the Bush administration before and during the Iraq War, during which he became cynical about

politics and questioned the corporate-owned media's ability to give him the truth. "But I think the appropriate response is that if you're unhappy with the way things are," he says, "is to do something about it and not just write it off." Advocacy journalism became his vehicle for making a difference.

I think I come at this from a very different perspective than a lot of other journalists. Being at Salon, I don't have to be an objective journalist. I don't pretend to be, no one expects me to be. I'm very clearly progressive, and I'm doing advocacy journalism. And I think there's a long story—a wonderful history of that—on the right, with places like *National Review* and the *Weekly Standard*, and on the left, *The New Republic* and *The Nation*. And I think I'm a big believer in that model.

But, like a traditional news journalist, he also strives for fairness in his reporting.

I'm very careful when writing negative things about people to make sure that I'm very confident about the facts that we're asserting, and that the language is appropriately couched, so it is certainly a grayer line when you're not doing straight objective journalism, but I definitely strive for that.

Here it is clear that the persistence of fairness through all forms of journalism—from straight news to opinion columns—makes it a more practicable concept to modern journalists. Objectivity serves only the function of straight reporting, but fairness has lasting value in a much more dynamic media environment.

Additionally, digitization has introduced challenges to the reflexive habits and disciplinary function of the newsroom, particularly when journalists post messages to Twitter. In July 2010, CNN fired Octavia Nasr, their Senior Editor covering the Middle East, for tweeting that she was sad at the passing of a Hezbollah leader (Schafer, 2010). *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* both have issued social media policies, with the *Post* restricting their reporters from posting opinions on any social network. Part of their guidelines state that "nothing we do must call into question the impartiality of our news judgment" and highlighted "the importance of fact and objectivity" in their brand of journalism (Ingram, 2009). A recent dust-up on Twitter between Andrew Goldman, a freelance writer at *The New York Times Magazine*, and author Jennifer Weiner regarding

sexism in one of Goldman's articles forced the associate managing editor for standards, Philip Corbett, to clarify the *Times* social media policy. In a memo to staff, he writes, "Be thoughtful. Take care that nothing you say online will undercut your credibility as a journalist. Newsroom staff members should avoid editorializing or promoting political views. And we should be civil...." (Sullivan, 2012a).

Banning reporters from tweeting has created ideological tension between reporters and editors regarding the extent to which reporters have speech rights outside of the newsroom. (Much of this will be discussed at length in Chapter 3 on journalists and citizenship.) Responses to the *Post's* outright ban on social media use created a wave of backlash from *Post* reporters and media scholars alike. Media reporter Howard Kurtz posted this sardonic tweet: "Under new WP guidelines on tweeting, I will now hold forth only on the weather and dessert recipes." CUNY journalism professor Jeff Jarvis wrote, "*Washington Post* turns journalists into antisocial mannequins. So much for new connections to the community" (Ingram, 2009). However, some reporters see social media use as a threat to the integrity of their profession. For example, Paul Singer of *USA Today* believes that Twitter has no place in journalism. When discussing the increasing presence of opinion-based journalism in the public sphere, he shares a few observations.

The things that people will admit to on Twitter astound me.... I think it was Luke Russert, who's not a real reporter anyway, who tweeted a picture of a concert, with "I'm here at a concert with Brad Dayspring, and we're having a blast. Woohoo!" Well, Brad Dayspring at the time was Eric Cantor's Chief of Staff. What are you doing? Why are you at the concert with Eric Cantor's Chief of Staff? Why are you admitting it? Why are you taking a picture of it and tweeting it? And so tomorrow are you going to write a story about how Eric Cantor is actually cheating on his taxes? Doubt it.... The system now promotes immaturity. Twitter is designed for the immature. The whole idea of Twitter is to not regulate yourself.

Singer's claim that Twitter promotes immaturity is arguable, and his proposition that Eric Cantor cheats on his taxes is only hypothetical, but his main point is valid. Social media can

operate as an unregulated playground for reporters and can blur the lines between fact- and opinion-based journalism.

Well, I think with blogs, with Twitter, and with all of these different avenues—many of which are not regulated by editors or any intermediary—that there is a lot more opinion out there. Yeah, I mean there's a lot more opinion out there. There can be a real line between writing with voice, which many blogs are supposed to have, and actually injecting opinion (Rebecca Corbett, *The New York Times*).

Let me just tell you this. I think just the fact that opinion—I mean, people [journalists] think that they have the right to express and opine, which they do. The ease with which they can do that now, compared to before, I think, leads to some of this (Roger Wilkison, Voice of America).

A recent study questions whether journalists risk undermining their credibility when they use social media. Daniel Hagemeyer of Hamilton College argues that Twitter serves as one of “today’s primary battlefields” in the fight between supporters and opponents of journalistic objectivity. He discovered, however, that Twitter did little to diminish reporters’ credibility. In fact, the platform enhanced their standing in the eyes of their followers, because news sent through Twitter “appears to be more honest and straight from the source” (Hagemeyer, 2011, p. 210). Because of this, Hagemeyer believes that newsrooms should steer away from objectivity, because “audiences do not seem satisfied with just the bare facts anymore. People increasingly search for opinions, advice, and clear statements.” They use Twitter as a news source in order to find opinion-based news and to weigh contrasting opinions (p. 212).

However, as many of the reporters interviewed in this work have explained, the objectivity standard has never been fully realized in their work because of its impracticality. Still, newsrooms have not yet given up the objectivity ghost, and neither have many members of the public, media critics, and scholars concerned with the state of journalism ethics, such as Hagemeyer. This phenomenon indicates that objectivity remains active in the realm of theory and rhetoric in the minds of many Americans. (This topic will

be explored in greater detail in Chapter 4.) To say that journalists need to abandon objectivity for transparency, or for more community-based newsgathering values, or for another spoken value, is akin to telling them to change clothes instead of change habits. Fair reporting will continue, regardless of what rhetoric newsrooms use in order to protect their credibility in the minds of Americans.

Digitization has influenced the reflexive habits of journalists in two additional ways. First, digitization has increased the workload, and hence, reduced the time that journalists can use to focus on a single project. The pressure to produce news while blogging, tweeting, newsgathering, writing, and even appearing on television has created an unprecedented challenge to journalists.

I have plenty of friends who are slightly younger than I am (and I'm 71), but who are still in the business, and they complain about this. I mean, there was a time when—I go back to the '70s and '80s—when, if you were a newspaper consultant, you only had to file one story.... Nowadays they have to update all the time, almost as if they were wire service people. And then you've got to blog, you've got to take pictures, you've got to do an on-camera thing, you've got to film video, and you've got to write your traditional story. The people I'm editing nowadays at VOA, some of which I knew when I worked there full time, are doing all of that (Roger Wilkison, Voice of America).

We are asking people to do more and more, and we're really demanding of our reporters and editors. And at a certain point you can't do everything, and so you have to prioritize. But I think at some news organizations that don't have as deep a bench as we do that they have to make starker choices than we do (Rebecca Corbett, *The New York Times*).

But a few reporters have found ways to manage their work schedules, despite the pressure.

I think that readers who are closely following and expecting a certain standard of neutrality and fairness—they may have gripes about any one given story generally because of time constraints and fact-gathering pressures, but in general I think people do a pretty good job given the duress that they're under (Alex Altman, *Time*).

Second, digitization has exacerbated the polarized political environment first discussed in Chapter 1, and this has laid a fertile ground from which more forms of opinionated journalism have grown. Since the mid-twentieth century, increasing wealth inequality has created greater ideological disparity in congressional policy discussions.

Professors Jonathan Haidt and Marc Hetherington note divisions in both Congress and in the public, with the Republican Party appearing “more radicalized, energized and opposed to compromise” (Haidt and Hetherington, 2012). Political discourse has become polarized in kind, according to Steven Michels of Sacred Heart University. “The essential feature of modernism is the pursuit of objective and empirical truth,” he writes in *The Hartford Courant*. However, postmodern values have made truth as a goal “as impossible as it is silly.” Instead of competing narratives spun from a commonly accepted set of facts, he explains, the new narratives “begin with a moral stance” out of “which facts are then spun into or out of” (Michels, 2012). Doyle McManus, a political columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, discusses how this affects checking the verisimilitude of political narratives for his columns.

You are framing issues... examining critically the received frame for an issue, to see whether it's the right frame or not, and not simply assuming that the terms of the debate as they exist in a political campaign, or in a debate on Capitol Hill, are correct is an absolutely critical function. And in a polarized political environment there are fewer political actors who will do that. So it's coming down to us... to look at an issue in a new way and maybe to expand the discussion in a different way.

Polarization in political discourse also creates an environment where opinions become far more delectable to the American media palate than fact-based journalism. Cable news organizations such as the Fox News Channel and MSNBC, to name two examples, have made political ideology a commodity and a lucrative business.

I think there is a blurring of the lines, in part, because people are selling a product, and the product is engagement, not news. And opinion is as engaging as news is (Paul Singer, *USA Today*).

I think maybe the market forces are just taking advantage of something they noticed. I think there is a large percentage of the population that is very dissatisfied with government, doesn't trust it. And that affects people both on the right and the left... I would suspect that what you see playing out in the news media, and the fact that some people are making a lot of money out of it—I would suspect that it's probably the result of taking advantage of the society at large (Roger Wilkison, Voice of America).

So far, this analysis has suggested that modern journalism is in no way a scientific mission in the tradition of Comtean positivism. Journalists do not function as objective

producers of symbolic content for the benefit of public discussion. Instead, they are subjective arbiters of symbolic content for individuals to make up their own minds, whether or not those individuals decide to politically organize. By studying how journalists reflexively process their work, one might go as far as to conclude that the mission of mainstream “fair” journalism does not operate as much as a public good as it does as a “good for many.” These results seem counterintuitive in comparison with the stated mission of American journalism newsrooms, which for several decades have maintained that they endeavor to report in the public interest; however, these results do fit well within a view of journalism as part of a Millian marketplace of ideas in which inquiry more reflects the traditions of Hume, Kant, and Hegel.

Has the Objectivity Standard Been Harmful to Professional Journalism?

In 1930, Henry Luce, the owner of *Time*, said, “Show me a man who thinks he’s objective and I’ll show you a liar” (Baughman, 1987, p. 29). Chapter 1 alluded to the possible harm that the objectivity standard may have for professional journalism, which has grown into a public debate between media academics and journalists. Stephen Ward explains that objectivity became an especially loathsome concept for postmodernists during the mid-twentieth century. “Media scholars treated objectivity as the dogma of corporate media,” he writes. “Objective routines protected journalists from criticism” (Ward, 2011, pp. 132-133).

The reporters interviewed for this work agree in part with these criticisms. Nearly all answered questions concerning the postmodern critique of objectivity (in not so many words), with several offering two main reflections on the pitfalls of objective journalism: first, that newer versions of objectivity err by embracing the naïve observer; and second,

that objective journalism creates false arguments in the public sphere. First, a few of the reporters mentioned that modern forms of objectivity embrace the role of the naïve observer in the pursuit of truth—that reporters enter the newsgathering process with a *tabula rasa*. Naïve observation derives from naïve positivism, a reductive application of Comte’s separation of subjective and objective methods of understanding. Naïve positivism adopts “what amounts to a ‘principle of complete neutrality’” that “underemphasize the value judgments in science,” explains Kristen Shrader-Frechette (1991, pp. 39, 54). The result is a reduced scientism for journalistic inquiry—a kind of rote, mechanistic methodology for transcribing the world’s events. Journalists eschew this approach. Even when maintaining a neutral mind, journalists use their judgments when evaluating the information they are receiving, which involves a bit more subjective reasoning than naïve positivism implies.

Well, I think mindless objectivity does not have particularly great value, but I don’t know that mindless objectivity creates great journalism... Part of what I’ve always thought was important was to try to explain the right to the left, or the left to the right. And to some extent, if you can do that by being a step removed, by being a good listener, I think there’s value in that (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*).

Although journalists push back against “mindless objectivity,” critics maintain that this reductive form of objectivity persists in news stories. As Brent Cunningham, the deputy editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, wrote in his widely discussed 2003 essay on the perils of objectivity:

Objectivity excuses lazy reporting. If you’re on deadline and all you have is “both sides of the story,” that’s often good enough. It’s not that such stories laying out the parameters of a debate have no value for readers, but too often, in our obsession with... “the latest,” we fail to push the story, incrementally, toward a deeper understanding of what is true and what is false (Cunningham, 2003).

Additionally, he equates objectivity with “its twin sentries” of fairness and balance. The manner at which he conflates his terms is troublesome, because not only does he fail to delineate objectivity from fairness, but he also describes objectivity as if it were a form of

naïve positivism. Later in his essay, he quotes Joan Didion's 1996 excoriation of Bob Woodward in *The New York Review of Books*: "The genuflection toward 'fairness' is a familiar newsroom piety, in practice the excuse for a good deal of autopilot reporting and lazy thinking but in theory a benign ideal" (Cunningham). Like Didion, Doyle McManus of the *Los Angeles Times* disagrees with "lazy objectivity," but he differentiates it from the actual mission of modern newsrooms and from the form of objectivity he understands as a journalist.

Lazy objectivity has harmed the news business. Unexamined objectivity, or reflexive objectivity, the objectivity that traps you in false equivalence... is not the aim of journalism, the aim of journalism is finding truth and getting it out there. But I don't think that is an indictment of objectivity as a principle or a practice or an ideal.

Identifying which standards define modern newsgathering, and especially objectivity, has become a complicated task. Definitions for objectivity, fairness, balance, neutrality, factuality, and other journalistic values are never consistently defined across media ethics literature, and are often conflated, as Didion's confused use of "fairness" above illustrates.

Some scholars believe that objectivity's disillusion as a journalistic value lies in the antiquated way journalists define and reify objectivity in their daily routines. Steven Ward (2009) calls for a "philosophical examination" of objectivity. "Without a thoughtful reform of objectivity we risk losing an important restraint on journalism," he writes (p. 77). Traditional objectivity was rooted in a misleading notion of the journalist as a recording instrument, he explains. When positivism and its passive model collapsed, so did traditional objectivity. Like Cunningham, Ward appears to rely on a reductive, naïve positivist notion of objectivity that has rarely materialized within newsrooms. He proposes an alternative iteration of objectivity—"pragmatic objectivity"—as a solution to the problem, which he defines as an epistemological coupling of general inquiry and discipline.

“Pragmatic objectivity is not the reduction of reporters to bare facts,” he writes. “It is not the elimination of all interpretation and theorizing. Objectivity is the testing of interpretations, from the mundane to the theoretical” (ibid).

The naïve positivism articulated by Shrader-Frechette, and critiqued by Stephen Ward, mirrors a second strain of positivism that arose in Austria and Germany in the 1920s and 1930s—logical positivism. Logical positivism, supported by philosophers such as Hans Reichenbach, proposed an ahistorical, Cartesian conceptualization of Comte’s epistemological movement from scientific theory to sociological practice.⁷ They maintained that Comte, in how he used the history of sciences in order to formulate sociology, relied too much on an ungrounded movement from the sciences to sociology. Therefore, they reduced positivism to its logical components. In turn, post-positivists, such as Thomas Kuhn and others, complained that this new formulation of positivism “produced narrow, naïve, and ‘sententiously’ defended concepts of philosophy,” and fostered ignorance of what makes philosophical “problems” problematic in the first place by remaining hostile to philosophy’s past (Scharff, 1995, p. 146). Post-positivists sought to re-historicize positivism in order to affirm science’s continued relevance to philosophical problems, as well as to refute “the single-model and science-topical form of analysis” promoted by logical positivism (p. 147). Knowledge is socially constructed, and as Thomas Kuhn explains, scientific change is a non-rational “conversion” to a new set of beliefs

⁷ This movement is first outlined on pp. 7-8 of Ch. 1 of this research. It is notable that Comte’s first step indeed historicized the sciences, but also synthesized them into a new and “only remaining” branch of science—sociology (see Wernick, 2001, p. 27). Logical positivists of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Hans Reichenbach, believed that Comte’s historicization of philosophy was a tale of “mystical mist lying *above* the research methods of science” that failed to lay any solid foundation for “real” philosophy (Scharff, 1995, p. 107). Therefore, they reduced Comte’s method of understanding down to its purely logical, ahistoricized form. The reductive, “naïve” journalistic objectivity believed practiced in newsrooms today mirrors logical positivism (as well as the “naïve positivism” articulated by Kristen Shrader-Frechette), and is the form of objectivity refuted by post-positivist and postmodern observers of journalism.

(Ward, 2009, p. 76). In other words, post-positivists embraced the possibility that bias can sully objective understanding.

Ward's critique of journalistic objectivity follows a similar trajectory to the post-positivist critique of logical positivism. His new method, pragmatic objectivity, challenges the naïve form of journalistic objectivity purportedly practiced in newsrooms. Pragmatic methodology involves five steps: first, journalism as an active, truth seeking form of inquiry; second, journalism as an interpretive exercise; third, objectivity as a holistic testing of that interpretation; fourth, testing based on generic and domain-specific standards; and fifth, an objectivity that is not opposed to passion (Ward, 2009, pp. 77-80). This process blends both subjective and objective methods of understanding, accounting for introspection, fallibility, and scientific methodology within a self-reflexive system. Chapter 6 will assess "pragmatic objectivity" in much more detail.

But is this the answer? Is the fundamental problem with journalistic objectivity its need for redefinition? Journalists already question the naïve positivism that these new conceptualizations interrogate, and some reporters maintain that objectivity of any form has been nothing more than an expressed ideal of journalism ethics. The *New York Times* incident involving Art Brisbane's column concerning "truth vigilantes" only reinforced the erroneous understanding of objectivity held by post-positivist and postmodern critics. Nearly every journalist interviewed acknowledged that their work involves some level of interpretation and contextualization of facts. When asked about the Brisbane column and the subsequent fallout, Rebecca Corbett of *The New York Times* said,

The inference is that we are sort of naively reporting candidates' assertions without providing any context for readers about what the facts are, and I think that is entirely wrongheaded. We do. Maybe not in the forum that he would want us to do, and maybe in his view it should be done every single time. But,

I mean, look at many of our political stories. On any given day, a lot of them are, “Here’s the candidate saying this and, well, in fact he is mischaracterizing what Obama’s policy is on whatever.”

In 2010, David Hildebrand, a University of Colorado, Denver, associate professor of philosophy, wrote that “there is a constant and practical need of discussing and debating what objectivity should—and should not be. The term is too important: practically, epistemically, and morally” (Hildebrand, 2011, p. 1). Hildebrand’s assertion elicits the question of ‘Why?’ Why is this term “too important?” Can journalists not maintain a moral identity without it? As many of the journalists interviewed for this work have maintained, their ultimate ethical standard is fairness in both news and opinion reporting. Here a disconnect may exist between the public, academics, and journalists. While objectivity continues to inhabit the public sphere as a rhetorical device in the ongoing debate on journalism ethics, journalists operate within a slightly different ideological framework.

Second, journalists view objective journalism as having the potential of creating false arguments. This is also a view expressed by postmodern critics. Doyle McManus, a political columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, acknowledges that journalists argue “all the time” about the value of objective journalism. McManus started reporting in the mid-1970s, first for United Press International, and then for the *Los Angeles Times* in 1978. His interest in foreign policy led him to bureaus in the Middle East, in Central America, as well as the New York bureau. He became a columnist in 2009 after ten years of serving as the Washington bureau chief. When answering whether he received any formal training in journalism ethics, he explains, “I’ve never taken a single journalism class in college, let alone get a degree in it. So I think it is probably true that I’ve never had so much as an hour of formal training or professional education on the issue of objectivity.” Rather, for McManus and other journalists of the Watergate generation, objectivity was a term with

unquestioned discursive influence—a “received wisdom that, for many journalists, sort of went unexplained and unexamined.”

McManus differentiates objectivity from fairness, which he describes as “closely related to objectivity but not identical.” He explains, “Pure objectivity, a purely nonjudgmental reporting, ends up providing a very unsatisfying product, an incomplete package. Readers want someone to do some analysis.” In general, journalists express an understanding that objective reporting has the potential to generate false arguments in the public sphere. “There is plenty of media criticism that attempts to identify objectivity, or failures to achieve objectivity, or false forms of objectivity,” McManus says, “and journalists talk among themselves all the time about other journalists’ product.” He suggests that not only does ideological discipline occur within the newsroom, but between newsrooms as reporters from different organizations keep one another in check.

A *New York Times* article on voter fraud, published during the 2012 presidential campaign, exemplifies this well. On September 9, national reporter Ethan Bronner analyzed Republican attempts in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin to establish voter identity laws, to reduce hours for early voting, and to purge voter lists. Republicans alleged that overzealous registration drives by liberal groups added thousands of ineligible voters to the voter rolls and argued that the new rules were necessary to combat fraudulent voting. Democrats viewed these actions as attempts at voter suppression and challenged them in the federal court system. Bronner examined both parties’ arguments using a neutral voice and providing a parallel analysis of both sides of the argument, describing the courts as having “taken a mixed view of the two sides’ claims” (Bronner, 2012).

The actual legal evidence, however, demonstrated little equivalence between the two arguments. In the comments section of the article, readers contested what they viewed as unfair reporting. “This is the worst case of he-said, she-said reporting I have seen in a while,” posted Kyron Hulgens of New York City. “There is no evidence, none, that in person voting fraud exists in more than trivial numbers” (Bronner). WER of New Jersey responded, “This article falls back on the lame ‘on the one hand, the GOP says this, and on the other, the Demos say this.’ This is not necessary. Why not stick to the facts?” Andrew Cohen, a contributing editor for The Atlantic magazine and legal analyst for CBS’ 60 Minutes, noted that the article failed to mention that the State of Pennsylvania conceded during its trial that not only did they have no evidence of in-person voter fraud, but that they also did not expect any in-person voter fraud during the 2012 election. In fact, in the weeks leading up to the article, Cohen could not recall a single substantive ruling that favored the Republicans. “Clearly the issue has become sharply partisan,” he writes. “But from a legal perspective, at least so far, it has been a rout in favor of those who believe the new law would unlawfully disenfranchise registered voters. In other words, there is no ‘equivalence’ in the way judges so far have evaluated these laws” (Cohen, 2012). Bronner’s analysis, therefore, falsely presented rulings equally in favor of both Democrats and Republicans.

The reporters interviewed for this study also identify the potential for false equivalency and its negative effect on political discussion, and they try to keep that potential in check as they write.

False equivalency—also, especially in political coverage I think it drives—I think it’s absolutely had an effect and that it drives everything towards the horserace mentality and looking at it like a sports game, devoid of the fact this this will actually matter about who wins in November... Because every fact is now politicized, and you can find two sides of it (Alex Seitz-Wald, Salon.com).

I will agree with those who say objectivity is a false concept, or a false conceit, that nobody's objective... And clearly there's a danger in the false equivalence way of reporting, which is, "Some say 6 million Jews were killed by the Nazis. Other say, maybe not." And I run into this in my reporting not irregularly (Mike Doyle, McClatchy Newspapers).

I'm aware of that perspective. I think there is a lot of merit to that perspective. Some people, they use the term "the view from nowhere," and I take that into account as I write (Alex Altman, *Time*).

This raises an important question: Was Bronner's reporting simply the effect of his trying to remain objective, or was it a failure to provide a fair account of the voter fraud argument in his news analysis? Bronner demonstrated factuality in how he reported on the opinions expressed, but he failed to contextualize those opinions, using his own judgment, in a way that offered readers a more truthful view of the story. Hence, he showed little subjective reasoning in his reporting.

In Bronner's defense, *The New York Times* national editor Sam Sifton said, "There's a lot of reasonable disagreement on both sides.... It's not our job to litigate it in the paper. We need to state what each side says" (Sullivan, 2012b). And perhaps this case illustrates the potential harm of maintaining a detached, objective perspective: that, in doing so, reporters focus more on political rhetoric than on political activity, offering only semantic meaning to symbolic exchange ongoing in the American public sphere. Hence, the Bronner story on voter fraud became "all information, no form."

Conclusions

In this analysis, objectivity endured a quick but heroic death. Objectivity is an expressed ideal that modern journalists do not realize in practice, while fairness better reflects their ethical mission. Immediately, the analysis turned to why objective journalism has diminished as a guiding ethical principle within the newsroom.

This analysis has focused on five potential reasons for objectivity's demise. First, objectivity has never had a practicable value for journalists because it fails to account for subjective understanding; instead, journalists value fairness, which embraces subjective evaluation and reflexivity, as the paramount ethical standard for their work. Second, journalistic objectivity presumes that an objective political truth exists in the public sphere, but this contradicts the framework of public opinion, which relies on the subjective discourse amongst many minds, which is an inhospitable environment for "objective" truths.

Third, journalists fail to articulate the rituals that construct and discipline objectivity within the newsroom; however, they can describe the reflexive process for producing "fair" stories. Fourth, while objectivity ideally assists the development of straight news stories, fairness persists as an expressed value across the entire spectrum of the news and opinion journalism that comprises today's dynamic media environment. And finally, journalists do not envision their audiences as a public; rather, they imagine their audiences as individuals participating in rational-critical debate when constructing stories.

These findings also raised two issues in need of further exploration. The first concerns the extent newsrooms permit reporters' freedom of expression outside of the newsroom without reprisal. Journalists abandon some of their political rights as citizens in order to maintain a neutral mind. Does this distance from political activity disable some journalists' ability to address the *realpolitik* of the issues they cover?

Second, the revelation that journalists envision their audiences as rational individuals, and not as a public, opened a surprising window into how journalists may understand the ethical goal for journalism—that they report not for the "public good" as

much as for the “good of many.” This finding needs additional exploration, but it signals the possibility that journalistic rituals reflect more the larger hegemonic traditions of American free speech and symbolic exchange—as a Millian “marketplace of ideas”—than the scientific goals of Dewey.

Despite the great attention this analysis has paid to fairness thus far, it is important to note that the objectivity standard is not *completely* dead. The ideal persists as a rhetorical tool used by newsrooms, and is a point of criticism by members of the public, media critics, and academics. Objectivity’s rhetorical value suggests that it has become what rhetorician Richard Weaver describes as a “charismatic term,” which derives its rhetorical power from its very lack of definition (Weaver, 1953, p. 227). The conflated, and sometimes contradictory, definitions for objectivity, as opposed to fairness, balance, neutrality, and other similar terminology, belie Comte’s original construction as a part of his positivist system. Post-positivist attempts to redefine the term in the form of a reflexive, scientific system offer a more grounded definition but contest a reductive definition mostly absent in newsroom habits. Other than being “received wisdom” passed down in newsrooms, objectivity possesses no practical value to journalists; but journalists still use the term, and it continues as an important aspect of their ethical identities.

Chapter 3: Entering the Fray: Journalism, Citizenry, and Distance from the American Public Sphere

"Journalists cover words and delude themselves into thinking they have committed journalism."

- Former *New York Times* reporter and editor Hedrick Smith (Singh, 2005, p. 206).

In September 2012, while other participants stood for the pledge of allegiance at a rally for Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, Ari Shapiro of NPR remained seated before his laptop, observing. "This is always an uncomfortable moment for me," he reflected in a blog post the next day. "While I sat at my laptop, most of the reporters around me stood and put their hands over their hearts" (Shapiro, 2012). Instead of sitting idly during the Pledge, Shapiro posted to Twitter: "As a reporter I'm torn about joining in the pledge of allegiance/national anthem at rallies. I'm a rally observer, not a participant." Expecting vitriol by his Twitter followers, he instead encountered a remarkable dialogue, including some of the journalists also covering the rally, about the struggle they sometimes encounter between their dual identities of "journalist" and "citizen."

Some reporters appealed to patriotism. "But you're an American!" posted Caroline Zilk in response. "...I say, participate unless you're busy recording, taking a photo or writing something down." Other journalists expressed their own struggles, such as Chris Johnson. "I feel the same way. I've made up a compromise where I stand with my hand over my heart, but remain silent," he tweeted. Other responses ranged from the humorous: "I think you should decide based on the universal moral standard: What Would Fox News Do?" to the thoughtful: "as an American, of course, it's optional to join in no matter where you are." (Shapiro).

By calling himself a “rally observer, not a participant,” Shapiro reveals his belief in maintaining a detached, objective perspective from the space (or spaces) devoted to public debate. In his monograph *The Power of News*, Michael Schudson writes that one of the tendencies of American journalism is to “take a distanced, even ironic stance toward political life—in fact, they are enjoined to do so by the tenets of their professionalism and the cynical culture of the newsroom” (Schudson, 1995, p. 10). As Kaplan (2002) asserts, reporters who distance themselves from the public debate lose the ability to interject their own values; therefore, they cannot independently set the news agenda. Hence, news has become all information, and no form—symbolic content with “all semantic meaning, no poetic meaning” (Burke, 1973, p. 140). Objective journalism focuses more on political rhetoric and less so on political praxis. Mike Doyle of McClatchy Newspaper’s Washington bureau explains why. When discussing coverage of a Mitt Romney speech during the 2012 presidential election, he said in an interview,

[W]e have to be more than transcribers. People can see the tape of a presentation themselves, and they can read the transcript. And if you simply run the speech without setting the scene, and you don't provide any sort of context or detail outside of what the candidate presents, then you're simply providing a megaphone to the candidate. *And sometimes I think that's important, but it's forfeiting the opportunity of journalists, and forfeiting the responsibility of the journalists to tell the truth, if all you provide is the rhetoric and not the other part of the story* (emphasis added).

Chapter 2 discovered that reporters identify fairness as the paramount standard for reporting, more so than objectivity. This revelation introduces a new wrinkle to this analysis. The journalistic climate developing in the beginning of the twenty-first century is experiencing greater fluidity in two directions: first, modern journalism is horizontally fluid, as reporters adopt several roles, traveling between news and opinion with greater ease within their professional organizations through digital media; second, modern journalism is vertically fluid, as reporters have greater access to alternative methods of

informing the public sphere outside of the newsroom. To elaborate on this second point: While analog or mechanical technologies made the transfer of skills between different media difficult, digitization has simplified this process by creating a universal language for all of them. The reduced cost of entry into alternative methods of information production via digital media, such as documentaries, blogging, social media, and even digital forms of written non-fiction and the digital arts, permit a journalist to adapt their his or her innate skillset into new modes of symbolic exchange.

As a journalistic value, the fairness standard works outside of the boundaries of standard newsgathering, permitting more room for personal judgment and the creative framing of ideas prevalent within this dynamic, fluid environment. Because of this, some journalists find reporting from a detached, objective position less practicable.

Objectivity in the sense of neutrality is not a good thing. You cannot just be a reciter of facts. You have to be an interpreter of facts, and objectivity is more recitational and fairness is more interpretational (Fred Brown, *The Denver Post/Society for Professional Journalists*).

Chapter 1 touched on the possibility that objective journalism may actually have harmed news production by diluting reporters' abilities to contextualize the day's events into rhetoric useful for political praxis. Hence, the thesis explored here is that objective journalism has, over the last several decades, provided the public sphere with semantic symbolic content that divorces rhetoric from political practice and creates an environment that privileges rhetoric as the primary means of political power. In contrast, news has the potential of functioning as what Richard McKeon deems an "architectonic productive art," or a rhetoric that "relates form to matter, instrumentality to product, presentation to content, agent to audience, intention to reason" (McKeon and Swenson, 2005, p. 214). Therefore, this chapter will focus on the forces that both create and close the distance that

journalists maintain from public debate, which bears significant meaning for the extent to which journalism not only promotes social change but also keeps political rhetoric in check. First, it will explore how journalists negotiate their dual identities as reporters and as citizens and how pursuing more “fair” and less “objective” journalism complicates this process. Second, this chapter will focus on how public criticism by politicians and market demands *pull* and *push* journalists into the public debate. Third, it will focus on public and citizen journalists who actively participate in public discussion.

Journalists, But Not Quite Citizens: Creating a Separation

As discussed in the last chapter, journalists’ reflexive processes involve maintaining a neutral mind. Some of the methods that most mainstream reporters use in order to keep their biases in check involve eschewing some of the basic rights granted to American citizens: voting, participating in political demonstrations, and for a few political reporters and editors, publicizing their opinions about the day’s events through social media and on television appearances.

There’s a code among most journalists that if you’re a journalist you don’t join organizations that are political. You don’t participate in marches on Washington. Since you are denied that right of citizenry, you keep yourself apart from that... Most people, myself included, don’t think they should not vote. I mean, you vote. So I think everybody draws those boundaries in a slightly different way (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*).

As discussed in Chapter 1, maintaining independence from party influence became one of the first major developments in the professionalization of the press during Reconstruction and continues to be a fundamental aspect of journalists’ professional identities.

Independence works spatially for journalists in a similar manner to the observational distance some anthropologists use when engaged in ethnographic studies of the subaltern. Jennifer Hasty, a visiting scholar of African Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, notes

that journalists and anthropologists “are both inspired to discover and write about the sociocultural world, and both are governed by the professional, methodological, and discursive conventions of their disciplines” (Hasty, 2010, p. 132). Pierre Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology, which is informed by anthropological observation, strives for objectivity by controlling the relationship between the researcher and the object of inquiry “so that the position of the researcher is not unwittingly projected into the object of study.” A researcher must control for internal values while also addressing any bias inherent in the “scholarly gaze,” “in order to produce a more objective social science” (Swartz, 1997, pp. 271-273, 275).

Objective journalism works similarly. Reporters reflexively negotiate their distance from political debate by controlling the extent of their political activities. Paul Singer of *USA Today* explains:

So I’m pretty religious. Like, I don’t vote. I don’t donate. I don’t sign anything. I don’t take sides in debate... And for me, it really came to fruition when I was traveling on the Bush-Gore plane in 2000... And I realized that I couldn’t go to a ballot box and choose among these two people. It would be inappropriate, because my whole job has been to write about these two people and their competition for a seat.

Exercising one’s personal judgment becomes an especially important process for journalists who work for more ideological publications.

I, exercising my personal judgment—I won’t donate to a political campaign. I won’t volunteer for a political campaign. I won’t donate to anything even remotely political, but I don’t think there’s an official policy, which is unusual because I know that a lot of places do [have one]. I mean, I did sign an official ethics form, but it’s very basic (Alex Seitz-Wald, Salon.com).

Ethics codes adopted by mainstream newsrooms serve as the primary means of shaping the ideological space that separates many journalists from public debate. Some of these rules pertain to avoiding conflicts of interest that can influence a reporters’, or a newsroom’s, activities. Others pertain to the use of social media, which was explored in the

last chapter. As the editorial system serves as a disciplinary mechanism for producing fair journalism, ethics codes serve as a disciplinary mechanism for maintaining distance between journalists and public debate.

You don't take part in political activities. You don't contribute to a political candidate. You don't join certain kinds of organizations. If you have for some reason a conflict of interest because of an association with something, you don't write about that (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*).

I'm not allowed to give to a political organization. I'm not allowed to donate to a politician. I'm not allowed to participate in a political rally that I'm not covering (Radio Reporter).

We have a set of ethical guidelines... I mean, I don't donate to political causes. I don't make statements in support of one candidate or another. Obviously, when you go to political events, you identify yourself as a journalist. And as a member of the non-ideological press, you are not there to press an agenda (Alex Altman, *Time*).

Editors take these rules very seriously. On October 15, 2011, Caitlin Curran, a freelance web producer for Public Radio International's "The Takeaway"—co-produced with WNYC—attended a street rally for the ongoing Occupy Wall Street protests with her boyfriend. Borrowing a quote from a recent column on the Occupy movement by Conor Friedersdorf of *The Atlantic*, they constructed a sign for her boyfriend to carry at the rally:

It's wrong to create a mortgage-backed security filled with loans you know are going to fail so that you can sell it to a client who isn't aware that you sabotaged it by intentionally picking the misleadingly rated loans most likely to be defaulted upon (Friedersdorf, 2011).

Curran intended to follow her boyfriend, observe reactions to the sign, and report on her observations via Twitter. However, as Curran explains, her boyfriend developed sign-holding fatigue, and she "took over momentarily" (Curran, 2011). Another protestor took a picture—her entire face in view, arms suspending the sign overhead—which quickly circulated throughout social media. The next day, the co-editor of the online 'zine and group blog Boing Boing posted the picture as the "Occupy Wall Street sign of the day." In a column for Reuters, Felix Salmon described Curran as "one of those protestors that photographers dream of" whose sign conveyed "something true, and accurate, and

touching” (Salmon, 2011). Not only did the sign generate positive attention, but it also caught the attention of Curran’s boss who fired her immediately, claiming that she had violated every ethic of journalism (Curran).

The same week, another freelance journalist, Lisa Simeone of NPR, also lost her job as a contributor to the syndicated documentary radio program “Soundprint” for sitting on a planning committee for an Occupy DC protest. Moira Rankin, the president of Soundprint Media Center, which produces the program, explained, “In my mind, it’s fine if you want to be a leader of an organized protest movement, but you can’t also be in a journalistic role” (Zongker, 2011). Simeone, however, kept her other job as host of the NPR-distributed program “World of Opera,” produced by WDAV in Davidson, North Carolina. The station’s spokesperson stated, “Ms. Simeone’s activities outside of this job are not in violation of any of WDAV’s employee codes and have had no effect on her job performance.” NPR, who distributes the program to its affiliated stations, disagreed. Spokesperson Anna Christopher explained that the NPR ethics code, which prohibits political activism by its journalists, applies also to the cultural programs it distributes. “We are not her employer, but she is a host for a show that we distribute,” explains Christopher. “She’s a public person who represents NPR and public radio” (Zongker).

Simeone’s story underscores that such rules do not seek to protect the reporter’s credibility as much as the news organization’s. Mainstream newsrooms need to maintain their access to finances, and conveying an image of impartiality avoids offending those whose hands grant them that funding. In NPR’s case, those hands belong to Congress, state, and local governments, which provide approximately 16 percent of the budget for NPR stations through direct funding or through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB,

2010, as quoted by NPR, 2013). Public broadcasting has endured heavy criticism over the last few decades by conservatives for its purported liberal leanings and has been very sensitive to political scrutiny. Gary Knell, after being named NPR's CEO and President in late 2011, said that he sought to "depoliticize" partisan debate about public radio in order to "calm the waters a bit" at NPR. "It's not about liberal or conservative—it's about fairness," he said. "We've got to make the case that we're delivering a fair service, not only in the way we do our jobs, but in the way we disseminate the news" (Memmott, 2011).

Knell's use of "fairness" is an interesting choice. It reframes expectations for the position of the journalist to the public sphere: While objectivity builds distance, fairness incorporates more subjective judgment, which closes the distance, however slightly. Politicians have long complained about news coverage—journalists' main role is to question their rhetoric, after all. But the objectivity standard has provided politicians with an easy means of questioning journalists' credibility. Objectivity is not materially practiced, and therefore, not a realistic standard to which one can hold journalists. Politicians of all ideological camps, however, use this with relish. One could interpret Knell's use of "fairness" as a means to disarm the symbolic potency of politicians' claims that NPR is "non-objective" and therefore guilty of journalistic malfeasance.

As maintaining objective distance from political debate becomes more difficult for journalists, fairness has grown as an important part of their professional jargon. In an August 2012 article for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Kathleen Bartzen Culver tells the story of a journalism student who lost a potential internship at the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* just days before her official start date, because she signed a petition during the tumultuous Wisconsin gubernatorial recall election that year. Although she was not fully

employed at the *Journal Sentinel*, had not yet even started her internship, or was even working for a school newspaper, the paper “un-hired” her because of “a retroactive imposition of an ethics code on a job that hadn’t been created when she chose to put her name on a petition.” Culver questioned the enforcement of objective journalism through the strict abandonment of political activity. “Difficult questions require deep reflection,” she writes. “And upon reflection, it seems to me that if journalism ethics rely on the perceptions of a heatedly divided audience, those ethics are doomed” (Culver, 2012). Instead of continuing the belief that journalists should abandon their political views, she proposes that news organizations make a commitment to objective reporting methods with a *fair* mindset, and to use methods that will achieve that fairness.

Closing the Distance: The Pull/Push Effects of Politics and Market Demands

Jonathan Ladd (2012) contends that objective journalism’s functionality in the public sphere diminished, in part, because the marketing function of news organizations responded to both the widening ideological gap between the parties and increasing economic disparity during the second half of the twentieth century. Maintaining distance from public debate has, therefore, become a greater challenge for modern journalists. In fact, the journalists interviewed for this study identify two forces currently that both *pull* and *push* journalists into the fray: first, public criticism by politicians, and rhetorical tactics by political operatives intent on manipulating the press, pull journalists into public debate; and second, market forces push journalists into public debate in order to appeal to more acute political tastes.

First, the criticism of journalists by political operatives, and the manipulation of newsrooms by think tanks, *pulls* journalists into the political debate.

You know, I think the news business has become kind of a hockey puck in a political game, and the efforts of the news business to stay above the fray—at least to the extent that we’re talking about news organizations that do make that effort—sometimes the news media is dragged into political fights that we would rather stay out of (Radio Reporter).

The public sphere is a space for the symbolic warfare between ideas, with language being the symbol and the mechanism for inducing responses in others. Walter Lippmann explains, “[T]he leader knows by experience that only when symbols have done their work is there a handle he can use to move a crowd” (Lippmann, 1922/2010, p. 163). Ever since the printing press instituted the distribution of information, politicians have been a constant source of criticism for journalists—from Edmund Burke’s comparison of the press to “the rack” during the eighteenth century, to the Nixon administration’s blood feud with investigative journalist Jack Anderson during the late 1960s and early 1970s (*see* Feldstein, 2010), to cries from the modern left and right who claim that the media are in cahoots with the “other side” in direct opposition to their interests. During the 2012 presidential campaign, Jim VandeHei and Mike Allen of Politico wrote, “Republicans cry ‘bias’ so often it feels like a campaign theme. It is, largely because it fires up conservatives and diminishes the punch of legitimate investigative or narrative journalism” (VandeHei & Allen, 2012). Public polling illustrates the effectiveness of these attacks. In 2009, the Pew Research Center discovered a record low for the public’s assessment of press accuracy and fairness, with opinions becoming increasingly partisan (Pew, 2009). Craig Crawford, a columnist for Congressional Quarterly, writes, “Politicians won the war against the media with a simple rule: first, attack the messenger” (Crawford, 2006, p. 15). Journalists themselves, therefore, become symbols of public debate.

But politicians serve as only one means through which journalists have been pulled into the fray of public debate. Washington-based think tanks—once a place for the

generation of knowledge and ideas—became very politicized during the latter half of the twentieth century and have too been very influential. Former Treasury advisor Bruce Bartlett explains that think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation began adjusting their strategy of political communication during the early 1970s. Instead of filling its staff with “aging PhDs” who conduct original research, the Heritage Foundation instead hired people with Master’s degrees who took research “that had already been done by conservative academics, summarize it and apply it to the specific legislative issues Congress was considering” (Bartlett, 2010a). During the 1990s, corporations realized that they could better influence legislation by relying on studies produced by think tanks, so they began donating in larger amounts. As contributions began to swell, think tanks became even more aligned with politicians and political parties. “I recall one conversation I had with a very rich contributor to a think tank I was working,” Bartlett reflects. “He told me that the money he contributed to the organization came from the same pot of money he budgeted for political contributions” (Bartlett, 2010a). Think tanks focused keen attentions on translating their research into rhetorical tools as a means to counter the work of liberal groups. In a subsequent blog posting on the politicization of think tanks, Bartlett explains that conservatives “realized that putting out a study saying the exact opposite of a liberal study was sufficient to muddy the water and prevent a reporter from drawing a clear conclusion from the liberal study. It didn’t matter that the liberal study was done by a preeminent scholar in the field.... All that mattered is that they came to opposite conclusions, thus leading to the on-the-one-hand/on-the-other-hand” form of journalistic writing “that everyone hates” (Bartlett, 2010b).

The tit-for-tat form of journalism alluded to by Bartlett reflects the “false equivalency” argument promoted by postmodern critics of objective journalism. Journalists in this case focus on an issue in terms of how arguments and counter-arguments clash instead of on how policy proposals would actually impact people. In other words, journalism remained suspended in the realm of semantic information without any grounding in *realpolitik*. As newsrooms’ own competitive pressures increased during the latter half of the twentieth century, journalists began relying more on larger think tanks, such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the Brookings Institute, for insight into policy discussions, because personnel from those organizations could comment on a range of issues while maintaining a notion of credibility. They also appeal to journalists seeking a particular political perspective on an issue (Abelson, 2009, p. 85). Both forces—public criticism by politicians, and the rhetorical manipulations of think tanks—used the objectivity standard as a way to yank journalists into the arena of public debate. Not only did journalists become more vulnerable to political influence, but many journalists also focused their attentions on detached, semantic analyses of rhetoric in order to reinforce to themselves, and to their critics, their professional distance from the public sphere.

Second, journalists note that the widening ideological chasm between Republicans and Democrats have made opinionated forms of journalism more palatable to audience tastes. This, in turn, has added pressure to journalists to enter public debate on a variety of issues.

There’s more pressure to analyze what you are saying and to insert opinion, simply because the most successful media outlets seem to be those that have a point of view... So I think the whole idea that the internet and electronic media and this whole idea of instant communication requires and depends on a lot of opinion.... So it is tempting for someone who’s supposed to be reporting facts to get into the story,

and I think it may even be encouraged a little because that seems to be what people expect (Fred Brown, *The Denver Post/Society for Professional Journalists*).

Brown refers to a common theme throughout many of the interviews with journalists conducted for this study: Washington press culture has changed over the decades. Not only has the pool of reporters grown, but also their focus seems to be on a narrower range of issues. Beating an issue to death through multiple story angles, analyses, and countless opinions expressed through traditional media and online have quickly narrowed the distance maintained by objective reporters. As discussed in the last chapter, some major newspapers have created specific rules for social media use. Mike Doyle of McClatchy Newspapers explains why.

Our paper recently put out a policy, or a reminder to reporters who use Twitter, which most of us do for reporting purposes, to steer clear of getting into a tit-for-tat or name-calling. And there is something about the speed and the unfiltered nature of the social media, Twitter in particular, that makes it very easy and tempting to get into a name-calling and the commensurate loss of objectivity.

This differs markedly from thirty years earlier when major newspapers shirked at the idea of allowing their reporters to appear regularly on Sunday political news programs.

This is bizarre, it's a real anachronism, but if Steven B. Roberts who now teaches at George Washington—Steve was the White House correspondent for *The New York Times*. And it would have been in the first Reagan administration, in the early '80s, and he was told that he could not appear regularly on Washington Week in Review, because that was a television show and *New York Times* reporters could appear occasionally on television shows, but not regularly. And it was not clear at the time whether that was because they thought it was a lower order, or they were afraid you would find yourself debating in a food fight, or what. And Steve was not happy about that. *The New York Times* eventually changed that policy,⁸ but it's an example of how the norms changed (Doyle McManus, *Los Angeles Times*).

At least one journalist interviewed resists the push to enter public debate, preferring to maintain an objective distance.

When I go on TV, I don't give opinions. In fact, people will say, "So what do we think about that? Singer, is that a good or a bad thing?" To which my response is always, "It's not my job to have opinions." Which is why I don't get invited to do TV very often, because the commodity they want to sell is entertainment, engagement, and that's—I'm not in that world (Paul Singer, *USA Today*).

⁸ The current *Times* policy on broadcast appearances says that staff members may not appear on broadcasts that compete directly with the company's offerings on television or online. Otherwise, they can make "occasional" broadcast or online appearances (*The New York Times Ethics Policy*, 2013).

John Pollack of The College of New Jersey acknowledges that the media not only have a great influence on individual opinions, but that they also can be affected by surrounding political and social conditions. Papers can “resemble tilted mirrors, reflecting or refracting impulses toward change and the concerns of a broad range of publics and stakeholders” (Pollack, 2007, pp. 5 & 263). Ladd’s analysis uncovered this very phenomenon: that the multiple forces that undermined objective journalism—growing economic disparity, a widening ideological gap between the parties, and decreased technological homogeneity—coincided to make objective journalism less appealing, and opinionated forms of journalism more appealing, to consumer tastes, and newsrooms responded thusly. This leads to rhetorical questions like those posed by Michael Kinsley of Slate.com: “Will people want, in any form—and will they pay for—a collection of articles, written by professional journalists from a detached and purportedly objective point of view?” He describes objectivity as a “muddled concept” that outside of journalism has been “deeply out of fashion for decades.” Opinion-based journalism, on the other hand, can actually “be more honest than objective-style journalism because it doesn’t have to hide its point of view” (Kinsley, 2006). In other words, opinion journalism is not only more realistic, more transparent, but it also carries more public appeal than objective journalism.

But while market forces push journalists more into the daily political debate, a few journalists question the sincerity of some forms of opinion journalism. At least two of the journalists interviewed, notably those who are earlier in their careers, expressed discontent with forms of opinion-based journalism that masquerade as fact.

I’ve seen a lot of reporting from columnists who are open about their political leanings but still cast their reporting as fact-based analysis, but who will use the facts—manipulate them to support their point of view—and will sometimes contradict themselves in a way that’s blatantly partisan. And so I think in that

regard, here is a person trying to be transparent about their political leanings... [but] they are not objective [and] it clearly interferes with their reporting (Stephanie Condon, CBS Interactive).

I think that the key is transparency with all of this stuff. If you're going to have any kind of personal judgment, I think you need to be—so I think that the problem of why a lot of opinion journalism has a bad name is because of places like Fox News, which are clearly opinionated. They clearly have an agenda, but they refuse to admit that they have an agenda, and that's where we run into problems more so than somebody exercising a personal judgment, but who is very upfront (Alex Seitz-Wald, Salon.com).

The “pull-push” effect illustrated here undermines the distance that journalists and newsrooms attempt to create between themselves and public debate. For this reason, some mainstream journalists express that they struggle with maintaining an objective distance from political debate and, perhaps for this reason, rely more upon fairness as a guiding principle. Journalists disseminate symbols used by politicians, and through the subjective choices they make, can even in very small ways serve as advocates. “All media systems have a subtle element of advocacy, often through the hidden reproduction of cultural symbols and their choices about what should be included or excluded,” writes Maria Armoudian (Armoudian, 2011, p. 292). Perhaps, for a brief period following World War Two, journalists more easily maintained an objective, scientific distance from their objects of observation, but for the most part the American journalist has always had at least a toe in the milieu of public debate.

Jumping into the Fray: Public and Citizen Journalism

Nearly all of the journalists were interviewed for this study in late July 2012, immediately following a mass shooting inside a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado. Any major political news from the 2012 presidential campaign during the two weeks of interviews in Washington, DC, was squeezed in between ongoing coverage of the shootings and preliminary coverage of the 2012 Olympics in London, England. Neither President Obama nor Republican challenger Mitt Romney spoke about practical approaches to gun

control, with Obama instead opting to make an appearance in the battle state of Colorado to comfort the families of the victims. Brad Knickerbocker of the Christian Science Monitor wrote that although both President Obama and Governor Romney supported gun control earlier in their careers, both candidates have grown more conservative in their stated views on the issue, purportedly reflecting the hardening public opposition to gun control, especially in states with “an established gun culture” such as Colorado (Knickerbocker, 2012). Other journalists, such as Morgan Little of the *Los Angeles Times*, noted a “momentum against gun control in the court of public opinion” (Little, 2012).⁹

Alex Seitz-Wald of Salon.com also followed Congressional discussions surrounding gun control closely. Observing a lack of action by Democrats on the issue, he wrote a July 24th blog piece discussing Democratic silence on gun control. He describes how the story evolved:

[The story] was originally just looking for some Democrats who were going to stand up and say strong things on gun control and not being able to find any, and then we decided that that was the story, that no one was coming forward. So I was going to write a thing scolding Democrats for being so timid on gun control. And then this morning, all of a sudden, I started getting all these comments from a few Democrats saying [there was] action coming on. There clearly had been movement within the caucus... I didn't know if it was fair to say that all Democrats are refusing to speak on this. But just to say that some are doing it, and some are not, is not an interesting story, so we ended up—and most are still silent, absolutely, but we had to discuss that and decide that it's still fair to say that most are silent.

As an advocacy journalist, Seitz-Wald does not pretend to be objective. He does, however, strive for “fair” journalism by maintaining factuality in his reporting. By jumping into the gun control debate, he hopes to influence not only public opinion but also Congressional action.

⁹ Obama later raised the gun control issue following another tragic shooting in December 2012 at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, that claimed the lives of 20 school children and six adults. This additional tragedy also incited the State of Colorado into exploring gun control measures. In March 2013, following the bills' passage in the state House and Senate, Democratic Governor John Hickenlooper signed two gun control bills into law.

But in general, I think we have strong progressive values that include gun control. And when, for political reasons—like we all know that Barack Obama really is into gun control. He said so himself many times. He's not speaking publicly for political reasons. So to push a little bit from the left—not with any specific goal in mind but to try to get people to stand up a bit stronger, or at least vocalize.

Seitz-Wald sees himself as very much a part of the public debate. Although he eschews some of the rights he has as a citizen (he does not donate to political causes or volunteer for campaigns) he uses his role as a journalist in order to pressure political discussion to reflect liberal causes.

Just by talking about it, that can have an effect. By forcing a politician to either say something on it, or shaming them for refusing to say something about it. That's one thing that you can do. Or just opening up a little bit of space for them—they're obviously not journalists, but the way the Tea Party did for Republicans by moving them to the right. Liberal journalists can do [the same] for Democrats on the left by putting pressure.

By being a willing participant in public debate, Seitz-Wald sees his writing as adding to the “marketplace of ideas” concerning gun control within the public sphere. However, he does not view advocacy journalism as replacing traditional “objective” journalism. Rather, he believes that it should always be there, but that the public sphere should make room for journalists like him.

Nearly all of the “mainstream” journalists interviewed agree with Seitz-Wald, with a few reservations. When asked whether a journalist can maintain his or her professional identity while serving as an advocate, nearly all of the journalists agreed, as long as the reporting was both transparent and fair.

I think you can be professional as an advocate as long as you set out what your goals are... Can you be objective and yet an advocate? You know, I think you can't be objective as an advocate, but I think you can be fair as an advocate (Roger Wilkison, Voice of America Radio).

One of my first jobs in Washington was interning at The Nation magazine, which is a liberal publication. I worked closely with David Corn, and I think he's an excellent journalist... That said, I think there should always be organizations that strive for objectivity, like CBS, because I consider David's reporting among the best. I understand that some people won't trust him because of this point of viewpoint, so I think there should be people who are working without a viewpoint (Stephanie Condon, CBS Interactive).

Condon raises the important issue of how people inform themselves within the more vertically and horizontally fluid media news environment. Political partisans will either distrust objective media, because they view them as too conservative or liberal in general, as well as remain skeptical of forms of journalism that do not ideologically comport with their previously held views (for a poignant study on this phenomenon, see Ladd, 2010). For this reason, Condon believes that all forms of information should be available in the public sphere. Not all the journalists interviewed agree. When asked about whether public or advocacy journalism can still be considered professional, Paul Singer of *USA Today* seemed indignant about the idea. “Yeah, it’s called opinion,” he said. “It’s called the opinion pages. Knock yourself out. Stay off my fucking news page.” He continues:

There is no such thing as advocacy journalism. There are two things. There is journalism, and there is advocacy. And if you’re involved in one, you’re not involved in the other. Period. End of sentence... There is advocacy. And there can be fact-based advocacy. Good for you! Enjoy it. Go get a non-profit to fund it. Stay out of my newsroom.

Objectivity became an important feature for the formation of a professional journalism identity. Lippmann believed that reporters needed to be equipped with “a more serious education and more expert knowledge” to reduce the impact of subjectivity on their work (Schudson, 1978, p. 153). For Singer, this means maintaining his distance from public debate. In his eyes, public journalism is only a part of the public discussion but cannot serve as a reliable interpreter of symbolic content. Other reporters expressed a view transposed to this one: Advocacy journalism is welcome, but only as long as objective journalism remains as a kind of referee standing outside of the arena.

To me there is an important role for advocacy journalism, partisan journalism, opinion-based journalism, what have you, to play. What worries me is when people say that there is no such thing as objectivity—it is all opinion and advocacy journalism, because I think there’s an important difference between journalism that pursues a political goal and journalism whose primary goal is to inform (Radio Reporter).

That post-objective journalism, to be useful and reliable, will need to retain some of the principles of antediluvian objective journalism. And if, in the process, we lose objective journalism entirely, we are losing something (Doyle McManus, *Los Angeles Times*).

On the contrary, political scientist Albert Dzur believes that public journalists have indeed bridged the gap between reporters' dual identities of "citizen" and "journalist." They have demonstrated "how their stress on lay participation and public engagement has not meant professional trade-offs with cherished traditional values of objectivity, independence, and fairness" (Dzur, 2008, p. 137). Alex Seitz-Wald's commitment to producing fair, fact-based journalism with a mission exemplifies this. A journalist jumping into the fray of public debate does not, when conducted within an organization whose disciplinary mechanisms focus more on the process of story creation than on the ideological precepts of each story, mean a loss of professionalism. Dzur considers public journalism a form of "democratic professionalism," in which the rationalized processes in institutions that service the public, such as those in criminal justice, in health care, and in journalism, focus more outward than inward, toward improving democratic life than toward fulfilling the needs of the organization. These institutions comprise a number of key professions that have a "civic dimension" from which their players "can help mobilize and inform citizen participation inside and outside spheres of professional authority" (p. 10).

But like objective journalism, this idea, too, has its limits. Several journalists and media scholars, including journalist Jeff Jarvis, and Clay Shirky and Jay Rosen of New York University, among others, subscribe to the Future of News (FON) concept, or the idea that public or crowdsourced journalism should be the new, ideal model for newsgathering and dissemination. Because the public sphere has become more ideologically heterogeneous, they argue, the only means of supporting an ailing climate for fact-based journalism is

through the amalgamation of many minds seeking truth in tandem. In a recent column for the Poynter Institute, Shirky argues that too many voices have entered the public debate through digital media, and because of this, we fail more and more to decide our universal truths about which we can all agree. “There’s no way to get Cronkite-like consensus without Cronkite,” he explains, “and there’s no way to get someone like Cronkite in a world with an Internet; there will be no more men like him because there will be no more jobs like his” (Shirky, 2012). Shirky makes a salient point that digital media have diluted the elite role once enjoyed by journalists. As Ladd (2012) describes, the more limited media technologies existing right after World War Two meant less competition between news organizations, leading to less differentiation in news product. Reporters such as David Brinkley of NBC and Walter Cronkite of CBS became themselves universal figures of an era during which the United States enjoyed greater ideological harmony. However, Shirky appears to rely on the belief that a universal political truth exists in the public sphere—one that journalists can discover by “looking for consensus among relevant actors.” This process has succumbed to the lack of agreed upon “experts,” which in turn has made seeking and reporting on truth “less on finding consensus, which there is simply less of in the world, and more about publicly sorting the relevant actors from the irrelevant ones” (Shirky).

The answer Future of News thinkers offer to this dilemma, which Dean Starkman outlines with a critical eye in recent articles for the Columbia Journalism Review, is “a faith in the wisdom of crowds and citizen journalism, in volunteerism over professionalism, in the ‘journalism as conversation’ over traditional models of one-to-many information delivery” (Starkman, 2011). In other words, Jarvis, Shirky, and others believe that not only

should journalists jump into the arena as referees of the public sphere, but that the collective observations held by the players themselves—of the countless citizens engaged in symbolic warfare within the arena—should together compile the data from which a political mean can be reached. Starkman concludes, “Indeed, if one were looking for ways to undermine reporters in their work, FON ideas would be a good place to start.” This includes, among other requirements, asking journalists to “spend a portion of their workday marketing and branding themselves and figuring out their business model” and “require that they keep in touch with you via Twitter and FB [Facebook] constantly instead of reporting and writing” (Starkman, 2011). Most of the journalists interviewed express similar beliefs that, regardless of how many journalists become a part of the public debate, a monastic cadre of journalists maintaining an objective distance should continue to monitor discussion from outside of the public sphere. In other words, journalists continue to believe in their roles as “experts.” Witschge (2012) notes that this concept “is very much dominant in news organizations.” As discussed in the last chapter, journalists express little faith in the public’s ability to make sense of the information they consume. It may be for this reason that they have committed to “a strong division between the role of the amateur—the audience—and the role of the professional—the journalist” (p. 125).

One additional way to understand journalism’s more active role in the public sphere is by understanding how columnists and political commentators serve as public intellectuals. The public intellectual today manifests in two different formats. Communication scholar David Park argues that journalists “speak in the common vernacular, address issues of social importance, and communicate to a broad audience” as do public intellectuals (Park, 2006, p. 118). His comparison counters Russell Jacoby’s

premise that, because the professionalization of academia has separated university academics from communicating with the public at large, an expanding yet market-compromised journalism has precariously filled the void by keeping “alive a tradition of writing on public issues in a public language” (Jacoby, 1987, p. 222). Park does not adopt Jacoby’s cynicism. Rather, he argues that public intellectual journalism has formed a ritualistic dimension, in which columnists such as David Brooks, Thomas Friedman, Paul Krugman, and George Will serve as ideological flag-bearers in social dramas, such as the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal or the 2005 bombings in London (Park, pp. 119-120).

Certainly, the work of Brooks and others mimics the detached writings of Walter Lippmann and other public intellectuals who observed their world from just outside the rim of the public sphere. However, more recent manifestations of purported “public intellectualism” have developed from the ideological divide permeating modern American political culture. In this case, Bill O’Reilly, Ann Coulter, and Ed Schultz have become the champions of daily political debate, but their communicative formats “are based on a deeply politicized or a deeply cynical and ironic worldview” that engages in the rampant symbolic categorization of friends from enemies, of the menschen from the heathens, “neither of which leads automatically to the vision of public deliberation that the traditional formats have tended to offer” (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011, p. 246). Columnists and commentators of this nature do not offer fair, factual opinions. They are players in the sandbox who throw dirt into the eyes of their opponents.

Why Does Distance Matter? Journalism as an Architectonic Productive Art

Through its analysis so far, this chapter has uncovered two main ways that journalists maintain distance from the public sphere. The first type of distance is an

ideological distance in which a journalist adopts an objective, detached position outside of the area of observation, similar to an anthropologist. In this case, the journalist has separated his or her values from the facts that he or she has collected through observation, and those values in no way color the facts on which the journalist reports. This category includes traditional, mainstream journalists who eschew their political beliefs both inside and outside of the newsroom and offer fair, fact-based reporting.

The second type of distance is a *professional distance* in which a journalist maintains an active involvement in the public debate but maintains his or her professional identity while participating. In this case, the journalist has not separated his or her values from the facts collected through observation; however, observation still has the power to challenge those originally held beliefs. Public journalists and traditional public intellectuals both report and opine from within the public sphere, yet they do so while offering fair, fact-based information to the public. They may eschew their politics while on the job, but avoid participating in politics outside of the newsroom.

More recently, forms of reporting that do not maintain either ideological or professional distance have been on the rise. Modern think tanks, politicized forms of public intellectualism, and citizen journalism neither separate facts from values nor limit their participation in public debate. The symbolic content generated from these forms of communication yield more propagandistic than democratic forms of discussion. Battling forms of propaganda, bereft of intersubjective exchange, create conditions within the public sphere that support symbolic warfare between well-entrenched, ideological camps. Professor Nicholas O'Shaughnessy of the University of Keele, U.K., writes, "Symbols telegraph meaning, and life is a cacophony of symbols, since they are the mental heuristics

or short cuts through which daily life is interpreted and organized. A key function of propaganda is to manufacture such recognition devices” (O’Shaughnessy, 2004, p. 100). Increasing technological, political, and economic heterogeneity in the United States has not only increased the amount of mediated discussion in the public sphere but also has further exacerbated already polarized ideological choices by providing more opportunities for propaganda to expand. Citizens more and more make political decisions based on heuristics than on empirical evidence, especially when the choice is complex (for an interesting study of this phenomenon, *see* Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). Increasing propaganda compels Americans to choose one side over another instead of exercising a critical analysis of available information.

The degree to which a journalist distances himself or herself from the public sphere, whether they do so through newsroom ethics policies or through their own reflexive habits, affects the kinds rhetoric generated from their work. In the case of traditional “objective” journalism, which maintains a strict ideological distance from public debate, the rhetoric generated from this work has a greater potential of becoming “all information, no form,” or “all semantic, no poetic” meaning (*see* Schudson, 1995, pp. 69-70). Burke describes the semantic meaning of rhetoric as functioning much like an addressed envelope making its way through the mail system. “Any single worker, handling the letter in its various stages of transit,” he explains, “interprets the address as instructions for a different kind of operation. Its ‘totality’ is in the organized interlocking of these operations themselves, whereby each ‘specialist,’ performing a ‘partial’ act, yet contributes to the total act...” (Burke, 1989, p. 88). A chair, for example, means something different to the carpenter who built it, to the furniture salesperson who sold it, and to the person who sits

in it. All of these actions, together, provide the total semantic meaning for the chair. The chair, in this case, acquires an objective, impersonalized meaning. However, not all semantic meanings achieve a semantic ideal, for which the aim is to “evolve a vocabulary that gives the name and address of every event in the universe.” The meaning of “chair” would, ideally, account for every subtle, personalized interpretation of the meaning of a chair. It can mean to a student a place to sit and complete a book report for school, and to a grandmother a place on which she can sit and play with her grandchild. It can mean to a person that he or she has incurred additional debt on his or her credit card. These meanings cannot be organized into an interconnected totality. Burke describes these more subjective, personalized meanings as “poetic” meanings, which “would be different from, or other than, or more than, or even, if you want, less than, but not antithetical to” semantic meanings (p. 89).

Because of this, objective journalism, which maintains an ideological distance from public debate, tends to produce rhetoric with only a semantic meaning. It serves as instructions for political participation, but only to the degree that individuals know how to act in order to uphold the status quo. McKeon’s concept of the architectonic productive art goes beyond this. The art should be architectonic, or first, an organizing system. The art should also be productive: “Instead of discovering or uncovering the eternally constant boundaries, principles, and domain-specific problems of the sciences, practices, and arts,” rhetoric should instead “create these very boundaries, principles, and problems” (Depew, 2010, p. 40). The focus on an architectonic productive art is to organize systems of problem solving—not simply an art of construction but also “an art of invention which is a rhetorical system of organizing data, experience, existence, places, or commonplaces”

(Holmberg, 1981, p. 229). In order to achieve this form, journalists would have to move beyond focusing on simply reporting the news to including more subjective interpretations of political rhetoric. Otherwise, reporters would relay uninhibited political rhetoric, permitting propaganda to circulate unchecked in the public sphere.

This conclusion immediately introduces the question of whether public journalism and public intellectuals are more capable of achieving McKeon's construct. Public or advocacy journalists maintain a professional distance by not becoming active participants in politics outside of the newsroom, but they add to the public debate through their work. By doing this, the work of public journalists and intellectuals comes somewhat closer to achieving an architectonic productive art. They suggest changes to the status quo through their reporting, but they fail to organize those inventions into a system that connects rhetoric with a true praxis. Only the most politically active public journalists, such as *Rolling Stone's* Matt Taibbi, dismantle the professional boundaries that separate them from "amateurs." However, by not always following professional norms, they risk losing credibility with their sources and with the public.

Conclusions

Maintaining an objective distance from the public sphere, then, has enormous implications for the extent to which journalists can affect social change in the public sphere. During the halcyon days of relative political homogeneity immediately following World War Two, objective journalism flourished because it effectively reflected the status quo back to Americans. But as greater political division grew toward the end of the twentieth century, objective journalism became a means of disseminating propagandistic rhetoric, focusing the symbolic production of news on more he said-she said arguments

than on creating effective solutions to social problems. During the 1990s, public journalism became a means of putting “the ideals of deliberative democracy into the practice of journalism by making the promotion of public deliberation part of the journalist’s role” (Dzur, 2008, p. 138). Journalism operating within the public sphere facilitated interpretation and debate more than mere reporting, and in turn, became more palatable to the tastes of a polarized political culture.

However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the journalists interviewed for this research describe their ideal constructive goal as achieving “fair” journalism, which involves more subjective interpretation than pure objective journalism. In a sense, mainstream political journalists already report from a closer distance than objective journalism dictates. It is also important to note that modern journalists work in a more fluid environment in which they more easily move between news and opinion, sometimes entering and leaving the public debate. Ethics policies of newsrooms attempt to control this movement, but the pull-push effect of political criticism and market forces undermine the distance that newsrooms attempt to create between their reporters and the public sphere. Although mainstream newsrooms attempt to maintain ideological distance from public debate, they cannot completely divorce themselves from the capitalist ideologies that surround them, and from the power of political rhetoric that has made them into symbolic fodder for partisans of all political stripes.

Journalists have more opportunities today to be both a “journalist” and a “citizen” without entirely compromising their professional identities. It is fascinating that, although most of the journalists interviewed support the role of public journalism in the public sphere, they believe in maintaining the “antediluvian” form of objective journalism active

since the turn of the twentieth century. Perhaps political journalists see a value to including informational, semantic rhetoric in the discursive mix with more opinionated forms of journalism; and, perhaps, such journalism is less vulnerable to being coopted by political interests, such as think tanks, now that more interpretational forms of journalism exist in the public sphere.

Chapter 4: People-Pleasers or Public Servants? Objective Journalism as a Tool for Impression Management

"You can please some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time."

- Poet John Lydgate, later paraphrased by Abraham Lincoln and P.T. Barnum

Introduction

In late July 2012, Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney stood before the Western Wall in Jerusalem, spending a moment to reflect, his eyes closed and head bowed, before the furious clicks of press cameras. That same day, during a fundraising speech to American donors, Romney stated, "I was thinking this morning as I prepared to come into this room of a discussion I had across the country in the United States about my perceptions about differences between countries." Palestine's economy, he believed, suffered from "cultural" differences instead of from the effects of the ongoing Israeli occupation. He compared the gross domestic products of Israel and Palestine, noting the "dramatic, stark difference in economic vitality" that is "also between other countries that are near or next to each other. Chile and Ecuador, Mexico and the United States" (Wilson, 2012). In a news analysis piece for *The Washington Post*, reporter Scott Wilson noted inaccuracies in Romney's speech. "The [economic] assessment is one not widely shared within Israel," he wrote, "and suggested a lack of sustained study or nuanced understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship." Wilson also corrected Romney's stated GDP figures for Israel and Palestine. Romney had understated Israel's GDP by approximately \$10,000 and overstated Palestine's GDP by more than five times its actual figure. "From a tactical point of view," Wilson concluded, "Romney has faltered at times in

trying to prove that he has the policy expertise, personal skills and cultural intelligence to represent the country abroad” (Wilson).

Wilson’s use of in-text fact-checking alludes to Art Brisbane’s infamous *New York Times* blog posting asking whether the *Times* should be a “truth vigilante,” even if the paper risked appearing non-objective in the eyes of its readers. The 2012 presidential campaign became a testing ground for this concept. Republican Vice Presidential nominee Paul Ryan’s address at the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Florida, incited a slew of analysis pieces and blog entries that highlighted “lies,” “problematic” claims, and “factual errors” (Klein, 2012; Stanley, 2012; Rainey, 2012). Ezra Klein of *The Washington Post* first approached Ryan’s speech with a forgiving eye, urging his fellow journalist, Dylan Matthews, to “bend over backward to be fair, to see it from Ryan’s perspective, to highlight its best arguments as well as its worst.” After Matthews returned with an analysis pointing out only one item in the “true” section of his article, Klein was incredulous and reread the speech himself, locating just one more statement to add to the “true” column—but he found two more “false” claims, as well. “I wanted to stop here and say that even the definition of ‘true’ that we’re using is loose...” he wrote. “But Ryan’s claims weren’t even arguably true” (Klein). He then returned to Sarah Palin’s 2008 Vice Presidential acceptance speech, wondering, perhaps, “this is how these speeches always are,” but Palin’s claims more or less held up to scrutiny. “Quite simply,” he concluded, “the Romney campaign isn’t adhering to the minimum standards required for a real policy conversation.” His deductions incited a small crisis of journalistic faith.

I don’t like that conclusion. It doesn’t look ‘fair’ when you say that. We’ve been conditioned to want to give both sides relatively equal praise and blame, and the fact of the matter is, I would like to give both sides relatively equal praise and blame. I’d personally feel better if our coverage didn’t look so lopsided.

But first the campaigns have to be relatively equal. So far in this campaign, you can look fair, or you can be fair, but you can't be both (Klein).

Erving Goffman (1959) describes the “impressions” one makes as a dramaturgical presentation of symbolic interaction with an audience, and the management of those presentations as the impetus to control the impression one makes (p. 15). As symbolic producers, journalists struggle between maintaining the impression of being “objective” or “fair” to their readers while also remaining factual. As Ezra Klein states, a journalist can look fair, or be fair, but he or she cannot be both. Journalists manage the impressions they make not only to their audience and to their sources, but also to their fellow journalists. After reading the *Post's* coverage of Romney's Israel speech, Mike Doyle of McClatchy Newspapers said,

I despise the man, but again, the accumulative effect is that it seems as if the *Washington Post* has a thing against Mitt Romney, and so today's story, in that context, seemed like another example of the *Post* going after Mitt Romney in a way that they don't do with Obama... We exist to be antagonists, I guess, toward people in the political arena; but... the *Post*, I think, is creating the impression, and has certainly created the impression with me, that they're anti-Romney and that they're going to go after him.

This chapter will explore the public and institutional pressures that compel journalists to maintain an objective image, and how larger changes in American political culture since the Watergate era, and the more recent growth of digital platforms for public discourse, have complicated the way journalists manage their impressions. It will first explore the institutional forces that pressure news organizations into maintaining an objective image, the larger changes in political culture during the Watergate era that reshaped public expectations for the press, and how digital communication has complicated how journalists manage their impressions.

Hegemony, Journalism, and Maintaining Professional Legitimacy

According to Goffman, the self contains two main attributes: first, the performer, or the “harried fabricator of impressions” involved in staging a performance; and second, the character, or the figure that the performance intends to evoke (p. 252). Impression management works as a dialectic between the performer/character and the audience. Individuals are concerned with maintaining the impression that they live up to the societal standards by which others judge them and their products. And although these standards create a moral universe in which the performer lives, Goffman argues, individuals do not concern themselves as much with actually living up to these standards, but rather, the amoral issue of creating the impression that they do (p. 251). Using this framework in order to understand how journalists employ the objectivity standard for maintaining professional legitimacy in the public mind at first seems cynical. But the motivation to create impressions is not solely a subjective exercise. After all, the individual’s need to create preordained, “acceptable” impressions in face-to-face interactions derives from hegemonic pressures that shape their moral universe.¹⁰ But at the very least, the journalists interviewed for this research expressed the need to create the impression that they are either objective or fair in order to maintain credibility with three main groups—their audiences, the subjects of their stories, and their sources.

Obviously, as a neutral reporter, anytime your sources or subjects are thinking of you as biased, you’re going to have trouble getting calls returned or being treated with respect. And by readers, too... so

¹⁰ Gramsci’s exploration of the bourgeois press described journalism as an institution within a greater ideological structure of the “dominant class.” “The press,” he wrote, “is the most dynamic part of this ideological structure, but not the only one. Everything which influences or is able to influence public opinion, directly or indirectly, belongs to it: libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture and the layout and names of streets” (Gramsci, 1991, p. 389). Hegemony serves as the means through which the greater ideological mores, norms, and values of society inform the impressions that individual actors attempt to create. While this chapter attends to how this functions within the newsroom, Chapter 6 will, in part, explore how this process also functions in the journalism classroom.

there's three audiences who [are] a good impetus to be fair and diligent (Mike Doyle, McClatchy Newspapers).

I think when somebody trusts me to tell their story they put faith in me to not mistreat their story... they're putting a trust in me that I think of as sort of an honor that I have a responsibility to handle with care and respect (Radio Reporter).

Because I want everyone to answer my phone call and to understand that they're getting a fair deal, even when I'm about to rake them over the coals. I have written stories about people that led to investigations against them, and they have told me that they thought they were treated fairly. That's all I ask. That's all I can offer (Paul Singer, *USA Today*).

Gaye Tuchman (1972) described objectivity as a “strategic ritual.” Because of diverse pressures, a journalist “must be able to develop strategies which enable him to state, “This story is objective, impersonal, detached” (p. 675). Those strategies include presenting conflicting explanations for truth claims, providing supplementary evidence to support a reported fact, the use of quotations, reporting the most “material facts” first in the article (or the inverted pyramid form of article writing), and carefully separating facts from opinions by labeling specific articles “news analysis” (p. 676). Together, these rituals comprise the means through which a journalist maintains credibility with audiences, sources, and subjects of stories. Responding to Tuchman, Fred Vultee (2010) begs the question of whether such rituals can become so entwined with the process of ethics that they ultimately replace the original ethical goals. Instead of objectivity serving as a strategic ritual for journalists, the maintenance of credibility itself becomes a ritual. Although Vultee does not mention Goffman, one can see examples of impression management in his study: “If credibility itself is central to ethical practice, is it helped or hurt when it is supplanted—if not replaced—by *a routine of credibility?*” (p. 14, emphasis added). Vultee departs somewhat from Tuchman by describing objectivity as a “necessary” but “not a sufficient” condition of credibility. Journalists cannot control “what pushes the audience’s buttons,” but they can control “what journalistic buttons they push” (*ibid*). So

viewing journalistic impression management as a cynical exercise does not implicate journalists themselves as much as larger ideological forces that pressure media institutions to maintain a detached, objective position.

But what ideological forces pressure media institutions to maintain an objective distance? Chapter 3 touched on how political forces, such as political think tanks, exploit the objectivity standard in order to manipulate political messaging. However, this pressure does not only come from political structures, but from a culmination of institutions. Lowery (2009) writes, “The credibility of the news media is grounded in a publicly accepted account, or typification, of news media, and fundamental deviation from this accepted account seriously undermines legitimacy in the eyes of external traditional institutions” (pp. 58-59). His study employs “new institutionalism,” which distinguishes institutional settings (such as news organizations functioning independently) from “relational” or “technical” settings, in which organizations become responsive to external influences. “Relational” settings include such forces as competitive marketplace conditions that “can cause trouble for institutional organizations” (p. 49). When consumers, for example, can evaluate news as a product, they “gain considerable rights of inspection and control,” and organizations respond in kind (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 354, as quoted by Lowery, p. 49). Such forces press journalism organizations toward maintaining a Weberian rationalization through institutionalized practices, such as objectivity, which acquire a “myth-like status” regardless of their effectualness. Because the press exists as an institutional mechanism for information dissemination, publics are then able to believe in at least the “possibility” of attaining truth through these means (p. 52).

The rationalization of objectivity has become a fundamental part of newsroom ideology. Not only do many mainstream journalists reflexively assess each article for examples of bias, but also, entire newsrooms perform this same function on a more macro level, longitudinally assessing whether all of their reporting creates a collective impression of favoritism.

You risk your credibility if you say that Barack Obama or Mitt Romney could be wrong on the issue of the day eight or nine times out of ten, but if eight or nine days out of ten... you write that Mitt Romney or Barack Obama is wrong, you lose credibility in the eyes of the readers who come to *Time* expecting a non-ideological take on the day's news... You want to fulfill your mission to readers of giving them the truth while not appearing to be constantly taking a stand to one side of the other. You want to maintain your neutrality and, of course, you want to be fair (Alex Altman, *Time*).

Therefore, not only are journalists engaged in impression management, but also their newsrooms and the entire news institution. Reflecting Goffman's dialectic between performer/character and audience, Lowery argues that "it is less important that this institution perform effectively or even that the public pay much attention to it" than actually providing the service that the public expects (p. 52). Goffman describes the collective staging of a single routine as a "performance team" or, in short, "team."

Individual members of a team develop an interdependence; any individual has the power to disrupt the performance through inappropriate conduct (Goffman, 1959, pp. 79, 82).

Time's longitudinal attention to the amount of criticism it wields toward individual political actors indicates that its news organization works as a team seeking to create a "non-ideological" impression for its audience. Many teams also contain directors who possess the "special duty" of keeping both team members, and the orchestration of the impression the team seeks to build, in line (p. 98). Mainstream newsroom policies become the means through which editors ensure that individual reporters avoid conflicts of interest, write

stories at an appropriate distance from public debate, and do not create the collective impression of bias.

Lowery also employs the “new institutionalism” model in order to explore how news organizations respond to the more dynamic media environment in which they report today. As discussed in Chapter 3, journalists find themselves in a more vertically and horizontally fluid public sphere in which technological changes, political polarization, and economic disparity have decentralized and atomized the dissemination of information. In his essay, Lowery focuses on how news organizations respond to changing media and communicative habits of audiences and to market demands (through how audiences are measured). Journalists and news organizations are unlikely to make imminent fundamental changes in practices because the wider institutional realm in which journalism takes place is not likely to make fundamental, imminent changes themselves. Therefore, because the news industry is a communications institution with unparalleled cultural legitimacy, news organizations “are likely to continue to take half-measures, bowing to increasing pressure from relational market forces by adopting new forms and trends, but buffering many core practices from these changes” (p. 59). Following Lowery’s analysis, a “half-measure” for news organizations could be their focus on “fairness” as the paramount standard for ethical journalism, instead of objectivity, which is more amenable to the more opinionated market climate of today.¹¹ But adopting this idea may be too market-deterministic, as this research so far has unearthed a more complicated amalgamation of political-cultural, economic, and technological forces that have created a

¹¹ In 1996, the Society for Professional Journalists removed “objectivity” from its revised ethics code, which indicates that some sort of collective institutional decision (at least by those serving on the ethics committee at the time) to abandon the term occurred during the dawn of online communication.

more fluid ecology for journalists. The market may be one relational force influencing news organizations, but it is not the only one.

Watergate: A Turning Point in Public Expectations for the Press?

Impression management reflects the hegemonic pressures that create the moral universe for performers. Hegemonic pressures become the force that forms public expectations for press behavior. Journalists and newsrooms adopted the objectivity standard in order to create an ethical legitimacy in the public mind by employing the scientific methodology that had become the gestalt of late progressive era social policy. Roger Wilkison, a retired reporter now working part-time as a television copy editor for Voice of America, believes that *The Washington Post's* investigative reporting on Watergate during the early 1970s propelled journalists to an almost sanctified level. When reflecting on a quote from Kovach and Rosenstiel's *The Elements of Journalism*—on whether journalism constitutes an “act of character”—he said,

You know, I think we tend to, nowadays but perhaps always since Watergate, put journalists on a pedestal as if we really were the “Fourth Estate.” As if we really were more important than we are. We are just messengers, you know. I never—no, I don't see myself as ever having exercised acts of character. I'm just doing a good job or the best job that I could under the circumstances at a given time. It's just your job and you know instinctively what you've got to do to get a story out and to make sure that it is a story worth reading, listening to, or seeing.

Here he implies that public expectations became unrealistic following Watergate, that deifying journalists as more than mere “messengers” may have placed journalists on too high a pedestal in the public mind. When asked if he saw Watergate as the *root* cause of journalism's ascendance in the public mind, he said,

I do, definitely. I think that lots of young people at the time decided that they wanted to be journalists after Watergate—that it was an exciting and fulfilling career that had elements of public service in it. That this would be a very satisfying way to make a living and to occupy yourself for the rest of your life. I think Watergate was instrumental in that, yeah... It redefined journalism in the public's mind, yeah.

His perspective also reveals a generational transition in how journalists view public expectations of them, at least for the older generations still working in newsrooms—one that transforms from the more pragmatic mindset of the generation that came of age during the years following World War Two (that they should remain objective), to the more idealistic perspective of the generation following them that came of age during Vietnam (that they should also provide a public service). This transition may very well have changed the impressions that journalists and newsrooms seek to create, from being objective and scientific in their reporting, to conveying a more post-positivist perspective that acknowledges the presence of subjective reasoning in their work and promotes “fair” reporting as the gold standard.

Watergate serves as a clichéd example—a publicly held conceit, perhaps—of journalism at its most moral. Mark Feldstein, the Richard Eaton Chair in Broadcast Journalism at the University of Maryland, interrogates the mythology surrounding the media coverage’s role in the downfall of the Nixon administration. “By now, of course, Watergate has become part of our folklore,” he writes (Feldstein, 2004). After Capitol police arrested five burglars wearing business suits and surgical gloves at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington, D.C., in 1972, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of *The Washington Post* followed a trail that led to a massive illegal White House wiretapping operation and subsequent cover-up directed by President Nixon. The David and Goliath story of two reporters felling an American president through diligent and risk-taking newsgathering became romanticized in print and on the big screen. After Nixon’s resignation in 1974, the reporters co-wrote the best-selling memoir *All the President’s Men* that, in turn, became a popular Hollywood movie starring Robert Redford and Dustin

Hoffman. Woodward himself refutes the notion that the media unseated a president. “To say that the press brought down Nixon, that’s horseshit,” reports Mark Feldstein. “The press always plays a role, whether by being passive or by being aggressive, but it’s a mistake to overemphasize” the media’s coverage (Feldstein).

In a sense, Watergate legitimated the rationalization of newsroom behavior that developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; however, it may have delegitimized objectivity as a part of it. The canonization of Watergate appears in many writings on journalism ethics. “Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein,” among others, built their reputations on telling us things that the powerful “have not wanted us to know” (Epstein, 2007, p. 52). Watergate “provided the most visible seal of approval” on journalistic distrust of the government (Schudson, 2011, p. 98), and “no other story in American history features the press in so prominent and heroic a role” (Schudson, 1992, p. 103). Thakurta (2009) asks, “Can the US media do another Watergate?” despite today’s newsroom policies concerning the use of anonymous sources—in reference to Woodward and Bernstein’s infamous reliance on information provided by “Deep Throat” (revealed in 2005 as former FBI agent Mark Felt) (p. 189).

If Watergate impacted journalism at all, it counter-intuitively demonstrated that, when journalists hold a magnifying glass over the public sphere, credibility plummets not only for the politicians investigated but also for the media involved in the investigation. Niven (2002) discusses that studies into media trust following Watergate and following the Iran-Contra hearings during Ronald Reagan’s second term uncovered increased distrust of the press (*see also* research by Robinson, 1974, and Kohut, 1988). The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed the loosening threads of universalism in American political culture.

Political tumult during the Civil Rights era, the Vietnam War, the landslide reelection of Richard Nixon in 1972, and his resignation in 1974 made objective impression management very difficult for reporters, although it remained firm as a journalistic value. Nicholas Lemann, former dean of the Columbia School of Journalism, considers this era the stage during which we witnessed the “big, prestigious journalistic organs asserting themselves, rather than merely passing along what government officials had said, and being rewarded with more power and influence and more admiration from the public” (Lemann, 2005, p. 172). But not all reporters see the move toward more investigative reporting as having a long-term benefit to ethical journalism. Carl Bernstein laments that the Watergate effect on reporting wore away too quickly, replaced by a “careerist impulse” that emphasized glamour over doing “required legwork and putting information in context” (Feldstein, 2004). For better or worse, Lemann and Bernstein identify the distinct shift in journalistic performance that Wilkison noted earlier—one that appealed to the less homogenous political culture of the United States. There were “two sides” to many issues, it seemed. And, depending on which side one spoke to, it was the “other side” whose scandals always needed investigation.

Another minor myth also lies in Watergate’s unique inspiration for increased enrollment in journalism schools. Before Watergate broke, enrollment already had been on the rise, especially since 1970. According to a March 8, 1977, article in the Burlington, N.C., *Times-News*, enrollment in journalism schools in the United States increased 93% between 1970 and 1975, and by 481% between 1960 and 1975. Professor Paul Peterson of Ohio State University explained that “The big boom began from 1971 to 1972 and it happened because young people already had seen journalism as a way to change the world. It was

the beginning of consumer journalism. People who would have originally majored in English felt that even though they might have no intention of working for a newspaper, they might be able to change the world if they mastered basic journalism skills” (Carmody, March 8, 1977). So Watergate signaled not the zeitgeist of objective journalism, but rather, a transition toward investigation and public service, as a generation with strong, rivalrous moral convictions cracked what had been a relatively homogenous political culture. These cracks spread from American civic culture to the voting choices of political elites in Congress. As Ladd (2012) notes, the parties remained relatively unpolarized until the late 1970s, after which voting patterns increasingly diverged (p. 66).

Parting Ways: Public Expectations and Objective Journalism

Hegemonic norms for the press create societal expectations to which all journalists wish to appeal in order to maintain credibility. Their failure to do so causes “incidents” in which “the reality sponsored by the performers is threatened.” Goffman explains: “The persons present are likely to react by becoming flustered, ill at ease, embarrassed, nervous, and the like.... When these flusterings or symptoms of embarrassment become perceived, the reality that is supported by the performance is likely to be further jeopardized and weakened” (Goffman, 1959, p. 212). Unfulfilled expectations lead to a decrease in the public trust of journalists, as exemplified by the record low for public trust in journalism found by the 2009 Pew Research study (Pew, 2009). However, the lack of distrust may not be due only to changing expectations created by the political polarization that started during the Watergate era, but because public expectations have evolved toward the belief that a more localized, or perhaps even personalized, position for news seems more credible. Two of the journalists interviewed for this study identified that the lack of

geographic focus in their reporting—of making their news relevant to their readers—has made reflecting the moral expectations of the public much more difficult.

I try to write a story that will be appealing to a local audience, because it involves local people or local issues, and I get pushback from the editors. They want me, or they want all of us, to write stories of national appeal. I don't buy that theory. I think they're completely wrong to believe that's where our strength is. I believe very fervently that our strength is writing a story that will be all a neighborhood or a person; and if written well, or written well enough, it will be of universal interest, as well.... I write for an audience that's fragmented by virtue of region and parochial interests, and my assumption is that people want to read about their neighbor, not about a stranger (Mike Doyle, McClatchy Newspapers).

I don't think people read as much as they used to, and I think people nowadays are so busy with their own lives.... And I don't know if it's—if just listening to the news sort of makes them feel that, "Well, there's a media establishment and it's far from my life and they never talk about the problems that I have, you know, about trying to avert foreclosure or trying to get a better deal at CostCo or Best Buy, or whatever." You know? I mean, perhaps the news today, the stories that are published or that you watch on television, are not relevant to the lives of a lot of people in this country (Roger Wilkison, Voice of America).

Recent survey research by Heider, et al. (2005), supports this idea. Their study responds to what has been the conventional wisdom for proper press behavior: That the public expects journalists to adopt a watchdog role that speaks truth to power. After surveying 600 adults on thirteen roles and characteristics of journalism practice, they discovered two dominant dimensions—that journalists should be “unbiased and accurate” as well as “good neighbors.”

Other long-held norms of traditional journalism, such as the watchdog role and rapid reporting, were not as strongly valued by a majority of survey respondents. Opinions changed, however, when stratifying the sample for age or ethnic background. More than three-fifths of respondents over age 55 described the watchdog role as very important, which again might reflect changes in generational attitudes towards journalism from Baby Boomer news users, to those in the Generation X and Millennial generations. Also, individuals who come from populations that are traditionally disenfranchised—African-Americans, Hispanics, adults with less income and education, and women—strongly

endorsed the idea that journalists should offer solutions to community problems, which is a significant characteristic of civic journalism. “The expectation that the press should be a good neighbor may be related to declining trust in the news media and declining attention to news,” they conclude. “If the public expects the press to be a good neighbor but the press fails in that role because it sees its professional responsibility as a watchdog, there is clearly a disconnect between the public’s expectations and the press’ expectations which civic journalism practices may not be able to fix” (p. 963).

If a disconnect between journalists and public expectations exists as Heider, et al. surmise, the potential for “incidents” between the press and its readership increases. But it is also important to note that, despite the desire for greater community and good neighborliness, the respondents still expressed that journalists should remain “truthful” and “unbiased,” indicating the continued presence of journalistic objectivity as an important moral value in the public mind. But as Chapters 2 and 3 uncovered, objectivity still exists, but mainly as a rhetorical abstraction with significant symbolic value to both journalists and readers. For this reason, even relatively recent research on the moral role of occupations, such as Gardner, et al. (2001), never question objectivity’s importance as one of the moral goals for journalism. Rather, they presume it as one of the main aspirations for journalists, who devise “second-nature” practices in order to “proceed with their primary mission of gathering and reporting the news objectively, fairly, and fully” (p. 185). Objectivity still exists as a part of public expectations, but only as an amorphous concept with little actual meaning inside the newsroom.

Another factor for changes in public expectations, the rapid growth of digital media, has undermined the traditional agenda setting and gatekeeping functions of the press.

Journalists view this development with cautious optimism.

The beauty of what the Internet has done is it has democratized our business. It's no longer three major networks and a few major newspapers that set the agenda or control access, or are gatekeepers, or all of that. Society doesn't work that way anymore. And so we have a plethora of voices, and out of that is the messiness of democracy, some of that is better than others. Some of the stuff is good, and some of it is not so good, and sorting through that can be confusing to consumers of news and information (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*).

There's a difference between writing about the news and reporting on the news, so anybody can watch President Obama's speech to the Urban League on TV and write about it anywhere, which in a way is a wonderful thing in that there are all kinds of positive outcomes because of what the Internet has done in terms of democratization of the news media (Radio Reporter).

Now that many individuals have the means to potentially set their own news agendas and filter their own information, public expectations for the press have changed in kind—moving away from the twentieth century model of detached institutionalism and more toward a focus on communities and their welfare. More recent research into the relationship between the press and the public has uncovered the waning utility of journalism's institutional role in democracy. Heikkilä, Kunelius, and Ahva (2010) argue that while maintaining institutional and market connections with the audience have long been methods used by news organizations, maintaining public connections are theoretically and empirically more useful. "For a long time," they write, "the value of journalism was mostly measured against its institutional dimension: Does it help citizens make informed choices in elections and do citizens trust public institutions? On the other hand, journalism's value was measured against its commercial success. Are people willing to pay for news?" They offer a third measure for assessing value: "How does journalism foster a public connection between the readership and the public world?" (p. 282). Their study connects well with the public expectations for journalists uncovered by the Heider

study, but it also opens the possibility that journalism's significance may be even less institutional and more relational than that proposed in Lowery's analysis. News audiences look to journalists less as symbolic producers and more as symbolic interpreters. Credibility derives less from a more scientific notion of journalism and more from the skillful application of judgment.

Journalists respond to such developments by changing how they manage the impressions they make to the public. However, in their efforts, journalists confront a public that exhibits misperceptions about journalistic rituals. At least one of the journalists interviewed expressed skepticism with some readers' understandings of what reporters can realistically accomplish.

The public demands a certain kind of objectivity and will never be satisfied with the kind of objectivity that they're demanding, and that thing that they're demanding is counter to the real objective reality, I would say. The demand for narrow objectivity pushes things towards the horse race, superficial sports-like coverage, because it's safe. But that doesn't represent what's going on. And then the public gets dissatisfied because it's superficial and horse-racey, but it's fascinating—this is the debate in journalism, I guess. And a fairly new one (Alex Seitz-Wald, Salon.com).

Here, the well-discussed debate from the 1920s between John Dewey and Walter Lippmann serves as an important component to this analysis. During the late progressive era, as journalism became a rationalized institution with established professional standards and practices, both thinkers tackled the issue of how communication facilitates political discourse and the role that journalism plays as a expediter. Essentially, should journalists be mere facilitators of public discourse, or should they serve as elite interpreters of information? The answer rests in the faith that each thinker had in the public. The typical dichotomy created by communications scholars poses the two men against one another: Dewey (1927/1954), the idealistic utilitarian who believed that communication is the social science that can consolidate the inchoate public into a Great

Community, versus Lippmann (1922/2010), the elitist thinker who believed that an inadequate public would be best served by scientific experts who use journalism as a means of educating the public. Their debate frames much of the current discussion of the changing relationship between the press and the public. More recent communication scholars, such as James Carey, have criticized Lippmann for relying too much on science and for believing that “intellectual-political activity had to be professionalized if truth was to be produced” (Carey, 1989, p. 78). Although he concedes Dewey’s “congenital optimism,” he argues for Dewey’s “pragmatic” conception of mass communication that embraces communications as a tool for democratic empowerment. Michael Schudson (2008) rejects Carey’s assessment of Lippmann, maintaining that Carey misunderstood Lippmann’s view of democratic theory. Schudson concedes that Lippmann relies on experts “with too much alacrity,” but that Lippmann also embraced the fact that the United States is a *representative* democracy. Lippmann’s faith in experts “places the general public a whole step removed from the everyday practice of democratic decision making... This is what constitutes representative democracy rather than direct democracy,” he writes. “Lippmann understood this reality while Carey does not” (p. 1033).

The Dewey/Lippmann debate, and Carey’s and Schudson’s later analyses, frames the growing conflict between evolving public expectations for news and the responsibility that modern journalists believe they have to the public, which the new digital ecology for American journalism has only exacerbated into a greater problematic. Despite these difficulties, fundamentally, journalists wish to maintain credibility with the public, if anything, because of their firm belief that their work serves the higher purpose of facilitating democratic discussion.

Journalism, without getting all highfalutin about it, really can be a calling. And maybe everybody feels that. Maybe if you worked in a pet store, you'd feel a calling to serve the pets. I have to get my watch repaired, or my watchband repaired, and maybe the jeweler feels a calling to that. I can't judge them, but I do judge them. I think there are few professions where you can feel called to do the right thing day after day the way that journalism allows you to (Mike Doyle, McClatchy Newspapers).

There's a fellow I used to work with here—a terrific reporter and editor. And when he retired a few years ago, there was a party for him. And he said, "People always ask me, 'Why did you become a journalist, or how did you become a journalist?'" And he said, "I always answered, 'I became a journalist because I wanted to change the world.'" And I think there is some of that in all journalists that doing what we do in in part, and this sounds more noble than I intended, public service. That if you're a journalist, you have some wider obligation than simply to do your eight hours and write your story, and that there's a real value in what you do for a wider community (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*).

I believe the only way we operate a government, and the only reason—I mean, my job is protected by the First Amendment.... And my obligation to that, and the reason it's in the First Amendment, is because a free press provides information that empowers people to govern themselves. We are a tool of self-government (Paul Singer, *USA Today*).

Even within newsrooms, journalists struggle with focusing on their stated purpose of supporting democratic discourse. After interviewing more than 100 journalists for their Good Work Project during the 1990s, Gardner, et al. (2001) discovered a gap between the expressed noble purpose of the journalists interviewed and the actual practices of journalists. "In a field where good work is frequently marginalized and trashy work is frequently rewarded, it is not easy to sustain a mission that reflects the domain's best traditions," they write. "This is why noble purposes do not always translate into noble traditions" (p. 170).

Also, Chapter 2 discussed that journalists may either not see, or may neglect to see, their readership as having a public mind. Instead, they see their readers as a collection of minds that may or may not congeal into political activity, who despite their flawed reasoning, have the duty of making sense of information. This perspective of the public follows Dewey's more populist role for communication in the public sphere. However, in a growing climate of bountiful, decentralized information, as the Heider and Heikkilä studies uncovered, it is journalists' *interpretations* of information that the public craves, which

follows a more Lippmannian model for journalism. Alluding to Chapter 3's exploration of journalistic distance from the public debate, it appears that news readers now want the press to close the distance they have traditionally kept, to become less objective and more interpretive. This wish may seem counterintuitive to the calls for a greater community focus implicated by both studies, which implies that journalists adopt a less elite role. But the message that those studies offer asks for journalists to pay *closer* attention to public debate, to focus on it with a sharper magnifying lens, picking apart symbolic content for the benefit of the community, and, perhaps, focus less on objective distance and more on fair, accurate reporting. This may likely be a significant factor for the trust gap between the press and the public.

American Political Culture's Desire for Non-Objective Journalism

Despite their claim that they have a responsibility to inform their readers for the sake of facilitating democratic discussion, journalists also acknowledge that their readers are quick to accuse both them and their news organizations of bias.

Almost every political story gets so much blowback that there will always be somebody who's unhappy with however we've handled it (Rebecca Corbett, *The New York Times*).

I have been thinking about Edward R. Murrow, and if he were to do what he did today—say he was Wolf Blitzer—undoubtedly, he would be condemned as having a liberal bias. Fox News and conservative outlets would be attacking him as having biases and so he might back off on that, or might hesitate to do that, because the accusation of bias is so much quicker, and it cuts deep, I think. People respond to that (Alex Seitz-Wald, Salon.com).

Since the Watergate era, the growth in ideological polarization of the parties, widening economic disparity, and the expansion of digital communication have not only created a political culture with more hardened philosophical sides, but also have provided the means for greater symbolic warfare between these sides in the public sphere.

On September 11, 2012, an armed militia group attacked the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, killing four Americans, including the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens. That weekend, U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice appeared on several news and political talk programs, claiming that the armed group had attacked the consulate because of a spontaneous response to a crude homemade film released on YouTube that many Muslims believed to be disparaging to Islam. Congressional Republicans attacked Rice, claiming that she was disseminating misinformation in order to protect Obama's reelection chances and to shield the White House from any culpability concerning the attack. After Obama's reelection, Rice appeared on Obama's shortlist as a potential replacement for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who planned to step down from her post early in 2013. Republican attacks remained focused on Rice, eventually forcing Rice to remove her name from consideration for Secretary of State. NBC's White House correspondent Chuck Todd believed that Rice became a victim of conservative advocacy media, "and it was all driven, in many cases, by conservative outlets who were making her the center of the Benghazi story" (Byers, 2012a). Republican politicians, he suggested, may have been spurred on by the attacks on Rice in conservative media. "It's too easy now in the way our media landscape is set up: You can become collateral damage in a hurry, in the way you can just get piled on—whether it's Twitter, whether it's advocacy journalism, talk radio," he told Dylan Byers of Politico.

Earlier in the fall, just after the Republican and Democratic National Conventions, Andrea Mitchell and NBC also found themselves in the crosshairs of a conservative media backlash. On September 18, 2012, The Drudge Report released a 1998 tape of Barack Obama, then an Illinois State Senator, in which Obama purportedly said, "I actually believe

in redistribution.” The tape appeared just a couple of weeks after secret video footage of Mitt Romney surfaced in which he attacked 47 percent of Americans for being “dependent on the government,” which became an albatross around the neck of the Romney campaign. As a possible attempt to deflect attention from the Romney video, conservatives pointed to the Obama tape as proof that Obama is a socialist engaging in “class warfare.”

During her MSNBC News program *Andrea Mitchell Reports*, Mitchell commented that NBC News and MSNBC had not been able to authenticate the video as it appeared on The Drudge Report, therefore, the network decided not to air it (Uwimana, 2012). In an email to Dylan Byers of Politico, a spokesperson for NBC News stated, “In any instance like this—regardless of the source or topic—NBC News Standards will issue guidance instructing broadcasts to not air content unless we can determine that it is authentic, unedited, and not taken out of context” (Byers, 2012b). After locating the full video, NBC aired the entire clip omitted from the original released video, which showed Obama providing a more nuanced statement about redistribution than the edited version implied (Uwimana):

I think the trick is figuring out how do we structure government systems that pool resources and hence facilitate some redistribution because I actually believe in redistribution, at least at a certain level to make sure that everybody’s got a shot. How do we pool resources at the same time as we decentralize delivery systems in ways that both foster competition, can work in the marketplace, and can foster innovation at the local level and can be tailored to particular communities.

Conservatives responded to NBC with vitriol, accusing the network of creating a double standard for vetting information during the 2012 presidential campaign—that they would air the Romney video, but not the Obama video. Rush Limbaugh viewed NBC’s refusal to air the edited tape as an indictment that “all media” were in the tank for Obama. On *Fox & Friends*, conservative columnist Michelle Malkin accused Mitchell of being a frequent winner “of the drool bucket award for Obama,” who all of a sudden “puts on this pose of neutrality and objectivity” (*Ibid*).

The extreme backlash that journalists experience in today's media ecology presents a challenge to maintaining a neutral impression. It is difficult to play a role on stage when so many stand ready to throw tomatoes at any perceived slip-up.

I think that there is a broader issue, and that is I think we are evolving away from an era, a period in journalism (a pretty long period), in which there is a notion of news organizations as referees, if you will... With all the changes that the Internet has brought, that's broken down, because there is now much more commentary available for people (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*).

John Judis of the *New Republic* historicized this phenomenon, tracing the progression of attacks from first the left, and then the right, on the "realm of disinterestedness."

"Disinterested" organizations, he explains, developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in response to the rise of giant corporations and the corresponding rise of the industrial working class. As business and labor clashed, groups committed to transcending party, class, interest, and ideology developed in order to reconcile the differences between the two groups. Hence, organizations such as the National Civic Federation formed in order to provide a neutral site that could adjudicate conflicts. Independent think tanks, such as the Brookings Institution, also formed as institutions "free from any political or pecuniary interest." It was during this same era that *The New York Times*, purchased by Adolph Ochs in 1896, adopted a "non-partisan" approach to newsgathering (Judis, 2011).

Chapter 1 outlined the scientism alive during this era—of the application of positivist logic, and its corresponding objective perspective, in order to solve societal problems. Judis sees this era as changing during the 1960s under the postmodern and post-positivist New Left movement that attacked disinterested organizations as "instruments of capitalist guile," "corporate liberalism," and "neo-imperialism." "Subjectivity was extolled and the attempt to be objective derided," writes Judis. But very

quickly, the New Left's critique faded away, replaced by an even more successful conservative movement that criticized think tanks and mainstream media as "arms of Democratic Party liberalism." In the early 1970s, the Heritage Foundation formed, which, along with other conservative organizations, took advantage of "the genuine commitment of the mainstream media to being above party and ideology," demanding equal time and space for their experts (Judis).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, political discussion began polarizing during the late 1960s and early 1970s, most likely spurred by the great symbolic capital offered by these new ideological organizations. The common tropes about the media generated by these organizations continue even today. Alex Seitz-Wald, notably a journalist for a left-leaning online news site, expresses discontent with the anti-corporate rhetoric of the modern left.

They assume that, because NBC is owned by GE (or was owned by GE) that, therefore, they're corrupt. And I think that's almost always bogus.... Especially now, and it's an argument to be made, that the economic decline of newspapers is beneficial to objectivity, because it's no longer a business that's profitable, that somebody would just buy purely for profit.

But, although journalists such as Seitz-Wald push against the more conspiratorial rhetoric of the modern left, the journalists interviewed do identify that current news readership has become more polarized, so therefore, journalists for more ideological news organizations can more easily win loyal viewers and readers by creating the appropriate impression that they share the same political perspectives.

Because of Fox and MSNBC, there are now networks where people can go to get news that fits their particular view of the world, and we know from everything that we can see and measure, that provocative journalism gets clicks on the Internet.... So there is more incentive now to have opinion, to state opinion, to take a side, to be in the fight, as opposed to trying to provide the unbiased analysis and criticism that we would traditionally think of in journalism (Dan Balz, *The Washington Post*).

David Niven (2002), who analyzed political coverage for potential bias in *Tilt: The Search for Media Bias*, concluded, “The results clearly indicate that when they produce comparable outcomes, Democratic and Republican presidents, governors, mayors, and members of Congress receive comparable coverage. There is simply no great disparity in their treatment and no evidence to substantiate charges of partisan bias” (p. 115).

Returning once more to Goffman’s dialectic between the performer/character and the audience, one can see how complicated the job of maintaining impressions has become for journalists. The new media ecology, coupled with modern political culture, has created an almost impossible job for mainstream reporters. When a journalist manages his or her impressions in order to maintain the character of an objective journalist, he or she faces rhetorical backlash from political organizations, and from changing public expectations that wish to see a more community-focused, interpretive form of news that is more fair than objective. Journalists express much frustration with their predicament.

Yeah, that’s a real problem, and you find it now when people look at the world views of those who watch CNN versus those who watch Fox. They have different perspectives on what’s true.... And that happens with fragmentation. And that’s a serious problem. People are attracted to what news source confirms their biases, instead of being challenged (Mike Doyle, McClatchy Newspapers).

I don’t read opinions. I don’t care. I don’t want your opinions—give me some facts. And that’s this whole notion of bias in journalism, you know? What is the notion of bias in journalism? Well, nobody seems to care anymore, because there actually are facts but no one’s really interested in them. People are interested in, “Can you make these facts into an argument?” (Paul Singer, *USA Today*).

News consumers have so many options and it’s hard to notice that the stories that get the most attention are the editorials, or the, you know, editorially-tinged writing, so I think there’s a lot of appeal for people to go in that direction (Stephanie Condon, CBS Interactive).

Maintaining credibility continues to be important to journalists and the news organizations they support. One final method is by providing more forums for the exchange of media criticism. Several mainstream newsrooms, such as *The New York Times* and NPR, have staffed “public editors” or ombudspersons to facilitate a two-way dialogue with their

readers and listeners. Glenn Feighery of the University of Utah argues for greater two-way, symmetrical media criticism between news organizations and their readership.

“Technology has been a leveler,” he explains. “By sharing information, checking facts, and criticizing the news media, the public is already engaged, whether journalists like it or not” (Feighery, 2011, p. 171). Tom Rosenstiel of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, and co-author of *The Elements of Journalism*, sees this type of transparent dialogue with readers an important facet of modern objective journalism. “Objectivity really relates more to the idea of replicability, and the way you achieve that is by making your work method transparent,” he said in an interview. Newsrooms began adopting concepts such as datelines and bylines during the 1920s as objectivity became a part of standardized journalism ethics. If transparency is part of the act, then perhaps journalists can more ably maintain an objective impression with their readership. As it now stands, however, objective journalism, at least the traditional form of objective journalism understood by journalists since its adoption, has become a difficult tool for maintaining credibility with news audiences.

Conclusions

The fundamental principle underpinning this project is a concern for the health of American journalism. As this research progresses, the significance of objectivity begins to fade, but beneath it lies the fact that the definition of professional journalism itself, and the role for journalism in the public sphere, is evolving. This chapter uncovered that public expectations for professional journalists are evolving in kind and that the objectivity standard has waned as a desire for the average news reader.

One really cannot point to a specific moment, such as Watergate, that indicates when public attitudes began to evolve away from expecting news to be traditionally objective. However, this chapter identified two historical moments—a divisive American civic culture that has developed since the middle of twentieth century, and more recent technological developments that decentralized communications and created a more horizontally and vertically fluid media ecology. Both forces have worked in tandem to dismantle traditional public expectations for objective journalism, and journalism has had trouble maintaining a public image that comports with these expectations.

Erving Goffman became very useful in understanding why journalists have focused on maintaining an objective image for their audiences, but current research has discovered forces that belie the dialectical relationship between performer/character and the audience. Goffman, writing during the 1950s, assumed that a person, or teams, can find the correct balance of language, posture, and staging that will appeal to an audience. But as this chapter uncovered, the homogenous American civic culture that existed during this time became unraveled during the late 1960s, and a more fractious audience developed. Appealing to public expectations is now a great challenge to journalists; rather, journalists can best hope to appeal to as many individuals as possible.

Conclusion for Part 1: What is the current state of objectivity in the modern American newsroom? An interview with Tom Rosenstiel of the Project for Excellence in Journalism¹²

Although objectivity remains an abstract ideal with potent symbolic power for both journalists and their audiences, based on the interviews conducted with journalists for this study the standard never fully materialized as a journalistic ritual. Notably, the version of objectivity adopted by newsrooms departs from the form of objective understanding proposed by Comtean positivism, which eschews subjective introspection. Nor does the objectivity standard follow the reductive naïve, or logical, positivism proposed by Austrian sociologists during the 1920s and 1930s. Journalists have coopted the theory but not the practice. Instead, they endeavor to produce “fair” journalism that comports with the vertically and horizontally fluid news ecology of the present. The journalists interviewed for this research describe the production of fair journalism as a reflexive process in which they use their inquisitive natures to keep their own biases in check. They understand this process not to be perfect, but they also believe that being “fair” accounts for subjective judgment in a way that objectivity does not. The more recent adoption of “fairness” as the voiced gold standard for journalism most likely developed as American political culture evolved from one that is ideologically and economically homogenous following World War Two, to one more divided economically and politically. Not only has digitization created more fluid roles for newsgathering, but it has also exacerbated divisions in American political culture through a plethora of new communicative platforms such as blogs, social media, independent news sites, and other forms of symbolic delivery.

¹² Rosenstiel, the founder and director of the PEJ, left the organization in January 2013 to become the new executive director of the American Press Institute.

While journalists have traditionally kept their distance from public debate, the pull of political criticism and the push of market demands have forced many reporters to take several steps closer to the arena. Some have even jumped into the fray, participating in debate through non-objective forms of news, through public intellectualism, or the more crude forms of public “intellectualism” introduced by those whose ideologies drive them into symbolic warfare. Public expectations for journalism have also evolved, with many citizens asking for journalists to maintain more of a community focus than a more combative “watchdog” role introduced during the years surrounding Watergate. A divide may exist at present between these evolving norms and the impressions that journalists endeavor to make for their audiences. In summary, objective journalism has not changed, but rather, the forces influencing newsroom ideologies have evolved, whether they are from American polity, political culture, or new communication technologies. “Fairness” is not simply a semantic change for working journalists, but rather, a method that they practice daily, further supported by a more dynamic news ecology that blurs the lines between fact- and opinion-based reporting.

In early August 2012, Tom Rosenstiel of the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), and co-author of the widely cited book *The Elements of Journalism*, responded to a few of the findings uncovered by the interviews conducted for the first part of this research. An abridged transcript of the interview, with additional reflections, follows:

Do you believe that objectivity, as a method of getting closer to the truth, still has a place in American journalism?

Yes, I do, and my definition of objectivity may be different than many working journalists. In the research that I have done and one of the books I did with Bill Kovach, *The Elements of Journalism*, we talk about how the original intention of objectivity was to bring the concept from social science into journalism, and really from science into journalism. In science, the concept of objectivity really relates to using a scientific

method that other people can see so that if they were to replicate the work they would come to similar conclusions. So objectivity really relates more to the idea of replicability and the way you achieve that is by making your work method transparent. The concept of objectivity really began to migrate into journalism in the 1920s, which people like to say, sort of cleverly, “Well, that’s just the time when the academy was beginning to have its doubts.” But it migrated to journalism precisely because people were beginning to have doubts about whether people could be objective. This is after Freud and modernism and art were becoming aware of the subconscious. Walter Lippmann had just done a fairly famous study of the coverage of the Russian revolution in the *New York Times* and said that the editors had been biased in ways that they were not aware of, an unconscious bias. So to combat this problem, the idea was [that] journalists should employ a method in their work that is objective precisely because they believed journalists cannot be objective... Somewhere between the birth of this idea, or the genesis of the idea coming to journalism in the hands of fairly intellectually minded journalists, and its practice in newsrooms where the ideas are squeezed out and just becomes a series of procedures and routines, the idea almost got flipped on its head and became neutrality. That journalists should be neutral, or their presentation should be neutral.

So, to clarify, you’re saying that they conflated the meaning of objectivity with neutrality when it comes to how they do their jobs?

Yeah, right. And really what the intention was: You should have a method of doing your work that other people can see, [and] they can see how you did it so that they can judge for themselves whether your work is reliable. So in these early days, the 1920s, concepts like datelines and bylines were part of the objectivity movement, so that people could at least know who wrote the story and [whether you were] in the city that you were writing about, or [whether you] were getting all this material second hand. These are what we would consider very, very crude notions of transparency, like almost minimal dimensions of it. But that notion of objectivity—you take the word objectivity and you replace it with the word transparency—it has a significant application in today’s journalism, in today’s news presentation. I also think, in the work that [Bill Kovach and I] did, that this applies even to magazine journalism and journalism that draws conclusions and comes to opinions, because the believability of your argument, the strength of your argument, your persuasiveness in your argument, will be stronger if you’ve done the work in a way that’s transparent where people can sort of see the evidence.... Not that you can’t come to conclusions, but that you should explain the basis of those conclusions and show it you your readers. That’s what a historian does, that’s what authors do in books, that’s what the best journalists [do].

Transparency has become a widely discussed “alternative” journalism ethic to objectivity, both within academic circles and in some sectors of mainstream media.

Newspapers have long relied on ombudsmen to keep track of possible journalistic

malfeasance, opening the inner workings of news production to news audiences. More recent challenges to journalistic integrity, and the further increase of the public's expressed distrust of mainstream news, have forced some major publications to take additional steps in order to improve transparency. For example, immediately following the Jayson Blair plagiarism and fabrication scandal at *The New York Times* in 2003, the paper hired a public editor who independently reflects on or sometimes investigates the ethical salience of articles, answers readers' questions, and provides background on how major stories develop. Rachel Smolken, in an article for the *American Journalism Review*, describes transparency (somewhat cheekily) as the "healing crystals" of journalism (Smolken, 2006). Perhaps, to a degree, greater transparency can heal the trust gap between news organizations and audiences, but transparency does not perform the same function as objectivity. As Chapter 1 explored in depth, objectivity derives from positivist science, that when applied to the newsroom became an ideal journalistic method that reporters could use to offer more truthful reporting. Transparency's function does not focus on improving the discovery of truth; rather, transparency endeavors to improve the impressions news organizations make so that they can better assuage larger hegemonic norms demanded of American journalists. Chapter 6 will explore the concept of transparency in greater detail.

However, as Chapter 2 discussed, the journalists interviewed for this study prefer almost universally to describe ideal journalism in terms of "fairness." Tom Rosenstiel also responded to this discovery.

Most of the journalists I spoke to prefer not to use the word "objectivity." They prefer the word "fairness" more often than not. Do you think that better describes [the goal for ethical journalism]?

No. Famously, *The Washington Post* even had in its style book a kind of precis that was written by Ben Bradley in which he makes this point. He says, "Objectivity is not a

useful word. We prefer the word fairness.” In *Elements*, Bill and I come to the conclusion—We say fairness is a goal but it’s not very useful in any other way. It doesn’t actually show you how to do your work. Transparency does, because you can say, “Alright, have I demonstrated who I talked to? Why they’re believable? Have I provided evidence?” Fairness is just another intention, [and] in the same way that balance as a procedure can be potentially flawed, because you could create false balance in a story by talking to both sides and giving them equal weight when they don’t deserve it.... Journalism is on its strongest footing when it’s talking about some of the physical externalities of the news: “There were eleven people in the room”; “these words were said”; “the table they sat around was a rectangle.” As you move toward the interior foundation of the news you’re on softer ground: “Why did he say those words? What was his intention? What was his calculation vis a vie the person he was talking to?” ... That work has a kind of integrity to it. You’ve actually told me these are the facts. Now we’re going to get into an interpretation of what’s behind them, and I’m being very scrupulous in sharing [this] with you. So another dimension of transparency, or a kind of modern objectivity if you will, is that you acknowledge to the reader or the audience what is truly known, and what can only be inferred, and what is not known, or what cannot be known. And when you do that, much like a scholar does, you are thinking, “Wow, I’m really with you. You’re leveling with me. I’m trusting you.” That work really is more objective in the full sense of the meaning of the word.

The journalists I’ve spoken with—I can’t really say that any of them had any notion of a universal definition for objectivity, especially when translated into the jobs that they do. Most of them said, “I’ll know it when I see it,” and they’ve developed over time reflexive habits. Do you think it would help American journalism if newsrooms and professional organizations were to be more specific in establishing real, practical methods for achieving objectivity?

Yeah, you know the problem is that newsrooms are shrinking, people are working faster, the goals of journalism haven’t really shifted, not in any conscious way. People still want to be accurate. They still want to be complete. They still want to be all the things that they tried to be seven years ago. But doing it, how you fulfill that is a lot harder, and the theories that people are operating by have not caught up. People are not so conscious of how their job shifts as the demands of the day are altered. Now that you are tweeting and posting on Facebook and posting things that have not been vetted by an editor. Most people are just doing it and are not really saying “Okay, what does this imply about my professional norms that I believed in five years ago? I still believe in these things, but it’s harder.” ... Today you’ve got to assume that it’s already out there. Anybody who’s interested in this might have been following tweets.... So now you have to essentially contextualize a rumor. That’s how you fulfill accuracy. You have to say, “He said it, but he offered no substantiation and here’s what substantiation would be required for us to know whether this was true. So at this point you have to, you know, just really discount this.” That’s a harder way of fulfilling the same goal of being an accurate journalist, but you know you live in the jungle so you have to play by the jungle rules.

Rosenstiel's argument for transparency as the true definition, and hence the true successor, to objectivity is not merely semantic. In fact, he offers the same utilitarian analysis as presented in Chapter 2, which stipulated that the reflexive habits of journalists derive from the ideological discipline instituted by the episteme of modern journalism that emphasizes "fair" journalism. Rosenstiel remarks on their reflexive impulses, but instead of attributing those habits to "fair" journalism, he instead describes those rituals as aspects of "transparent" journalism. In addition, his conceptualization of objectivity as transparency serves as an important extra step to this process. Returning again to the blending of theory and practice discussed in Chapter 2—of acting as a fair reporter by maintaining a neutral mind—Rosenstiel contends that journalists should take the process a step further and externalize those reflexive habits. That way, the audience can better assess whether journalists are indeed being fair in their reporting. So Rosenstiel is, in fact, using "transparency" as a tool, not only during the production of news, but also for managing the impressions that news product makes to its audiences. The warrant underlying his argument is that objectivity, defined in terms of transparency, provides practical steps both during and after the reporting process.

Because the practical methods that the reporters interviewed for this work use to describe "fair" reporting are similar to the reflexive habits that Rosenstiel uses to describe "transparency," an important normative question arises: Does it matter whether journalists say "fairness" or "transparency" when describing ethical reporting? If they both mean similar things, then what difference does employing one term over another make? It is important to note that Rosenstiel rejects fairness as only an "intention," as an idea that potentially promotes false balance. Objectivity, as he defines it, has pragmatic legitimacy.

In a post-structural sense, if journalists choose to adopt “fairness” as their ultimate goal, have defined fairness materially, offer reasons for why being a fair journalist offers more identity salience than being an objective journalist, and believe fairness to be a more relevant ethical goal in modern newsrooms, it may behoove scholars, critics, and lay observers of the press to honor that rhetorical adjustment. This does not mean that one should not be skeptical about the extent to which journalists have agency over the ideological framework of newsrooms. Hardly. But the reason for interviewing journalists, for allowing them to define the precepts of their work culture for themselves, lies in allowing the subjects agency over explaining their lives without an observer’s paradigmatic prejudice. Given this, one should not summarily dismiss their claims of striving for “fair” journalism through a cynical lens that focuses only on the sinister motivations of markets and politics.

Rosenstiel also responded to the distance that “objective” journalists keep from public debate, the potential conflict between their roles as citizens versus reporters, and whether this distance causes too much division between the goals of news organizations and public expectations.

What about journalists’ dual roles as journalists and citizens? Of course, many reporters refuse to register to vote, some don’t vote, or their newsrooms explicitly prohibit them from being actively involved in politics. Essentially, they have to cast aside their roles as citizens in order to remain independent of what they report on. Do you think that this creates too much social separation between journalists and the public?

Yeah. Another subject I’ve thought and written about. The best description I’ve heard of—well, let me just say, when you take on a profession (by profession I mean you are engaged in a professional craft and practice that has some—that is more than commerce), you have some obligation to some public interest [or] concern, because society requires that of you. We know that lawyers, for instance, are required by their professional oath to provide the strongest possible defense to even people that they might despise. We know that doctors have an oath to do no harm but also to treat the

most needy first. So, if there is a shooting on the street, and four wounded people come into the ER and the criminal, the killer, the person who did the shooting is wounded most and needs the most medical attention, the doctors are actually required ethically to provide medical treatment to that person, the evil doer, first, and the more lightly wounded policemen who were protecting the public would come second. We understand that as a society. We understand that no one thinks that the lawyer sitting next to the shooter from the Colorado theater is an evil person. We understand that this confessed shooter requires a defense, and society works better that way. So if journalists have a professional responsibility to the public interest, then they can't behave entirely the same way that an average citizen would in their professional conduct. So what does that mean? The best description I've heard of these professional responsibilities is that you are a committed observer. I like this phrase because it suggests your commitment to the public interest. You are of the community. You are of the society. You are committed to that. But your role in performing that is as an observer on behalf of the rest of us. That means that you shouldn't engage in certain activities that would detract or inhibit your ability to be my eyes and ears... So if we understand the goal or the role that the journalist is supposed to play, we can better kind of situate what citizen activities you might not want to engage in... It's a sacrifice. It's a sacrifice you make.

And that is something that came up considerably. Also, it seems that journalists are really struggling to try to negotiate between actually reporting objectively and the impression management that comes with being an objective reporter. When it comes to American journalism, are we really dealing as much with an ethical problem in the newsroom as we are an image problem outside of the newsroom?

Yeah, and the perception of conflict of interest is a meaningful issue. If people perceive you as being conflicted, or having a conflict, or being disqualified from some activity or another, that's not something you can dismiss by simply saying, "Well, you're wrong. I don't have any integral conflict." Because if the perception causes people to doubt the integrity of your work, that's a genuine problem. Which is also why it's important to have a nuanced understanding of what the problem is rather than create blanket rules that nobody can engage in any kind of citizen activity, because that creates another problem: The sense of the professional, isolated journalist who's disconnected from the community and can't have any understanding. It's valuable to the news organization and to its understanding of the community. If you have people who are members of churches and synagogues, and [who are] engaged in activities, but the guy who covers food banks probably shouldn't work at the food bank. It's not that complicated. You just have to think through the principle, which doesn't always happen.

Doesn't this perception issue, or the need to create this perception, of objectivity in the minds of readers actually cause that kind of conflict where maybe they're not able to concentrate on factuality as much as they should without looking like they're supporting one political side over another?

I think that's an issue of presentation not intellectual discipline. The best journalists have what I call "The Cold Eye" where they really can rise above their personal feelings and imagine how the audience or their community will view the material they are writing about or that they're covering. In that way sort of the "Golden Rule" or your ability to empathize with your audience or put yourself in their shoes is a very important intellectual skill for a journalist. How would somebody—"I'm trying not to think about this, but I don't like this guy? How would somebody who does like this guy perceive how I'm conveying this?" The other thing is, for many years critics of journalism said, "You know, you guys are too hung up on facts. You should give is the truth." Well, I believe that journalism can be more than accurate, that its goal is truth. But truth is a process that is not necessarily achieved in each story. When there is an accident on North and Main the first day we may just know, you know, that there were two cars that collided at North and Main. The third day you may discover that one of the drivers was drunk, and on the seventh day you discover that there's an incline on that intersection and the cars tend to accelerate without even realize it, and two weeks later you might even discover that there's been a lot of accidents at North and Main and they really need a street light there, or something like that. So the truth of what happened in that little accident, the first accident, gets illuminated more over time. The first story might just simply have an accurate accounting of facts. So I think truth is possible but it's a mistake for journalists to abandon the notion of "let's get the facts right." If you do that you very quickly get to Bill O'Reilly and Rush Limbaugh and Rachel Maddow who are unconcerned with facts because they're so busy trying to give you truth. It's valuable for our journalists to be fact based. So anyway, I think truth is built on a foundation of facts. So let's figure out what Romney said first, get that right, and then if he misstated the facts it's important to establish that. But don't do it in some snide way that makes people think, "Oh Jesus, you're just out to get him." So there's a way to do this but it's a matter partly of presentation.

Journalists manage the impressions they make to the public in order to mirror hegemonic norms for how professional journalism should function in American democracy. As Chapter 3 discussed, for journalists to maintain a professional identity, they often distance themselves from the public debate in two ways: professionally and ideologically. Being an objective journalist means that they maintain both forms of distance, maintaining their professional identities while adopting an objective, detached position outside of public debate. Rosensteil describes journalism as a "professional craft," whose professional "sacrifice" means not participating in certain political activities.

This has significant weight in the modern news ecology, in which American political culture is ideologically polarized and technologically diverse. Part 2 assesses how the concept of objectivity is discussed in the journalism classroom, how these approaches complicate the creation of professional identities, and how the educational ISA reproduces professional ideologies in the minds of aspiring journalists. Studying objectivity taps into deeper issues of how professional work identities, and the meaning of work, has been changing over the last decade, and how higher-education institutions have been transforming a century-old educational system in order to better prepare future journalists. Chapters 5 and 6 will respond to the question of how journalism educators define objectivity as a journalistic ethic, how they approach this concept with their students, how relevant they believe the concept to be in modern journalism instruction, and some of the alternative methods of understanding objectivity that they propose. Those two chapters will lead to the implications explored in depth within Chapter 7, which will present a case study of journalism education in transition at the University of Colorado, Boulder. This research concludes with an interview with Professor Michael Schudson of Columbia University, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the subject of objectivity, as well as copious publications thereafter. He offers his reflections on the topic, on some of the conclusions of this work, and on some of his own writings.

PART 2: OBJECTIVITY IN THE JOURNALISM EDUCATION CLASSROOM

Chapter 5: Objectivity in the Modern Journalism Classroom: How an Evolving News Ecology Complicates the Construction of Ethical Identities

“It should be apparent that the belief in objectivity in journalism, as in other professions, is not just a claim about what kind of knowledge is reliable. It is also a moral philosophy, a declaration of what kind of thinking one should engage in, in making moral decisions. It is, moreover, a political commitment, for it provides a guide to what groups one should acknowledge as relevant audiences for judging one's own thoughts and acts.”

- Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (1978, p. 8)

Columbia University's hiring of Steve Coll, a Pulitzer Prize-winning veteran of *The Washington Post* and *The New Yorker*, as the new dean of their School of Journalism incited a public spat between two newspaper opinion columnists. Michael Wolff of *USA Today* described Coll, “who has never tweeted in his life,” as out of pace with dramatic changes in the current news ecology. “The information marketplace is going through a historic transformation,” he writes, “involving form, distribution, business basis and cognitive effect, and yet Columbia has hired a practitioner to lead it with little or no career experience in any of these epochal changes” (Wolff, 2013). David Carr of *The New York Times* disagreed. “[T]he suggestion that Mr. Coll knows nothing about the current epoch is audaciously wrong,” he writes. During his tenure as managing editor of *The Washington Post*, the paper was “early and engaged in... creating journalism that would survive in a changed world,” leading the effort to develop a virtual afternoon edition of the *Post*, including video collected from reporters with portable cameras (Carr, 2013). However, despite his defense of Coll's digital media bona fides, Carr still attacked the rest of the journalism education system as a “confidence game” with many “escalators to nowhere” (Rosenstiel, 2013).

Wolff's and Carr's spat over Columbia's new dean covers the real argument ensuing in small corners of newsrooms and in many higher education institutions: How do journalism programs reinvent themselves to keep pace with the rapid evolution of modern newsgathering? Tom Rosenstiel, the new executive director of the American Enterprise Institute, argued that Wolff and Carr "exchanged misfire," calling for a "better conversation" about the future of journalism education. "[T]he trade school model of teaching journalism, which has never fit comfortably within research universities, falters when the jobs supporting it are shrinking." But not only that: Universities "are walking away at exactly the wrong moment.... Research universities now have a larger responsibility and role to play in helping rethink and revive civic discourse and ensuring journalism has a sustainable and ethical role in that" (Rosenstiel).

How the teaching of journalism ethics, particularly the teaching of concepts such as "objectivity," fits into the modern news ecology has grown into an important conversation, indeed. Part 1 of this research argued that the press's ability to maintain distance from the public sphere, a key aspect of news professionalization during the early twentieth century, has eroded in the face of a divisive American political culture, a more competitive media market, and a widening technological landscape. Hence, maintaining an ethical ideology of objective distance from public debate is now more difficult to uphold. Journalism education programs, which once facilitated the rationalization of professional news practices, now must evolve to maintain journalism's legitimacy in eyes of modern Americans.

The educational system is an established means for integrating a person's basic moral character with the professional skills necessary to produce ethical journalism. Gardner,

Csikszentmihalyi, and Damon describe education as key to the development of “good” work. Although it takes a lifetime to achieve fully, the “moral milieu” of graduate or professional school and of people’s first jobs serves as an important mechanism to instill this integration. “Relatedly,” they write, “the privilege of being part of a professional lineage is invaluable. Beliefs and practices associated with exemplary good workers... are often passed on not only to students and protégés but even farther down the lineage to ‘grandstudents’ and even ‘great-grandstudents’” (Gardner, et al., p. 247).

Another important wrinkle in this dilemma is that, of the journalists interviewed in Part 1, fewer than half hold a degree in journalism, communication, or similar fields of study on either the undergraduate or graduate level. Instead, many stated that they earned degrees in philosophy, international affairs, and sociology, among other disciplines. Although a few of these non-majors also interned in newsrooms as undergraduates, many entered the newsroom with little formal training but carrying significant hegemonic norms that informed how they should function as journalists. Furthermore, and perhaps of little surprise, of those who earned a degree in journalism, nearly all stated that they gained more of their professional knowledge from working in the newsroom than from studying in the classroom. These revelations suggest that the role of formal education as an exclusionary force between practitioners and non-practitioners may not be as significant in journalism as in other areas of discipline.

This chapter will review how educators describe how they conceptualize a key component of professionalized journalism—objectivity—and how they approach the concept pedagogically with their students. In doing so, the analysis will reflect on some of the themes presented in Part 1: First, on objectivity’s relevance as a modern news

principle; second, on the difficulty of maintaining an objective image in the modern news ecology; and third, the applicability and usefulness of advocacy journalism in modern journalism instruction.

Is 'Objectivity' Still a Relevant News Value?

The journalists interviewed in Part 1 could not provide a universal definition for objectivity. Therefore, instead of answering how they each would define the term, the educators interviewed for Part 2 of this study were asked to assess objectivity's relevance to modern American journalism. This approach encouraged the educators to couch the concept within a broader social context than they would by providing a more antiseptic definition, and in doing so, could account for the modern news environment in their responses. Their conflicting answers only further confirmed that objectivity remains an abstraction with multiple subjective interpretations and multiple perspectives on its continued role in modern news ethics.

It certainly has to be discussed, but I'm not exactly sure how important it is any longer. In some ways, in some discussions, it sort of seems like it's become a straw man where people like to set it up and use it as certain moment that somehow mysteriously happened (and I'm not exactly sure if and when that really happened). But clearly I think it has relevance, if not for practicing journalists, I think it has relevance for the people who have come to expect that that's what journalism is, be it the readers, or consumers, citizens, or however you want to phrase that (David Allen, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee).

Conceptually, if not by strict definition, objectivity is more important now than perhaps ever before. Objectivity is a major element in assuring that information provided by journalists is reliable. Although there has been a mega explosion of information, far too much of it is misinformation that should not be relied on to make any important decisions. Journalism by definition necessarily produces information that can be relied on when making decisions about important issues... Objectivity or at least the appearance of objectivity is one means of assuring that public that the provider of the information has no agenda... (John Watson, American University)

Yes I do, but I think you have to be very realistic about what that—like how you define objectivity, and I'm not sure that anyone can ever be totally objective. I think that's a really important goal to strive for.... Because I really do think if we lose the notion of objectivity now in this whole fourth estate, fifth estate, news media, new journalism world that that would be very disastrous (Jan Leach, Kent State University)

Nearly all of the educators interviewed have experience working within newsrooms, so unsurprisingly, many tap into their own past challenges as either case studies or discussion points during their classroom instruction. This impacts their instruction in two primary ways. First, at least a few of the educators mentioned feeling cynical about the concept of objectivity while working as journalists—a skepticism that only became further pronounced when attaining the critical distance offered by working within an academic environment. Hence, when objectivity arises as a topic in their classrooms, they introduce it within a critical framework that interrogates the concept’s practical merit. Tim Vos of the University of Missouri, in a study of early journalism texts from the 1890s to the 1940s, discovered that the texts made objectivity “a natural feature of the modern age while portraying past, partisan practices as pre-modern.” In effect, the texts normalized objectivity as the foil to the great specter of partisan journalism. “[T]he analysis presented here is sufficient to remind journalism educators that they not only describe contemporaneous journalism practices, they are active agents in prescribing various practices,” he explains (Vos, 2012, p. 446). Although a partisan press no longer has a foothold in the American public sphere, the modern news ecology permits more opportunities for journalists to close the distance, if not jump into the arena of public debate. Journalism instruction appears to reflect this reality, moving away from the normalized role for objectivity that Vos describes. When asked whether they consider other values more relevant than objectivity when teaching ethics, at least two of the educators, including Vos, described objectivity as an umbrella term for other elements they believe comprise ethical journalism.

These words [fairness, balance, neutrality, etc.] are no more than synonyms for the concepts embodied in objective journalism. Everybody knows nowadays that humans are incapable of true objectivity. These

other named values are ancillary or are just words we substitute for the now-disavowed concept of objectivity (John Watson, American University)

I think we have used the word “objectivity” as a catch-all term for a lot of more specific concepts in that it’s probably wise for us to disaggregate what we mean by objectivity and be more specific about it. Because some of the things that we call objectivity, or that fall within the umbrella of objectivity, are useful and important. Some of them less so (Tim Vos, University of Missouri).

So the educators interviewed for this study, unlike the journalists interviewed in Part 1, do not express a consistent value, such as objectivity or fairness, to describe the ethic of maintaining distance from the public sphere. One factor likely contributing to this phenomenon is that educators have greater ideological autonomy within the learning environment than journalists have within the newsroom. Accreditation systems, such as the Accrediting Council on American Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC)¹³ monitor the quality of journalism instruction at institutions across the United States, but when it comes to the classroom each institution (and each faculty member) decides on its (or his or her) own pedagogical approach to ethics instruction: on which text or texts to use, on what projects to assign, and on what grading mechanisms to employ in order to evaluate student performance. On the other hand, many working journalists face an environment with a separate and more precise disciplinary system in which both internal and external codes of ethics reflect larger hegemonic norms for how journalists should function within a democracy.

Another issue that may also contribute to the educator’s inconsistent language is that textbooks and published scholarship do not define objectivity consistently and offer sometimes divergent philosophical approaches to the concept. For example, Thakurta

¹³ The ACEJMC’s most recent standards state that an accredited journalism program “provides leadership in the development of high standards of professional practice through such activities as offering continuing education, promoting professional ethics, evaluating professional performance, and addressing communication issues of public consequence and concern” (ACEJMC, 2012).

(2009) suggests that pure objectivity is impossible, but “we can at least ‘simulate’ objectivity. This objectivity might be a relative version of objectivity—or an ‘accepted level’ of objectivity, given that pure objectivity is theoretically unattainable” (p. 46). On the other hand, Trapkus (2002) argues, “To speak of degrees of objectivity sounds to me like degrees of truth. Either something is or isn’t objective. I say the press isn’t—there’s just no such thing, or at least *objectivity* badly needs redefining” (p. 212). Additionally, the case studies of experiences of young professionals presented in Peck & Reel (2013) do not present objectivity as an expressed ethical dilemma. Finally, Berry (2008) describes objectivity as signifying both a “state of being” and a “state of achievement.” A state of being implies that being objective represents a methodological approach, while a state of achievement implies that one strives to be objective, and in doing so must also acquire a state of being objective, which makes objectivity both a unity of means and ends. “[O]bjectivity is an ideal or value that is seen to be essential for an ethical approach to news; to be objective is to attain good ethical standards, the basis of where journalists’ social responsibilities lie,” he explains (pp. 122, 125).

But many of the above approaches to objectivity discuss the term philosophically but almost never practically. This leads to the second way that the professional work histories of journalism educators impact how they approach the issue of objectivity with their students. When they worked as journalists, the educators never experienced objectivity as any real reified practice. Therefore, like the journalists in Part 1, they neither offer a universal definition for the theory of objectivity nor describe a universal method for accomplishing it.

[I]n some respects, objectivity sort of functions on a rhetorical level as a journalistic routine, so it’s a part of how we conceptualize the cultural capital of journalism, so it’s sort of embedded into how journalists

think about their jobs. But of course, when journalists do their jobs they do these jobs within the context of interaction with sources. And the sources are always... mindful of ways to manipulate those routines (Tim Vos, University of Missouri).

So we obviously talk about objectivity in that class, and we also talk about ethics... So the way that we approach it is along the lines of Kovach and Rosenstiel a little bit, where we're trying to focus on objectivity as not a quality or characteristic of a person but as a description of the method that one would use. The idea that the method is objective because people can't be. And so we try to talk about the tools and what the reporting process should look like without the objective method... to get at the kinds of goals that people, when they have objectivity in their mind, are thinking of (Journalism Professor).

I try to emphasize to the students that ethical theory, political theory—you ought to incorporate it, and that's how you justify the decisions that you make. And so any answer to any practical, ethical problem that you have ought to be in some ways tied to some larger theoretical concept about thinking about what the purpose of journalism or advertising or public relations might be, is within society. So I try to tie them all together (David Allen, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee).

As many of the educators stressed in their interviews, one cannot truly separate the teaching of theory from the teaching of practice; therefore, mixing theory and practice is a fundamental pedagogical tool for journalism instruction. The decisions that a journalist makes—the reflexive processes that journalists described in Chapter 2—are couched in some way in the theory of news ethics, mixed with the episteme of modern newsroom ideology. However, the journalists in Part 1 stressed that the best method of developing those reflexive processes, and hence a stronger ethical identity, is through the practical experience of working in newsrooms. So in a sense, developing ethical identities is very much a dialectical process between evolving journalism ethics and newsroom ideologies, and the practices that reify them into news product. Teaching reflexive processes, then, might better define how educators approach this topic with their students.

Professors' own ambivalence toward the objectivity standard, and the nebulous and sometimes conflicting definitions of the concept in texts and in academic literature, suggest that the professional barriers erected during the early twentieth century between journalism practitioners and non-practitioners are breaking down. Chapter 1 discussed at length that journalists adopted the objectivity standard in the early twentieth century as a

means of employing scientific logic to their profession for both internal credibility between newsrooms and external credibility with the American public. So what happens to the teaching of this concept when the walls between expertise and non-expertise in journalism appear to crumble? Should the Academy rely upon journalists' use of "fairness" as the gold standard for ethical journalism? Or should the Academy step in to fortify professional barriers, creating a precise methodology that instructs journalism students on how to be objective? Kelly McBride, who specializes in journalism ethics for the Poynter Institute, expressed skepticism about the Academy's ability to influence industry norms.

If there were a precise definition of objectivity in the Academy, that would have absolutely no connection to the way that the profession interprets objectivity. And the fact that you have half the people in the profession coming from outside the Academy means that you wouldn't over a time period make much headway in changing how the profession understands objectivity.

As the walls separating professionals from non-professionals dismantle, the maintenance of distance from the public sphere long attributed to professional journalism norms has less ideological support. Hence, objectivity becomes less important in journalism instruction and in the creation of ethical identities both inside and outside of the classroom.

Keeping Up Appearances: Teaching Students How to Stay Out of Public Debate

As Chapter 3 explored, the modern news ecology makes it difficult for journalists to negotiate between their dual roles as "journalist" and "citizen." The educators interviewed for this research noted that this process becomes a great concern for their students. As news ideologies become interpolated, students struggle to eschew some of their duties as citizens in order to attain an ethical identity as journalists.

Young people do have to struggle with it. They've always had to struggle with it, but it's probably more complex. For instance, I often meet or have students who get passionate about an issue... And I say to them, "Listen, make a choice. If you're a journalist, you have no business organizing to advance a political position. It undermines any claim you have to being an independent and trustworthy voice" (Robert Jensen, University of Texas).

They think, you know, "This is America, by God. If we want to run for office, we should be able to run for office. If we want to go to a political convention we should be able to." I say, "Yeah, but you have to give up certain things if you're attempting to present an unbiased point of view...." (Fred Brown, University of Denver/Society of Professional Journalists).

Yeah, we do get students who are really chagrined when they discover that, in whatever semester they're working in one of the newsrooms, that they can't go to the Young Republicans meeting, or the Sierra Club, or whatever (Journalism Professor).

When internalizing newsroom values, students migrate between the public sphere of subjective debate to the more controlled sphere of professional journalism in which they must keep their distances. Nearly all Americans grow up with the value that one possesses the ability to freely express and participate in democracy. Mill's conception of free expression posited that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant." The silencing of an opinion, then, is a "peculiar evil" that robs the human race (Mill, 1860/1909). Well before Mill, the American Declaration of Independence considered individual rights "self-evident" and a function of the "Laws of Nature." The privileging of subjective reason over objective reason has, therefore, grown into a fundamental aspect of the American collective consciousness. Horkheimer (1947/1974), for one, considered this ideology a product of a false consciousness. For example, he argues that John Locke "did not care to differentiate too clearly between sensual and rational, atomistic and structural experience, nor did he indicate whether the state of nature from which he derived the natural law was inferred by logical processes or intuitively perceived" (p. 27). Subjective reason, therefore, grows irrational and develops its own mythology (p. 30). The professionalization of the press, and the advent of the objectivity standard, sought to divide objective observation from this irrational component, while relying on the scientific logic of the early twentieth century.

Because of this, many American students may find transitioning from the mythology of their childhood education, to a world in which they must suppress their subjective desire to speak freely, difficult. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 3, many newsrooms require their reporters to wear multiple hats, moving from hard news, to news analysis, to opinion. Blogging and updating Twitter feeds makes discovering where to draw ethical boundaries very difficult.

I don't actually coach them on that. I just try to give them some examples and then some thinking about what they are willing to do, where might you be crossing the line on that. Some news organizations, as I'm sure you're aware, requires people to do that now. So it used to be that you could never write an opinion or give an opinion if you were a reporter... So I think you have to decide for yourself where your line is drawn... And I try to talk to them about the idea of you defining for yourself where your ethics lie and the you have to live with that definition (Jan Leach, Kent State University)

Many of the educators, themselves at one point practicing journalists, have experienced this same transition. When asked how they maintain their own professional and ideological distances, many explained that their political involvement stopped inside the voting booth.

As journalists we're engaged in the health of democracy, the health of our communities, the health of the public sphere, and granted you do that by doing good journalism, but ultimately at the end of the day you care about these institutions and you want them to function. The institutions—not necessarily who's at the helm of that institution at any particular moment, so it always seems sort of natural for me to cast the vote (Tim Vos, University of Missouri).

Well I'm certainly not going to draw it on voting. I happen to think that's ridiculous. I mean, journalism plays an important role in democracy, and it's ridiculous to think that the very people that are gathering that sort of information that they've used from other people and have a stake in their communities, and actually are knowledgeable about issues, and that those are the people who are not voting is ridiculous to me (Journalism Professor).

I think they should vote. I think that's where you draw the line. I don't think you should have bumper stickers, signs in your yard, campaign donations, active involvement in a campaign, or anything like that. I'm pretty old school on that one (Jan Leach, Kent State University)

The voting booth seems like a logical point at which to draw ethical lines. After all, the secret ballot permits anonymous participation in a democracy. When educators address the issue of political participation with their students, case studies once again become an

important pedagogical tool. This grants students the opportunity to think about this transition more critically, and perhaps, to personalize the ideological messages therein.

David Allen of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, explains one approach he uses.

I do a lot of this stuff through case studies.... There's a couple of them that we usually spend some time talking about. A few years ago, there were a couple of political reporters at the St. Paul newspaper, for example, who were suspended without pay for going to a Bruce Springsteen concern for John Kerry, even though they didn't write any stories about it. They just went during their free time. So is that a form of political involvement? Is it wrong to get involved in those sorts of things? I usually approach this through those case studies where we try to get at the question of where do we draw the line between what's too much and what's acceptable.

One can see how the critical discussion raised by a case study such as this helps students develop reflexive instincts. The questions these case studies raise are similar to those that journalists ask themselves each day on the job. But does maintaining the appearance of detachment, which the above example interrogates, mean that the teaching of objective journalism is, in part, more a lesson in impression management than in actually producing objective journalism? Here, educators keep in mind one important issue: Audiences and sources will balk if they suspect bias in purported "objective" reporting, so journalists must maintain the image of possessing no conflicts of interest. They impart this reality to their students thusly:

I mean, is it weird if I say that that kind of makes me sad? I talk about this with my students in ethics and occasionally the undergrads, too, in terms of conflicts of interest.... And the reason to do that is what? It's to maintain your independence. You don't want to look like you're just in the hand of whomever.... And so then we have to have that discussion about, well, a lot of it is the appearance, right?... And then you think how sad that is. Well, I do, anyway. I think that's sad that that's what we've come to. And so, the reason why I say it's sad is that I don't want them to go around thinking that ethics is really just all about what people think of you, right? Ethics is about your duties to people (Journalism Professor).

What I try to get across to students is that I try to get them to think about what it is that they want to do, and we try to talk about, well, what does an ethical journalist do? And what is their job? I guess in some ways I do try to push my students to worry less about what other people think about what they do and more about whether they are living up to their internal standards about what they think good journalism means (David Allen, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee).

Teaching objectivity only as an end in and of itself can lead to issues of false balance and “the view to nowhere” discussed in Chapter 4. As the two educators express above, a student should not concentrate only on the image of ethical distance, but primarily, on being an ethical journalist. However, maintaining this image is, in part, informed by evolving public expectations for journalists.

I'm thinking of that Arthur Brisbane piece and the response, and how surprised he was. So I think the worst thing is for journalists to be out of touch with what it is that the readers and the public need and expect from them.... I think the public thought for a long time that journalists were supposed to be objective and they were hiding when they weren't. But now, I think if you've got all these other choices and voices and things like that in this more expansive ecology, then maybe that undercuts some of the ire about that (Journalism Professor).

Teaching the means of objectivity, then, appears to be more important than teaching objectivity as an end. As Berry (2008) explicates, journalistic objectivity is both a “state of being” as well as a “state of achievement.” Additionally, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) write, “Most people think of objectivity in journalism as an aim, not as a method.... Yet the notion that the aim of objectivity is insufficient without a unity of method to put it into practice is as valid today as ever” (p. 83). But is it really possible to develop a universal, objective process to accomplish this? Nearly all of the educators were asked to reflect on whether establishing a precise method for producing objective journalism would be beneficial to journalism ethics education. At least a few expressed skepticism about the idea.

To the extent that journalism education needs to be connected to the practice of journalism, I'm just not sure how you do that. Sure, that would be great, [but] I don't think it's doable (Kelly McBride, Poynter Institute).

In the end, I don't think reporting can be reduced to a method in the same way that science can be reduced to a method, because of the nature of what journalism is. Journalism is not dealing with physical realities in the way that the natural sciences deal with the physical realities. Journalism is dealing with human constructions of reality (Robert Jensen, University of Texas).

I'm not sure you really can because you have to decide which fact is more relevant to the story, and it's hard to put that in a kind a framework or a template (Fred Brown, University of Denver/Society of Professional Journalists).

So some modern educators move away from approaching ethics through the scientific framework that journalism acquired as it professionalized during the early twentieth century. At the very least, the answers above indicate that these particular educators do not see communicating an objective method to their students as either helpful or practicable. Much like the journalists interviewed in Part 1, educators prefer to employ discussions in which students can exercise their reflexive habits in order to become better decision makers on the job. These reflexive habits encourage subjective judgment, which they take with them when they enter their first jobs.

Crafting the ethical identities needed to perform good journalism in the newsroom has great importance to both students and practitioners, and matching the ethics taught in the classroom with the ethics practiced in the newsroom is a perpetual challenge for educators. Students are particularly concerned with the health of journalism ethics, even more so than they are with attaining academic ethics, such as cheating or plagiarism. (For an interesting study of this phenomenon, see Conway & Groshek, 2009). In fact, their view of journalism ethics tends to be much more acute than practicing journalists. Hanson (2002) discovered a significant difference between how students perceive the seriousness of news ethics versus news practitioners. He surveyed 60 news directors, 166 students, and 44 journalism students, asking them to rate the degree to which they encounter (or believe they will encounter) specific ethical dilemmas, such as conflicts of interest, lack of accuracy, privacy, and other such issues, in the newsroom. Of the twelve potential ethical dilemmas surveyed, Hanson determined that journalism students believed that they would encounter nine of them in significantly greater levels than news directors actually

experience while working in the “real world.” Most poignantly, conflicts of interest appeared as one of the two areas of greatest difference between the two samples (Hanson, 2002, p. 242). Additionally, Hanson asked the respondents whether they believed ethics could be best learned in the classroom, during internships, or on the job. Once more he discovered significant differences between directors and students, but each of the groups pointed away from their current environments: More news directors believed that ethics could best be learned in the classroom, while more news students believed that ethics could be best learned during internships or on the job (p. 243).¹⁴ One possible reason for the difference in perceptions is that students learn in a more sterile environment where educators emphasize specific ethical principles for the sake of discussion. Students’ impressions of whether they will encounter particular ethical dilemmas in a professional environment, therefore, become more acute. These impressions likely change, however, when students enter the newsroom and encounter a far more complicated environment in which real experience better frames the ethical ideologies internalized.

Alternate Paradigms to Objectivity: Teaching Public and Advocacy Journalism

The Future of News (FON) movement discussed in Chapter 4, led by public journalism advocates such as Professor Jay Rosen of New York University, has opened a critical dialogue about professional journalism ideology, particularly the value of maintaining an objective distance from public debate. “Journalists and editors involved in the alternative press are also critical of the mainstream’s claims to objectivity,” writes

¹⁴ An important qualification should be made regarding Hanson’s study: Hanson did not control (or did not indicate that he controlled) his sample of news directors for those who actually earned a journalism degree. This is an important distinction to make. Many of the news directors surveyed may not have actually experienced how universities teach journalism ethics, and therefore, may not have had enough personal data on which to base an informed opinion.

Susan Forde in *Challenging the News*, “and the bulk of the alternative press has rejected the ‘neutrality’ line and opted for open, advocacy journalism” (Forde, 2011, p. 114). Public, or civic, journalism arose during the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to the perception that cracks had formed in the American public sphere, which led media scholars and journalists to ask “themselves whether serious journalism could survive without a stronger public climate around it” (Rosen, 1999, p. 21). Public journalism asks, “What does it take to make democracy work and what should be asked of the press?” (p. 23). Objectivity becomes a roadblock to journalists performing their duties for the sake of the public’s interest. Rosen, who considers objectivity a myth, writes, “If democracy was in trouble, journalism was in trouble; and public journalism was a way of saying to the press: get involved in *that*. Don’t use objectivity as an excuse to ignore the problem” (p. 215).

Alternative forms of journalism have entered the curriculum of some journalism education programs. The trio of economic, political, and technological effects on journalism discussed in this research has made the teaching of non-objective forms of news an almost natural progression in education. The educators responded to whether public or advocacy journalism should become a permanent component of standard journalism education.

I mean, I think in some respects it is. Starting to be. I mean, it’s part of the news system or news ecology or news ecosystem as it currently exists, and hence, I think journalism education should acknowledge that (Tim Vos, University of Missouri).

[T]he audience for documentary film has grown quite a lot, thanks to Michael Moore and a lot of other people, and so there seems to be an acceptance, if not an appetite, for certain kinds of more advocacy-oriented journalism among the public. And so, I think a lot of it is about what the audience expectation is going in.... If I opened up the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and saw something that looked like propaganda I would be mad, right? Because that is not what I expect from them.... Whether or not that means that educators should be focused on that sort of advocacy, I don’t know (Journalism Professor).

Although both Tim Vos and the journalism professor quoted above acknowledge the growth of alternative forms of journalism in the modern news ecology, they also see potential problems arising from teaching it as a practice.

I think the challenge, then, for educators becomes how do we distinguish between good advocacy journalism and bad advocacy journalism? What are the ethical standards, then, by which we judge that kind of journalism? So that ultimately could come back to issues of fairness. Yes, you're advocating a position, but is there an ethical compulsion to still be fair in hearing out the other side and giving the other side due consideration in the formulation of whatever position you're advocating? (Tim Vos, University of Missouri).

I do think that in general the best advocacy is based in fact and is either "shouldn't be the way that it is," or "here's a solution to a problem that I want to promote." So teaching that kind of evidence-information gathering, fact-gathering method for what we already do, and then I don't know if we really have to teach people how to put that in the service of—I think it would be pretty obvious how to do that, once you knew how to do that. So I don't know (Journalism Professor).

The educators do not offer much consistency, or a definitive answer, about whether teaching public journalism would enhance journalism education. The answers from nearly all of the interview subjects ranged from a definitive no, to a definitive yes, but always expressing ambivalence about incorporating such coursework into the standard curriculum. At least one interview subject went as far as to label advocacy journalism "unethical":

Journalism educators need to re-emphasize the importance of objectivity in opinion formation. Opinion journalists should be opinion leaders, but they should lead only where a rational assessment of facts directs them. Their course should not be predetermined. Unethical advocacy journalism is a disservice to the public. It teaches the public to deceive themselves (John Watson, American University).

One important feature of these attitudes is the consistent mentioning of "fairness." In order to produce ethical opinion, public, or advocacy journalism, both fairness and factuality become very important values to educators. Here we return to the blending of theory and practice first mentioned in Chapter 2: The educators believe that teaching students ethical journalism within the alternative paradigm involves acting as a *fair* reporter by offering an opinion or analysis couched in *factuality*. The journalists interviewed in Part 1 alluded to this combination when discussing public journalism, which gives it limited external validity

outside of the newsroom. A critical discussion of alternative forms of journalism can acquire many forms in the classroom, but if educators intend to teach public journalism as a skillset, they see fairness and factuality as two critical values for students to internalize and practice.

Here one can identify a paradigm shift. Ethicist Deni Elliott describes an “old” traditional paradigm in which objective journalists become exploited by public relations, where students learn erroneously that they must get “both sides of a story,” and the belief that autonomous journalists can discover “external news.” “[D]iscoverable news is a myth,” she writes. “News is what happens when journalists choose to pay attention to some event or issue, always at the expense of others” (Elliott, 2009, pp. 35-36). Elliott believes that the traditional paradigm reflects marketing strategies more than ethical principles. However, the new “alternative” paradigm, which depends on “interactivity, multiple source perspectives, and targeted audiences” also entails issues for journalism ethics. “Interactivity and multiple perspectives have resulted in Wikiality,” she writes. “[T]he mistaken belief that open participation in providing and editing information results in truth” (p. 36).

The three educators who described advocacy in journalism education above reflect both paradigms. Tim Vos and the journalism professor ascribe more to the alternative paradigm, while John Watson supports a more traditional model. An interesting schism seems to have developed among academics when discussing journalism education reform. On the one hand, some academics believe in embracing the new media ecology, abandoning the professional value of objectivity and supporting an alternative paradigm that makes more room for the teaching of an alternative form of news that better fits the more

subjective American public sphere. On the other hand, other academics believe in doubling down on objective journalism, protecting the traditional professional paradigm from the forces of the new media ecology.

Perhaps educators can find a place in the middle. Chris Atton of Edinburgh Napier University believes that professional, mainstream journalists can actually learn much from alternative news practices. “It would be quite unrealistic to expect any commercial media organization to adopt Indymedia’s approach *in toto*,” he writes, “yet there might be opportunities to be seized from within the network’s practices, not least the opportunity for self-reflexivity” (Atton, 2011, p. 61). He cautions against becoming “over-optimistic” about the benefits to mainstream news production, but “the value they add is that of critical communication between readers, and between readers and journalists” (p. 69). Critical communication has the potential of developing bilateral education between journalists and their audiences. Journalists communicate information to their audiences, but audiences can in turn provide valuable feedback that enable newsrooms to better reflect current public expectations. As Deni Elliott writes, “Good journalistic practice, whatever the paradigm of the moment, is that which upholds the essential shared values of the profession” (Elliott, 2009, p. 38).

The educators interviewed for this work expressed more ambivalence about the applicability of teaching alternative news forms than the journalists interviewed for Part 1. Yet their uncertainty about making such coursework a standard part of journalism education stems not as much from a lack of support, but rather, from the difficulty of crafting appropriate pedagogical measures to make it work for university programs. Tanni Haas (2000) offered a few ways that educators could develop teaching tools for students.

Notably, he offered his suggestions before the dramatic growth and the imposition of social media on standard newsgathering practices that occurred during the 2000s, but today, his suggestions seem prescient. His proposed methods surround three key areas of newsgathering: the gathering of information on audience concerns; moving away from the standard inverted pyramid format in story construction; and the creation of “citizen panels” to improve public accountability. Students become not only reporters but also social scientists, surveying local communities for the most prevalent concerns and later requesting feedback of their work.

All of these methods endeavor to teach aspiring public journalists to more actively engage their audiences in order to “help increase civic commitment to, and public participation in, democratic processes” (p. 38). Today, such feedback occurs almost instantaneously through social media sites and through the comments sections of many online publications, albeit one would question the effectualness of this feedback on improving civic activity. However, his second suggestion—to move away from the standard inverted pyramid form—indicates that not only does the teaching of public journalism encourage students to close the distance emphasized by traditional professional training, but it also presses students to rethink the professional norms that guide ethical journalism practices. This change introduces a new set of values in journalism curriculum. Additionally, it raises the question of how one defines what it means to be an ethical journalist in today’s modern news ecology, and how journalism education programs should adjust their pedagogical tools in order to permit students multiple paths toward developing ethical identities. In other words, should journalism education programs rethink professional skills long taught as aspects of “traditional” journalism?

Haas' article offers one more important observation worthy of mentioning. The Heider, et al. (2005) study discussed in Chapter 4 indicated that public expectations of the press, especially among younger generations, have been evolving toward desiring a greater community focus. Perhaps a move toward incorporating public journalism in standard curriculum might better reflect evolving public expectations and enhance the public's trust in news organizations.

Objectivity Unraveling: Is a Journalism Degree Necessary?

As mentioned earlier, journalism education programs reinforce professional news ideologies and practices. Ratinaud and Lac (2011) define professionalization as a "process of structuring one or several representations of one or more salient objects of a given professional field" (p. 58). Essentially, a subject creates an "active process of specification" which changes the professional representations of the objects associated with the profession. Hence, the objects acquire a more specialized representation of information, beliefs, and attitudes that then inform how professionals utilize the objects in the future. Gunnar Nygren (2011) writes, "To constitute a profession, the members of an occupation have to be able to control their own work and to have autonomy in their everyday practice." Occupational workers can accomplish this through possessing a monopoly on a specific area of knowledge, establishing a clear and exclusive division of labor, the existence of a professional educational system, professional organizations with established ethical rules with methods of controlling rule-obedience, and an ideology that "advocates greater commitment to doing good work than to economic gain" (p. 208).

Journalism education programs create a division in labor by imputing an exclusive body of knowledge in those studying the discipline, as well as by reproducing in the minds

of aspiring journalists an ethical ideology that they serve an important purpose within a democracy. At first glance, it is difficult to see why one would not describe journalism as a profession. However, Nygren argues that journalism “cannot be regarded as a complete profession” because a nation that supports free expression cannot preempt those who do not earn a journalism degree from earning the chance to fill that role. “There will always be many routes into journalism,” he writes, “making it difficult to identify an exclusive professional track.” Hence, journalism may best be seen as a “semi-profession” (p. 208). This roadblock to true professionalization provides yet another piece of evidence that a professional norm such as objectivity, which separates the journalist from public debate, cannot function in a public sphere that operates as a Millian “marketplace of ideas.” In essence, the American conceptualization of free speech prevents any journalist from fully attaining the distance needed to adopt a professional identity that separates him or her from non-practitioners. Journalism may never be able to fully serve as the scientific “elites” envisioned by Walter Lippmann during the 1920s. (Journalism’s status as a profession is explored in more depth in Chapter 7.)

Hence, attaining a journalism degree is not tantamount to entering the industry. News organizations have long staffed their newsrooms with non-journalism majors and continue to do so today. In today’s digitized news ecology, with so many available ports of access to the American public sphere, challenges to the value of journalism degrees have coincided with challenges to the industry itself. Howard Finberg of the Poynter Institute, in a speech to the European Journalism Association’s annual conference in Maastricht, revealed some startling statistics from a recent survey he completed through Poynter. His research team surveyed 1,975 journalism professionals and professors, asking them to rate

the value of a journalism degree for “equipping students with the skills or abilities in news gathering, editing and presenting the news.” While 96% of academics stated that earning a degree was “very to extremely important” to learning skills, only 59% of professionals agreed.¹⁵ Academics would certainly believe that the jobs they do hold tremendous value, but the gap between professionals and academics in the survey is stark. “We’ve known for a while there’s been a difference of opinion about the value of a journalism degree,” Finberg states, “Today, the gap looks like a canyon” (Finberg, 2012).

Conclusions

Objectivity in the journalism classroom, much like its role in the professional newsroom, remains an abstract symbol that students rarely if ever reify into practice. Hence, journalism ethics in the classroom have experienced a dramatic evolution from the early texts explored in Vos’s study that emphasized objectivity as a key component to professional practice, to today’s texts that offer specious definitions for the term, or fail to mention the concept at all. Lichtenberg (1991) describes objectivity as “a cornerstone of the professional ideology of journalists in liberal democracies” (p. 216). As Nygren explains, a formal education system is an important component of professionalized work. If objectivity is a cornerstone of a professional journalism ideology, then the absence of objectivity indicates a change in how the ethical identities of journalism students become interpolated. This translates into how they view their work in almost every capacity as a professional journalist, from the classroom to the newsroom.

¹⁵ The survey, conducted in the spring of 2012, sampled 1,975 individuals of whom 42% were academics, 34% worked in media organizations, and 11% were independent or freelance workers. The remaining respondents were students (Finberg, 2012). A more recent survey by the Poynter Institute conducted in the spring of 2013, that surveyed 1,800 academics, professionals, and students, found similar results (Finberg, 2013).

Objectivity's absence from practical journalism education indicates a professional institution in significant transition. For many decades, journalism programs taught the objectivity standard in order to give their profession legitimacy in the minds of the public, to create professional identities separate from the milieu of pedestrian public debate, and to follow the utilitarian belief that including a scientific "method" such as this would improve the health of American democracy. Without this component, journalism students learn more subjective methods to develop a professional skillset. More subjective methods of news production also better fit the modern news ecology and develop a more adaptable and legitimate workforce.

But a very important yet hidden kernel of truth lies beneath the many layers of analysis offered by this research: Studying objectivity is not an end in and of itself. After much critical consideration, the waning of objectivity in modern news ethics does not actually serve as the object of analysis; rather, objectivity is only the symptom of a much greater dynamic underway in modern communications institutions. As professional walls crumple between news practitioners and non-practitioners, the entire concept of professional work in the communications industries, and the training of communications workers, has itself become fragmented. Journalism's embracing of objectivity did not stem from its own need to create a professional institution, but rather, reflected larger social and political forces underway during which work became systematized and institutionalized. As Rosenstiel states at the beginning of this chapter, the trade school model for teaching journalism is slowly becoming defunct; the sunset of objective journalism is only one small sign of this. Journalism no longer simply resides in newsrooms, nor are standard news practices the only way of providing information to people. Journalism has spread beyond

the institutional model that has existed since the days of Fordism, and now universities must reimagine the structure of higher education in order to reflect this epistemic change. In the coming decades, we will no longer exist in a state of professional specializations, but in task specializations. Chapter 7 explores this in depth as it looks at a case study of journalism education in transition at the University of Colorado. But before then, Chapter 6 offers a critical analysis of alternative conceptualizations of journalistic objectivity by journalism academics.

Chapter 6: The Search for Universal Meaning: Transparency, Pragmatic Objectivity, and the Critical Political-Economist Perspective

"You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."

Inigo Montoya to Vizzini, *The Princess Bride* (1987)

Robert Jensen, Professor of Journalism at the University of Texas, believes that journalists can never be "non-ideological." Journalists can never break out of the capitalist ideology in which they work, he argues, and because mainstream American journalism continues to follow the marketplace model, reporters will never be able to attain the critical distance needed to address the problems posed by capitalist forces in the United States. "As long as contemporary corporate commercial journalism believes itself to be non-ideological, it will be incapable of dealing with any of these questions intelligently," he says in an interview. "They will sound stupid, because they do not fundamentally understand this question." Therefore, objective journalism to him in no way means the maintenance of distance from public debate, or the separation of facts from values. He sees that as fundamentally flawed logic. Rather, he believes that objectivity represents the citing of "official" corporate or government sources. Here, mainstream newsrooms in no way maintain their ideological distance, but rather, occupy a cozy spot within the public sphere next to the very elites controlling political debate.

But as this research has uncovered, objectivity's "true" definition continues to be elusive. So far, this research has evaluated journalistic objectivity within a few different paradigms: first, as a derivative of philosophical positivism; second, as a scientific concept adopted by journalists in order to legitimize a professional press; and third, ultimately, as an abstract ideal rarely practiced in newsrooms, but still possessing potent symbolic

power. Not once, however, have any of the empirical data offered a universal conceptualization of the term.

Without knowing where the goalposts sit, critical evaluations and debates about the state and necessity of journalistic objectivity become difficult for scholars. Essentially, about what are we debating? If we do not yet fundamentally understand the object of analysis, then how can any one person offer suggestions for change? Understanding the “true” definition of objectivity posits universalism against relativism, where each end of the continuum offers either an *a priori* prescription to Kantian formalism or a collection of disparate and sometimes conflicting subjective understandings. Christians and Cooper (2009) argue that a “commitment to universals does not eliminate cross-cultural differences in thinking and belief.” Rather, universals offer a means for debating our beliefs “in good faith,” rather than be constrained by a superficial consensus. Ultimately, universals “liberate us for strategic action and provide a direction for social change” (p. 59).

Virtually every scholar interviewed for this work researches and teaches journalism ethics with the same precept: that journalism serves as an important factor in the formula for improving democratic life. Better still, if all newsrooms and individual journalists can adhere to similar, if not the same, doctrine of prescribed ethical values, then a fundamental feature of American public discourse will have measureable standards by which the public can gauge its viability. Jensen and the scholars discussed in this chapter endeavor to do just that. This chapter evaluates three alternative “universal” conceptualizations for journalistic objectivity: transparency, pragmatic objectivity, and the critical political-economist perspective. It is important to understand that these three counter-concepts do not serve as discrete theories. In fact, all three have developed as a response to the same

modern news ecology that has incited media scholars to question long-held doctrines of professionalized journalism.

Transparency

In the conclusion to Part 1 of this dissertation, Tom Rosenstiel advocated that transparency should serve as the successor to the now outmoded objectivity standard. Transparency serves as a method for journalists to externalize their reflexive decision-making processes in their reporting, as well as editorial decisions by the newsroom. Kelly McBride of the Poynter Institute believes that transparency, along with truth and community, comprise three values in which many newsrooms (as well as journalism ethics classes) fall short. “Well, truth I think is a value, and we don’t do a very good job in teaching people how to identify the truth.” She continues:

Transparency, I think, is another one where the industry is falling short. Understanding what true transparency is. How did I select the story? Why am I covering this beat and not some other subject area? How does my business model affect the story choices that I make or the relationship I have with my audience?

McBride and Rosenstiel (2013) argue that, in today’s news ecology, transparency occupies the place where independence once served as an important journalistic value. “Where we once argued for independence, we now advocate transparency,” they write. “Independence is a part of that principle, and we still believe in its essential value. But we recognize that journalism in the future will take many more forms and will intertwine with the proliferation of opinion in the digital marketplace—the two no longer so easy to distinguish.” Ultimately, “[t]he test is in *how* the journalism is produced—*not necessarily who produces it*” (McBride and Rosenstiel, 2013, p. 4, emphasis added). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) describe the essential reflexive questions that journalists should ask themselves in the “Spirit of Transparency” (pp. 94-95):

- What does my audience need to know to evaluate this information for itself?
- Is there anything in our treatment of this that requires explanation, including any controversial decisions made about leaving something in or taking something out?
- What questions are my stories *not* answering?

Given the enormous demands on reporters' time, especially those working in larger newsrooms, a question arises as to whether newsrooms can easily fit the extra reflexivity required by transparency into their workdays. When responding to whether this is possible given increased competitive pressures and demands on journalists' time, Rosenstiel explained during an interview:

It is and it requires cultural discipline, newsroom norms, and those are always changing, always evolving. But that's one of the reasons why organized journalism is important. If everyone is a freelancer, you don't have that discipline. You don't have that culture in which you think, "This is going to be closely scrutinized, and this is the way it's done." When you are a freelancer you sort of operate within your own norms, and your primary goal is selling stuff so you can make a living. In an institutional setting—I shouldn't say that—in an organized setting, you know, you can set norms that have been thought through by a large number of people over time, and sort of the pros and cons of that debated back and forth, and it's sort of a more rigorous atmosphere, because you can have thought these things out.

Although he does not explicitly say so, by describing the "cultural discipline" necessary to maintain transparency within newsrooms, Rosenstiel reinforces the professional barrier between reporters and laymen, between news practitioners and non-practitioners. Where once objectivity served as a method to "scientize" news and therefore create rituals that constitute "professional" journalism, transparency becomes the standard that institutes a similar discipline that those outside of professional newsrooms would presumably not conscientiously follow. Also, transparency does not serve as a catalyst for improving the discovery of truth as much as it serves as a catalyst for enhancing communication and trust between journalists and the public. Not only do journalists educate the public, but also the public supports the activities of journalists through information provided via social media

platforms. Hence, in this paradigm, professional journalism becomes a dialectical process, complicating the scientific logic that first gave it life.

Furthermore, transparency incorporates aspects of both Dewey's and Lippmann's pragmatism. Lippmann explained that reporters serve as experts who help citizens make sense of an unknown world. Dewey believed that communication served as the means of solidifying an inchoate public that struggles to congeal into a Great Community. Although transparency reinforces professional journalism practice, and hence its "expert" status outside the public sphere, it also encourages journalists to empathize with community needs with greater alacrity. McBride and Rosenstiel write, "The transparency that we urge in these guiding principles demands that the public see how the journalism of the future is produced and calls for an openness that encourages constant conversation between journalist and citizen, newsroom and community" (McBride and Rosenstiel, 2013, p. 4). The role of journalist versus citizen explored in Chapter 3, therefore, becomes less of an either-or decision. In an interview, McBride explains further:

And the third value, I think, is community and how journalism interfaces with the community and becomes part of the community, maybe even how community is even one of the products of journalism, as opposed to these articles or information.

Their emphasis on the importance of community becomes a significant point for two reasons. First, as the Heider, et al., study in Chapter 4 revealed, more news readers (at least of local papers) expect newsrooms to adopt a greater "community" role, as opposed to a "watchdog" role. McBride and Rosenstiel describe engaging the community as an enlarged, pragmatic application of minimizing harm to the sources and subjects of a story. "It is a promise to act in the interests of informing a community and upholding a democracy," they write, "acknowledging that the community itself has a substantial ability to contribute to

the conversation” (p. 5). So their inclusion of community, and the use of transparency in the support of building community, could have practical merit in building the public’s trust of news sources.

Second, acknowledging that the community can “contribute to the conversation” fits well within the modern news ecology. Williams and Delli Carpini (2011) define transparency in three distinct ways (p. 289). First, they argue that the norms of transparency can and should be extended to other genres, media figures, and media organizations. Jon Stewart, for instance, should reveal his motivations for reporting on a story as much as Brian Williams; movie studios should reveal their financial interests as much as newspaper chains; a blogger should reveal his or her political affiliations as much as a newspaper columnist. All of these suggestions fit well within both the horizontal and vertical fluidities that now define the modern news ecology: horizontally, a journalist should reveal the purpose for choosing to write on a particular topic, whether that journalist writes a hard news story or contributes an opinion to his or her blog; vertically, a news satirist like Stewart should be just as revelatory about why he chose to focus his airtime on certain stories as a “traditional” news anchor such as Brian Williams.

Additionally, Williams and Delli Carpini argue that transparency should be a “central part of their responsibility as mediators” in the public sphere. In other words, reporters should incorporate transparency as a part of their ethical identities as journalists. “By this,” they write, “we mean that one of the central responsibilities of democratically useful media should be to make it possible for us to assess the authenticity and sincerity of the people, organizations, and institutions they mediate” (p. 290). This also would have bearing on how reporters manage the impressions they make with their audiences. If

transparency becomes a publicly held norm for ethical journalism, journalists must follow through by externalizing their decision-making processes in order for their readers and viewers to determine the validity of the information. This becomes an important tool for navigating the voluminous information produced within the modern news ecology. While many individuals might know how to access information, very few might know how to gauge the reliability of one piece of information versus another. Transparency, Williams, Delli Carpini and others argue, can help citizens overcome this deficit.

Third, they argue that audiences should be familiar with the rules that govern the construction of stories in a manner that is “clear and obvious” and offers “broader notions of disclosure, authenticity, sincerity, and ultimately familiarity” with the norms, processes, institutions, and rituals of journalism. Like McBride and Rosenstiel, Williams and Delli Carpini understand transparency as a process for creating a more dialectical relationship with news audiences, providing “formal and informal opportunities for deliberation and contestation” (p. 190). They also mirror McBride and Rosenstiel’s focus on the building of communities. Citing Dewey, they argue that “[d]efining the communities in which we see ourselves belonging is central to the normative implications of politically relevant media” (pp. 127). So transparency’s purpose becomes a means of bridging the oft-cited dichotomy between Deweyan and Lippmanian pragmatism. It attempts not only to maintain professional rituals that grant journalism its institutional legitimacy, but it also keeps a window open for news audiences to contribute to the formation and evaluation of news information. Journalists maintain their status as “experts” while acknowledging that the public can contribute to how we understand the world outside. We no longer need to rely only on the “pictures in our heads.”

So how does transparency differ from traditional notions of objectivity? Of course, as discussed throughout this research, it has been difficult to ascertain a universal definition for “traditional objectivity.” As discussed in the conclusion to Part 1, Rosenstiel believes that objectivity has been misdefined over the preceding decades as meaning neutrality. The media scholars interviewed for this research more or less agree with Rosenstiel’s assessment.

I used to think that I didn’t really want to talk about objectivity at all, because it just seemed like such a deadend discussion in a way, where everyone had these different ideas about what it meant, and they all seemed to be competing, and is objectivity possible anyway... And there are ways to talk about how to achieve or get close to, anyway, that idea without invoking objectivity, I think. Like some combination of things, like transparency and fairness and whatever. So I used to think that. And then I realized that my not talking about it isn’t going to make it go away [laughs]. And I was pretty influenced by Tom Rosenstiel and Bill Kovach’s book where they talk about that method, and I thought, “A-ha!”... So to me it’s been useful to follow their attempt at redefining objectivity in that way. I think that’s had a lot of impact actually on people who teach journalism—their book. But I still find when we have had reviewers looking at the textbook, or when I go to conferences and talk to people, that there are still instructors who are sort of hung up on the older idea of objectivity and are either railing against it or are trying to figure out a way to make it work (Journalism Professor).

Oh, yes. I think [Rosenstiel is] absolutely right about that. I think it’s been perverted. I mean, even if you look at the notion of objectivity as a scientific principle, the way that it has been applied in journalism is really sort of strange in how it’s been—I don’t know if I want to use this word— has been bastardized or whatever. But I think he’s right. The way that objectivity has been operationalized in journalism is I think very problematic. And I don’t think that it helps. I think we see that in a lot of examples today (David Allen, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee).

Kelly McBride believes that transparency will eventually replace traditional objectivity, which she defines as independence.

I think that objectivity—I think that the closest thing that you can get to when you really try to figure out what it means is independence. And I think that is going by the wayside. And transparency is rising as a value that, as we come to understand it, will be more clear about how it really fits into the way we execute journalism (Kelly McBride, Poynter Institute).

But more importantly, McBride believes that transparency will supplant objectivity because objectivity’s utility has waned because of the more diverse technological environment.

I believe that independence used to be synonymous with objectivity, and I think that was a mistake. It worked when we had a relatively limited number of news sources, you know, like if you have only a

newspaper and three television stations in your town to find out what's happening at the city council, you would prefer that they be independent—that they not be rooting for the mayor over the council or the Republicans over the Democrats. You would prefer that those. But when you have a multitude of ways to get information, you know, dozens and dozens if not hundreds, independence becomes less important even though transparency is very important... So I don't think that transparency and objectivity in its purest form are synonymous, but I do think that transparency is a more precise term than objectivity.

In essence, McBride argues that because citizens have multiple avenues for acquiring information today, that they care less about whether that information derives from a detached, objective perspective. Everyone has a point of view, after all. However, citizens do care about what influenced the reporter, how and why they have chosen certain sources over others, and why he or she sees newsworthiness in a particular story. Therefore, McBride intends not to redefine objectivity as much as she believes that transparency better defines ethical journalism within the modern news ecology.

If newsreaders care less about objectivity, as McBride believes, then does transparency as an ethic support the more subjective, or opinion-based journalism, that is ubiquitous at present? Ivor Gaber writes that objectivity, the “industrial discipline” of early twentieth century journalism, concentrated on the inverted pyramid method of delivering news. However, the inverted pyramid form “conceals the fact that for many stories, deciding the gist—and hence what should come first—essentially involves subjective judgments” (Gaber, 2011, p. 32). He describes those judgments as questions similar to the reflexive habits that the journalists described in Part 1 of this research. For example, “Who is the most important character in the narrative?” and “Where is the most important location for the events described?” Following similar logic to McBride's, he explains,

In the pre-digital era these issues were less troublesome—if somebody was paid to write, broadcast or photograph, and they have access to a mass audience via print, radio or television, then they were a journalist and what they did was journalism. But the dramatic changes wrought in the media ecology by the digital revolution have challenged these assumptions (*Ibid.*)

Transparency, he later explains, serves as one of the “Seven Pillars of New Journalistic Wisdom,” which include, among other values, subjectivity and fairness. “It seems important and relatively easy (particularly online) to maintain a position of revelation—not so much in terms of content but in terms of method,” he argues. “This involves enabling the audience to make judgments about how information was obtained and where more can be found” (p. 46). So transparency becomes part of a new system of subjective journalism in which reporters externalize their reflexive impulses when constructing stories. However, Gaber’s explication of transparency describes the concept as not a truth *gathering* value, but a truth *verifying* value.

Transparency, therefore, might have an easier time functioning within the more subjective American public sphere, in which multiple subjective understandings of symbolic content clash in the pursuit of truth. There are, however, different approaches to how one can achieve transparency: the *proactive* form discussed above, and a more *reactive* form in which organizations outside of the newsroom keep tabs on information produced by major news sources. As Part 1 argued, objectivity suggests that a reporter can establish an objective political truth, which within the American conceptualization of free expression becomes an impracticable idea. Axel Bruns (2005) argues that opening the information gathering process to citizen and independent forms of journalism serves as an avenue for transparency. However, instead of a news organization actively externalizing the procedures and logic surrounding how and why they produced a story, Bruns refers to modes through which alternative media forms that produce news using a “multiperspectival” approach serve as “gatewatchers” over news content. Examples of this form of news include the alternative news site Indymedia.com or the aggregated

encyclopedia Wikipedia. Quoting Herbert Gans, he argues that multiperspectival news can enhance how journalism serves the public interest, because “if [journalists] are no longer forced to present a synthesized, supposedly objective report on the news from all relevant angles, and if multiple viewpoints are presented instead, *users* of news, rather than journalists, are once again placed at the center of the process” (p. 314). Jones and Salter (2012) argue that Bruns’ “multiperspectival” model allows numerous sources of information entry into the public sphere “without (mis)representation.” In fact, Bruns’ model fits well within the liberal-discursive conception of truth described by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*. They explain, “Mill contends that free expression from a multiplicity of perspectives better enables a society to grasp the truth of matters” (p. 59). Therefore, transparency provided by external online sources, such as Factcheck.org, create a bi-directional information flow between newsrooms and audiences, permitting more subjective perspectives to flood the process of symbolic interpretation of news information.

Other scholars believe that transparency should become a common feature of modern news production. Angela Phillips (2012) argues that transparency has become a necessary tool for journalists to use in order to build trust with their audiences. Furthermore, transparency can protect professional journalists from news “cannibalization” (or taking material from other news organizations without proper attribution), which is common among blogs and news sources with less editorial oversight. “Journalism, if it is to contribute anything beyond entertainment to the life of a community, must be retooled in truth telling,” she maintains (Phillips, 2010, p. 379). Bloggers see truth as a “work in progress.” They will publish rumors and hope that their readers will correct

any erroneous information. Bloggers must, then, be more transparent about where they acquired their information. “If the ‘public’ is to act as a corrective,” she writes, “it needs to be aware of where the information originated” (*Ibid*). She believes that mainstream news organizations should follow suit, and electronic information “tagging” should become an industry-wide method.

Other scholars approach transparency with more skepticism. Professor Tim Vos of the University of Missouri’s School of Journalism sees transparency as another “mega-concept” of journalism ethics.

I mean, it’s a notion, it’s a concept, and it’s a pretty big, wide concept, as well. It means different things to different people, and in some respects there’s conceptual overlap between objectivity and these notions of journalistic transparency.

Additionally, he is not as anxious to embrace transparency with the same enthusiasm as McBride and Rosenstiel. He explains,

But the real downside of transparency, I think, is that it really puts journalism under a level of scrutiny that maybe compromises their detachment. They’re always the volleyball to get hit back and forth between certain political groups, and there’s always folks who want to dismiss whatever journalists say, because, you know: “We ‘know’ where they’re coming from.”

Within the scope of this research, Vos offers a sound counter-argument. Chapter 3 argued that think tanks have, especially since the early 1970s, used objectivity (or the perceived lack thereof) as a means to “attack the messenger.” Exposing internal editorial discussions for public scrutiny might open reporters up to additional attacks by political operatives intent on pulling reporters into the fray of public debate.

Rosenstiel maintains that transparency has practical merit within the newsroom as a ritual that, with discipline, can improve journalism’s service to the public. In a comparative study of U.S., U.K., and Swedish news media, Michael Karlsson (2010) discovered that only nascent uses of transparency appear in all three publications studied.

“To be useful as a concept and to have an impact upon actual news production,” Karlsson writes, “transparency needs to be translated into useful, everyday ‘rituals of transparency’” (p. 535)¹⁶. However, because he studied only one week of publications, he could not generalize from his limited results. Based on this, one could surmise that transparency might be developing as a ritual in online news production, but “this process is in all probability slow and evolutionary” (p. 543).

Pragmatic Objectivity

As this study has uncovered so far, objectivity remains an ideal that has never truly been reified into practical application in the newsroom, or as a practical form of training in the journalism classroom. The version of objectivity adopted by newsrooms in the early twentieth century departed from its roots in philosophical positivism by holding on to scientific notions such as “maintaining distance” from the public sphere and separating facts from values; but it also failed to incorporate the positive pursuit of Comte’s formula, which sought to fuse science and sociology into a means of improving the human condition. In essence, the form of objectivity adopted by newsrooms as journalism professionalized better reflects the “logical positivists” of the 1930s. Of course, this is not to say that journalistic objectivity, which developed well before that decade, served as a direct precursor to logical positivism. Rather, journalism borrowed the bits of positivist logic that suited its goal of legitimizing itself as a profession in the eyes of early twentieth century America while pushing aside its more pragmatic elements.

¹⁶ The news outlets sampled by Karlsson include the online versions of *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and Sweden’s *Dagen Nyheter*. Forms of transparency studied include forms of “disclosure transparency,” or the use of detailed time stamps, highlighting and explaining changes to articles, as well as forms of “participatory transparency,” including requesting reader collaboration or assistance.

Stephen Ward of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, sees the form of objectivity adopted by newsrooms in the early twentieth century as out of step with the kind of “pure objectivity” alive during the mid-nineteenth century.

The sort of pure objectivity that was in science in those days was certainly a combination of—it really was going down everyday observation through a rigorous method of collecting facts and testing those facts. So I think pure objectivity was a sort of attempt to get rid of the perspective that can bias scientific views. It was a mistake in approach, because what the scientific method eventually in the twentieth century came to realize is what’s important is not how you come up with your hypothesis. You might come up with your hypothesis and your ideas in the most incredibly weird way. You could be lying in bed one night and dream of Benzine as having a sort of snakelike structure. And who cares psychologically. From a justificational point of view, it’s, “Well, can we test those things?”

Positivism became, first and foremost, an “anti-metaphysical” philosophy that stipulated that scientific thinkers should concentrate solely on facts. Ward quotes John Stuart Mill: “We have no knowledge of anything but phenomena, and our knowledge of phenomena is relative, not absolute” (Ward, 2004, p. 78). Mill alludes to Kant’s notion that one can never understand a thing in and of itself, but can do so only as far as an individual’s perception can understand it. Therefore, testing and verification through empirical study must precede any new claims of understanding.

As Chapter 2 discussed, logical positivists sought to reduce positivism to its rational core, focusing on an ahistorical, Cartesian conceptualization of the movement from scientific theory to sociological practice (see p. 68, note 7). In response, post-positivists sought to return positivism to its historical, scientific roots, but in doing so, also addressed human fallibility in their conceptualization—a refutation of Comtean positivism, which eschewed subjective reasoning. Hence, they embraced the social construction of knowledge and acknowledged that bias can influence objective understanding. Ward’s notion of “pragmatic objectivity” follows a similar trajectory: It refutes the naïve empiricism that informed traditional journalistic objectivity while creating a model that

incorporates the subjective attitudes and beliefs of journalists. Ward defines pragmatic objectivity as the notion that one methodologically tests his or her interpretations.

For me, everything is an interpretation. Every statement, every story is an interpretation... So therefore, the question is, "What is the best way of going about trying to test these reports, which are interpretations, with respect to truth and accuracy, and so on?" Well, my idea is that you need to adopt what I call a pragmatic objective point of view.

In journalism, pragmatic objectivity means the application of pragmatic inquiry into journalistic practice.¹⁷ For a journalist to pursue the truth, he or she must engage in the implicit and explicit interpretation of events through codes, context, and framing (Ward, 2004, p. 295). The reporter then evaluates his or her interpretations utilizing two different levels of objectivity: first, by striving for partial transcendence of their current understanding of issues by first putting aside his or her initial biases and engaging other viewpoints; second, by adhering to standards of empirical inquiry in journalism—such as accuracy, verification, and completeness—as tools to evaluate those interpretations (pp. 298-299). Ward suggests that this second level of pragmatic objective inquiry involves asking oneself questions such as: "How does this viewpoint fit prevailing knowledge of the field in question?"; "Is it credible?"; and, "Is there an authoritative consensus on this issue?" In summary, pragmatic objectivity is "a holistic, fallible, rational evaluation of reports" (p. 300). The journalist adopts an objective stance that avoids prejudging stories, strives to fairly represent views, and follows facts to where they lead (Ward, 2010, p. 92). Furthermore, pragmatic objectivity rejects ontological objectivity (philosophical objectivism) and traditional objectivity ("just the facts") as being inapplicable to journalism, and a "spent force," respectively. "For the pragmatic enterprise of journalism," writes Ward, "objectivity is not the elimination of interpretation but the testing of

¹⁷ The short summary of Ward's work here does little justice to his entire project. For a more thorough explication of pragmatic objectivity, see Ward (2004).

interpretations by a set of standards” (p. 93). In short, it is a system of procedural reflexivity in the reporting process.

In a sense, pragmatic objectivity mirrors the reflexive method that journalists already use (albeit unconsciously) in their work, which they describe as striving for “fairness” in their reporting. Ward, however, expresses skepticism about how journalists have “re-written” their values to move away from objectivity as a term of art.

Here’s the little move that people make, and I think it’s really “Nyaaaah, doesn’t work. We don’t want to be ‘objective,’ because we don’t like the word and it sounds like we have to be perfectly neutral.” That’s wrong. Objectivity is not neutrality... Now, here’s what journalists like to say to protect themselves: “Let’s go to concepts that are a little easier to defend. Oh, I want to be accurate. I want to be fair. There. Isn’t that better?” But when you start to roll out the ideas of what values they actually—what they actually do is come back and verify or accept all of the component concepts of objectivity except one, which is neutrality. Right? And I’m saying that neutrality was never a part of objectivity anyway.

Here Ward expresses a similar historical perspective about objectivity as Rosenstiel. Over the decades, he believes, journalists have misdefined objectivity to mean “neutrality,” when it should be defined as a methodological tool for journalistic inquiry. Rosenstiel also argues for a more precise methodology in newsroom practice, which he calls transparency. However, when Ward responded to Rosenstiel’s contention that transparency should serve as that methodology, Ward agreed with Rosenstiel’s stated problematic but expressed skepticism about his solution:

My criteria and methods are quite general, as you’ve probably noticed. I think the next step is to take that notion and to make it much more specific. So I agree with him. Also, I disagree, and I’m not sure he was saying this, that the whole notion of transparency’s going to solve everything in journalism [and] is the new god, is the new objectivity, is really balderdash. It’s really nonsense... You can be transparent and be a Neo-Nazi. You can be transparent about being a racist. You can be a terrible journalist, you can be inaccurate, unfair, opinionated to a sickening degree, and say, “Yeah, but you know what? You know where I’m coming from, don’tcha?” So what you get in journalism—and I’m not denigrating transparency—but objectivity is about how you do that journalism and how you test it. And that’s the method. It’s journalists putting the stories together.

However, there need not be an either/or argument between Rosenstiel’s and Ward’s approaches. A journalist could, based on how they have described each concept, follow a

pragmatic objective method when reporting but still be able to externalize that reflexive process through transparent reporting. Ward's refutation, however, of transparency as the "new god" or the "new objectivity" speaks to these thinkers' struggles to discover a new universal for journalistic practice—a "mega-concept" that can take the place of traditional objectivity as the keystone to modern journalism ethics.

This research has argued that the pull/push effect of political rhetoric and market demands have forced journalists to close the distance they traditionally have kept from public debate. Transparency appears to address this reality, acknowledging that more "subjective" forms of news occupy more space within the modern news ecology; however, such revelations might make journalists more vulnerable to cynical attempts to attack the messenger. Pragmatic objectivity, on the other hand, seeks to reify a misdefined, unwieldy theory into practice; however, this approach sounds like a better defined methodology for what the journalists interviewed for this work already describe as their daily practice.

Ward's adherence to objectivity as a method for testing one's interpretations of facts seems to suggest that, perhaps, one could measure how close he or she adheres to predetermined standards for accuracy, factuality, and other criteria of good journalism. When challenged with this idea, Ward answered,

It's not measureable. It's very loosely measureable. The only measurement here is a way to set criteria to ask whether the stories fit those criteria to a tolerable degree. This is not—you can't qualify this in very strict terms at all. How do you quantify whether you put the right facts on breast cancer in a story or on autism together? Have you provided the right facts and put them in context? Well, there's no real quantity of that sort of thing and measurement.

So a newsroom could determine its own criteria for whether a reporter has used the proper methods needed to construct a factual, accurate, and fair news story.¹⁸ However, Ward correctly asserts that such criteria cannot be quantitatively measureable, so those

¹⁸ Another way of understanding this is that newsrooms can set up procedures for quality assurance.

judgments rely on the subjective, “loosely measureable” interpretations of newsroom editors and senior staff. This raises a recursive problem in managing newsroom ethics: If such standards are only “loosely measureable,” then the problem of subjective interpretations continues, and the pragmatic objective method would have failed in its mission. Newsrooms would also need to create the standards (and the method) that they use to evaluate whether a reporter’s work meets the criteria of accuracy, fairness, and so forth. Without first setting some sort of truly measureable standard for how an entire newsroom achieves these criteria, as well as for the editorial oversight of those standards, it may be difficult for newsrooms to determine whether their stories meet the mark.

During his interview, Ward expressed a desire to see his idea tested within a real journalistic environment. At least one study offered an empirical evaluation of his theory. Two scholars from the University of Winnipeg, Brian Turner and Judith Kearns, analyzed examples of pragmatic objectivity in columns by the award-winning veteran reporter Christie Blatchford of Canada’s *The Globe and Mail*. Blatchford’s columns constituted a “hybrid” form of reporting with both a “reportorial” side, which is “for the most part impersonal, informative, and dependent on traditional methods of reportage,” and an “ethotic” side, which over time “constructs the reader’s sense of the columnist’s character and values through a range of ‘voiced’ appeals” (Turner and Kearns, 2010, p. 70).

Sometimes Blatchford inserts personal discourse into her columns that reveal her internal thinking and personal biases. “Ocular tropes” in her writing indicate examples of pragmatic objectivity, such as her response to a trial of suspected terrorists: “Even before I knew for sure that they’re [sic] all Muslims, I suspected as much from what I saw on the tube, perhaps because I am a trained observer, or, you know, because I have eyes.” In a

column about a famous trial, she writes, “In all this murkiness it’s hard to tell who the good guys are” (p. 71). These moments reveal that Blatchford, to a degree, keeps in mind the potential fallibility in her interpretations of information, then uses the facts she gathers from the world she observes to test those interpretations.

Turner and Kearns had more difficulty identifying similar patterns in Blatchford’s columns on the Canadian involvement in Afghanistan, during which Blatchford had spent four elongated stays as an embedded reporter with the Canadian military. Those particular columns utilized more reportorial writing, and therefore, became less personally revealing than her other columns. This offered Turner and Kearns fewer opportunities to assess examples of pragmatic objectivity in her columns. “This is not to suggest that the hybrid column is an inadequate vehicle for the practice of pragmatic objectivity in journalism,” they write, “or that Blatchford fails over the long term to take advantage of the opportunities it affords.” However, their analysis raised questions about pragmatic objectivity’s reliance on a “reflective equilibrium” that keeps human fallibility in check. “Though it has the potential to serve as a valuable, albeit imperfect corrective to human fallibility,” they write, “we question its efficacy in journalism, especially in times such as ours. The monitoring and adjusting of one’s assumptions would seem to require an extraordinary degree of introspection and analytical insight, not to mention time and patience, especially when cherished values are at issue” (p. 79). While their conclusions seem sound, their study did not explore pragmatic objectivity as a method, but rather, focused on residual examples of “pragmatic objective” thinking that appeared after the fact in Blatchford’s columns. A better approach might have been to study the use of the pragmatic objective method in reporting, perhaps even an experimental study using a

sample of professional reporters using the method, and then observing whether their stories better reflect a prescribed set of criteria, such as accuracy and completeness.

Pragmatic objectivity, if implemented with thoughtful attention to measurable goals and a systemized set of practices, could be a useful method for quality assurance within newsrooms. However, how such a methodology could function within modern newsrooms remains to be seen. The approach packs many elements about which a reporter must be conscientious, when time and resources may permit only instinct and experience to carry him or her through the day.

Objectivity: The Critical Political-Economist Perspective

Reporter Chris Hedges believes that objectivity is journalism's "disease." "Real reporting, grounded in a commitment to justice and empathy, could have informed and empowered the public as we underwent a corporate coup d'etat in slow motion," he writes. "And yet these press courtiers, lost in the fantasy of their own righteousness and moral probity, cling to the hollow morality of 'objectivity' with comic ferocity" (Hedges, 2011, p. 213). Objectivity not only has led traditional newsrooms astray in view of the onslaught of neo-capitalist encroachment on the public's interest, he argues, but objectivity also creates the formula of quoting "establishment specialists or experts" who comprise the power elite, and who "debate policy nuance like medieval theologians" (pp. 210-211). And because traditional objective journalism remained detached and without empathy, it created a climate of weak political challenge that in turn permitted the entry of "less factual" partisan news outlets, such as The Fox News Channel, into the public debate.

Hedges utilizes particularly shrill language in his writing, but he reflects much of the critical political-economist's take on journalistic objectivity. Both transparency and

pragmatic objectivity pursue redefining a new universal that can replace traditional objectivity (read: neutrality). Here, instead of redefining objectivity for the sake of discovering a universal ethical standard for objectivity, political economists define objectivity in order to interrogate its perceived centrality to modern American reporting. “Both [journalism and education] professions claim to offer rules and procedures that guarantee objectivity,” University of Texas Journalism Professor Robert Jensen wrote in a recent article for *Extra!* “But within that narrow ideological framework [the naturalness of capitalism and the nobility of U.S. global dominance] described above, objective practices tend to reproduce the conventional wisdom of the dominant culture” (Jensen, 2012, p. 15).

When Jensen lectures to his students about objectivity, he argues that there are three primary ways that one can define objectivity. The first definition refers to how individuals use objectivity in the vernacular:

When people use objectivity, or the phrase “be objective,” in everyday language, what are they talking about? Well, usually what they mean is, “Listen, you appear to have some biases. Why don’t you try to step back from your biases and evaluate the evidence in as straight forward and as clear a manner as you can.” Now if that’s what we mean by being objective: Stepping back, trying to understand the way that everyone is biased and that our biases can affect our perceptions, to evaluate the evidence honestly and draw conclusions based on that honest evaluation of evidence... then being objective is a good thing.

Here objectivity has practical value. The concept, Jensen explains, does not simply remain an unrealistic abstraction, or a “phantom concept.” He does not suggest that a “magic formula” exists that can make one objective, but that one realizes that he or she has an obligation to be objective and will do his or her best to reason objectively.

Jensen’s second definition refers to how one uses objectivity in the scientific sense:

In the sciences—the scientific method as we understand it from the Enlightenment forward— one path to trustworthy knowledge is to follow a set of protocols in science. So, for instance, if you're going to do an experiment to try and expand our knowledge of a chemical, let's say, you set up that experiment according to some rule. And you follow those rules. And then you report the conclusions you've drawn from the data generated by that experiment. And you fit it into a larger theoretical perspective that has been built based on previous work. In that context, being objective means being following the protocols of a pretty rigorous scientific method.

Jensen sees this definition as meritorious as well, because he respects good scientific work and believes that this use of objectivity possesses a moral and practical value. However, he believes that neither of these two definitions of objectivity—its everyday and scientific uses—mirrors what journalists practice within the newsroom. Like Hedges, Jensen believes that objectivity in the newsroom refers to its reliance on official corporate and government sources. A similar perspective exists as one of the filters within Herman and Chomsky's "propaganda model" in which business and government powers shape the day-to-day "provision" of news by shaping the supply of experts (Herman and Chomsky, 1991, p. 23). These experts typically express pro-establishment opinions, and their media dominance on major news outlets marginalizes dissident views. Jensen, too, believes that quoting elite information sources only serves to uphold a dominant ideology in which America's perceived capitalistic and global prowess faces few questions.

So what does objectivity in journalism mean? What it means is a set of practices that a contemporary, professional journalism has developed. Now, what are those practices? Well, they focus mostly on who is and who is not considered a credible source. Most of what we call objectivity in journalism is really about practices around sources. And my own experience as a journalist, my own experience as a political activist interacting with journalists, and all of the research that's been done makes it very clear that in mainstream corporate commercial journalism, the practices around sources are creating a category that we typically call "official sources," mostly people from government and government-related institutions and from corporate and corporate-related institutions. To a lesser degree, think tanks and universities. These are places that journalists give credibility to sources, and those sources therefore take a primary role not just in commenting about the news but in defining what is news.

Instead of relying on the ritual of objective journalism, Jensen believes that reporters need to recognize that there is no "view from nowhere." "The first and most crucial step is to develop the capacity of self-reflection," he maintains, "not just individually but as a profession and as an institution." Like Ward's pragmatic approach to objectivity, Jensen calls for greater introspection in journalism, except Jensen believes that reporters

should focus that reflexivity in a counter-hegemonic way, wresting their precepts of American journalism out of the capitalist ideology that entraps them. McChesney (1993) explains that “the U.S. political culture does not permit any discussion of fundamental weaknesses in capitalism” (p. 262). Additionally, Clarke (2005) argues that the development of “corporate convergence” in the form of chain ownership compelled newsrooms to abandon partisan journalism for the more mass market-friendly objective format (p. 168). Together, these thinkers craft a great hegemon from which no newsroom that relies on a market-based model can hope to escape, unless journalists realize their predicament and approach their work with a more critical understanding of the capitalist forces affecting them.

Furthermore, Jensen criticizes “fairness” as the gold standard of ethical journalism. Now that objectivity has come under attack, particularly in the last ten years, he believes that “mainstream journalists who used to sell the objectivity story can’t sell that story anymore” because of the commercial success of overtly politicized news sources such as The Fox News Channel and MSNBC. He continues,

So if journalists say, “Well, we’re not claiming to be objective anymore, we’re striving for fairness,” but when they report about the most important story of the last ten years they fall into the same patterns, which again just demonstrates that it’s not about what you call it, it’s about how you understand what you’re doing. And most mainstream corporate commercial journalists understand what they’re doing within these traditional, very ideologically-limited ways of understanding.

He also argues that a commitment to fairness does little to curb the impact of mainstream journalism’s reliance on “elite” sources.

So imagine that the sourcing practices I described are unchanged, but instead of calling it “objectivity” you call it “a struggle for fairness,” but the underlying practices are the same. Well, and it doesn’t matter what you call it. The problem is the practices.... They have not reflected on the underlying structure of the industry and the reporting practices. They’ve simply tried to find a new name for it.

Jensen's cynicism about fairness stands in striking opposition to the manner by which the reporters in Part 1 describe how the concept functions as a practical goal in their daily routines. The reporters interviewed almost universally maintain that they strive to be "fair," and that "fairness" describes the subjective, reflexive aspects of their work in a way in which objectivity falls short. Many of the reporters believe that objectivity never materialized as a part of professional journalism practice although the concept remains an abstraction with potent symbolic power in the minds of many journalists. So Jensen's cynicism is not entirely without cause: Journalists indeed have made a rhetorical adjustment in how they describe their work without actually changing their newsgathering routines; however, their decision reflects less a market-based reaction to what "sells" to their audiences, and more reflects a maturing profession seeking to specify the type of jargon that better fits what they actually do day to day on the job.

Jensen also expressed skepticism about Rosenstiel's push for transparency as a primary journalistic value.

I think that people like Kovach and Rosenstiel are the most sane voices within mainstream journalism, but because they are still trapped within that ideology, I think in the end their project is a failed project, because they don't step back and say the fundamental question is whether or not good news reporting can be done by reporters working for a capitalist institution within capitalism—that's the first and most obvious question.

So Jensen believes that no construction of professional standards—no establishment of universal ethical concepts such as objectivity, fairness, or transparency—can improve journalism's quality or how it serves the American public without journalists first adopting a critical stance of hegemonic precepts such as capitalism and American global dominance.

Isabel MacDonald (2006) also argues for a critical journalism stance, and hence, the establishment of a critical journalism pedagogy in educational programs. She labels efforts

by ethics reformers to establish professional standards as “overly idealistic.” She quotes Herbert Gans’ critique of Kovach and Rosenstiel’s *The Elements of Journalism*, in which he wrote that “the authors view the ideals as, among other things, a weapon with which to fight the commercial and other forces threatening the profession, but whether any ideal has sufficient fire power to overcome a powerful reality is doubtful” (Gans, 2003, p. 36, as quoted in MacDonald, 2006, p. 755). MacDonald argues that the goal for journalists should instead be to challenge the corporate logic that undermines a public interest focus to their work. If a critical journalism education “succeeds in encouraging students to develop an analysis of the constraints of the commercial media, as well as exploring diverse journalistic practices, these students are arguably better positioned to rise to the challenge of promoting a journalism that better serves the public” (MacDonald, p. 758).

Jensen and MacDonald, and other media scholars who work within the critical political-economist framework, focus on the modern media ecology with a strident, macro-level perspective. Large, faceless institutional forces (the “MSM”; the “MIC”) conspire to reinforce dominant ideologies that control the lives of “the masses” (see Herman and Chomsky, 1991; Bagdikian, 1983, 2000, 2004). In a sense, they observe the media environment as if they are watching great gods in the midst of battle, with the oppressed forces of public good falling prey to monolithic, capitalist deities that seek to undermine the will of the people, operating as faceless masses engaged in a kind of groupthink. Little of this framework offers room for subtlety or nuance in understanding the current condition of journalism. As Chris Hedges demonstrates earlier in this writing, the debate about the current state of objectivity is no exception. “The Media” adopted objectivity because of its market-friendly application. “The Media” then abandoned objectivity because “The Public”

no longer bought what “The Media” were selling. After much flak, “The Media” adopted fairness as their new standard because “they” could sell it better to “The Public.”

The political-economist perspective has defined much of the debate surrounding American journalism ethics since the 1990s and has shaped our understanding of topics such as objectivity with a narrow, economistic focus. Michael Schudson writes,

Some scholars persist in emphasizing the media’s uniformity, which derives from its role as a necessary component of advancing the interests of corporate capitalism. Popular in some quarters of the left, this approach sees capitalist self-interest at every turn, as each cover of *Time*, each episode of *60 Minutes*, and every *New York Times* front page shores up a capitalist system. To these critics, every apparent sign of debate or controversy merely covers up a deeper uniformity of views (Schudson, 2011, p. 31).

Despite all of this, however, they are correct to a degree. Market forces have undermined the quality of journalism, especially when accounting for budgetary cuts to investigative and science journalism, and mainstream cable news continues to provide almost nauseating displays of he said/she said reporting and tit-for-tat public debate that appeal to the lowest common denominator. The problem with the political-economist perspective of journalism does not lie in the problems it identifies, but in how it frames those problems, failing to account for other ideological forces in American society that could, in smaller spaces of the American discursive environment, also shape the modern news ecology. American journalism is not merely an economic product, but a social construction based on blend of cultural, economic, political, and historical forces. Our understanding of the condition of journalistic objectivity should account for all of these factors.

Conclusions

The fox hunt for a new universal journalism ethic to replace the much maligned and discredited notion of objectivity continues. Media scholars have clamored in recent years

to locate the key value that better instructs modern journalism. Whether fairness, pragmatic objectivity, or transparency becomes the new term of art remains to be seen.

Critical political economists also pursue a new universal for objectivity, but only with the intention of criticizing a media system that they see as fraught with a capitalist ideology that undermines journalism's moral responsibility to the public. Their condemnation of objectivity ideologically maps to the work of Jay Rosen, Clay Shirky, and others who support the establishment of more avenues for citizen and public forms of journalism. They believe firmly that the establishment of alternative forms of journalism will improve how news addresses the public interest. They also believe that encouraging journalists to adopt a more critical perspective of their newsrooms will improve journalistic accountability to the public. Both are noble and worthwhile pursuits, albeit incomplete.

All three alternative conceptualizations place newsrooms closer to public debate and incorporate subjective reasoning, introspection, and reflexivity into their models, which better fits the more fluid modern news ecology. Mill's embracing of human fallibility in his construction of public debate has reflected the American conception of free expression and the pursuit of truth. Perhaps these more subjective approaches to newsgathering will better suit that tradition.

Chapter 7: Implications of the Modern Media Ecology: A Case Study of Journalism Education in Transition at the University of Colorado

"You have to figure out: How can we make the new thing? Because you have to acknowledge that the physical print business is in structural decline. You can't pretend that that's not the case. You have to accept it and move forward..."

- Jeff Bezos to staff of the *Washington Post*, after purchasing the paper in September 2013 (Farhi, 2013).

On August 25, 2010, when University of Colorado, Boulder, Chancellor Phil DiStefano announced that the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SJMC) would enter a process called "discontinuance," it was as if the air had left the aging hallways of the journalism building.

In some respects, the announcement came as little surprise: Discussions on how to ground journalism education at CU into the new digital climate had been ongoing since the 2000s, as the new digital news environment became inexorable. Additionally, efforts to combine the journalism program with similar programs on campus, such as communication and film studies, had for the last couple of decades developed then crumpled with little success. A kind of cynicism had set in. The SJMC continued to stand as its own entity on the northern end of campus, as it had for fifty years prior. Students seeking to train as journalists would enter its doors, learn the skills, norms, and ethics of the trade, then leave to enter an industry undergoing a significant transformation.

Political grumblings between the School's Advisory Board, the Dean, faculty, and the CU administration began chipping at an already faulty foundation beneath the SJMC. Discussions of a new "College of Information" met resistance in 2008. In September 2009, DiStefano created a College of Information task force that would not only unite disparate units on campus, but also would focus the College on the study of new technologies. The

task force's final report the next spring offered just that—a new College with “computer science and ‘computational thinking’ at its core,” but nary a mention of what would become of the SJMC (McDevitt and Sindorf, 2012, p. 111). In response, the Advisory Board wrote DiStefano, urging him to close the SJMC and consider the creation of a new “College of News, Information and Technology.”

Until November 17, 2010. The Discontinuance Committee, appointed by the provost to review whether the SJMC should close, recommended “discontinuance of the present structure of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication” in order to “permit a strategic realignment of degree programs, faculty, and other resources to better serve the mission and collective interests of the Boulder campus as a whole” (Discontinuance Report, 2010). On April 13, 2011, the CU Board of Regents voted 5 to 4 to close the school. Michael Carrigan, a Democrat from Denver serving on the Board who voted for the closure, told the *Boulder Daily Camera*, “Ultimately, I think we can’t be afraid of change” (Anas, 2011). The provost created a new committee—the Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) Exploratory Committee—to look into the possibility of establishing a new college with a greater liberal arts focus. In January 2011, the Exploratory Committee released a report proposing that CU consider establishing a new interdisciplinary college and institute devoted to education in information, communications, and communications technologies.

At universities, change occurs at a sluggish pace. Creating a new college that adjoins several disciplines, encompassing resources from different corners of campus, is both time intensive and politically draining. Such an initiative requires an extensive commitment to establishing discursive procedures that involve as many stakeholders as possible (predominantly faculty, but also students and the public), as well as a commitment to

creating a system of checks that vets each step of the developmental process. After the Board of Regents discontinued the School of Journalism and Mass Communication,¹⁹ and the ICT Exploratory Committee recommended the establishment of a new interdisciplinary college, the University of Colorado faced an extraordinary opportunity: To revise a 100-year-old system for journalism instruction, based on the industrial system, into an academic structure that not only embraces the more fluid modern media ecology but also potentially establishes a new epistemic approach to communication studies on the university campus.

In June 2011, the provost announced the creation of a new steering committee, of five faculty members from different departments, charged with formulating a “bold vision” for a new interdisciplinary college focused on the study of information, communication, journalism, media, and technology (ICJMT). Along with their own discussions, the steering committee oversaw several smaller “discussion groups” that focused their attentions on different disciplinary angles for a potential new college. The discussion groups reported to the steering committee in the middle of the 2011-2012 academic year, with which the steering committee created a proposal for the provost. The discussion groups focused upon:

- Journalism, documentary filmmaking, and creative non-fiction
- Media studies, communication, and mass communication
- Advertising and design
- Technology and computation

¹⁹ After its discontinuance, the SJMC became the Journalism and Mass Communication program—a temporary department of the Graduate School. A new program, Journalism Plus, began enrolling students in January 2012. Undergraduate students not only major in one of the traditional programs offered by CU’s JMC, i.e., advertising, broadcast news, broadcast production, media studies, and news-editorial, but they also must take 30 to 33 hours of an additional discipline on campus.

- Journalism, science, and the environment
- The arts, media, and technology
- Technology and the digital humanities
- Communication, internationalization, and globalization

As the conclusion of Chapter 5 argued, the eclipse of objectivity in modern American journalism serves as a sign of larger sociological processes underway: Of horizontal and vertical fluidity in journalism work, of a greater porousness in professional barriers, and of a move away from an industry-based model to a community-based model. This chapter explores the discussions and documents related to the ICJMT process during the 2011-2012 academic year at the University of Colorado. Specifically, it focuses on language that exemplifies post-Fordist ideology within the final reports submitted by the eight discussion groups to the steering committee during the spring of 2012, as well as the steering committee's final proposal to the provost, released in April 2012.

The chapter will first ground its analysis in a review of literature that will contextualize the greater fluidity, porous professional barriers, and the realigned model for American journalism education, including observations from the journalism academics interviewed for the second half of this research. It argues that journalism education is in the midst of significant transition, focusing less on professional training and more on the teaching of multi-modal tasks that cross media platforms and multiple "genres" of journalism. Ultimately, it argues that communication training could become a core feature in the modern university and an important curriculum component within other disciplines on campus.

Waning Objectivity: A Sign of Greater Change Afoot

Objectivity has served as the object of analysis for this research. But by studying the current state of objectivity—a concept of journalism ethics that continues to remain an abstraction with potent symbolic power for journalists and for the public—a larger picture of the modern news ecology forms. Hence, objectivity's importance as an object of study becomes even greater, not only as an indicator of modern journalism ethics, but also as a conceit for the condition of the professionalized press and for the public's changing expectations for press behavior.

As Chapter 5 discussed, transformations in the news ecology have led to a similar evolution for many university journalism education programs. Changes in the news ecology also impact critical perspectives of journalism in academia and in popular criticisms of the press, because the ethical criteria for observing the press has transformed. Political organizations and governments, too, have reimagined how they manage public relations strategies because the ideological framework of distance and objective, scientific observation for the press has dissipated over the last two decades. Hirst and Patching (2005) explain, "Journalists, academics, media institutions, and governments are taking an active interest in the performance of news and current affairs providers." This reflexivity is "fairly new and an important dialectic of journalism"; however, "it is an important indication that some of the longstanding shibboleths, such as 'objectivity', are starting to crumble under the pressure of new social relations of production" (p. 301).

The transformation of the news ecology has impacted journalism work in two salient ways. The first can be found in the blurring of professional roles for reporters.

I would say that it does not surprise me that journalists *would see their role as very blurry* when before they could say, "Yeah, I'm a news journalist, or I'm a business journalist, or I'm a sports columnist." And

now the sports columnist could be writing about issuing bonds for the news stadium. I mean, it's all very, very different (Jan Leach, Kent State University, emphasis added).

What we invariably come down to is that *there's no one way to characterize the media system according to those roles*, like there's always (and maybe this is a healthy thing) different entities performing some of those roles simultaneously (Journalism Professor, emphasis added).

So one of the things that we're sort of seeing in the current media ecology is that there is a fractionalizing—it's becoming more fractured.... And I think, to the extent that journalists are trying to get particular issues on the public's agenda, *they deal with it in a sort of multi-modal way through a lot of different modes*, and in different ways (Tim Vos, University of Missouri, emphasis added).

Greater fluidity means significant changes in journalism education. The Western model for higher education has, for much of its existence, adhered to the industrial model of production. John Baker, the founder of the online educational tool Desire2Learn, writes in the *Huffington Post* that the “traditional model of education, born in the industrial age with a one-size-fits-all approach, is not meeting the needs of our knowledge economy” (Baker, 2013). Graham May (2010) writes, “Universities, most notably through their research, clearly develop new knowledge and have traditionally acted as repositories of existing knowledge, but since the Industrial Revolution at least it has been apparent that any University monopoly of knowledge has, if it ever existed, disappeared” (p. 104). One manifestation of the industrial model is the concept of Fordism, a philosophy of production instituted by Henry Ford during the early twentieth century. Bob Jessop (1994) defines the nature of ideal Fordism in four ways: a) as a distinctive type of labor that focuses on the mass production of goods; b) as a stable aspect of macroeconomic growth in which wages improve with increased production; c) as a social mode of economic regulation incorporating, among others, a distinctive multidivisional, decentralized organization subject to central controls and a state-sponsored social reproduction that normalizes mass consumption; and d) as a social organization involving the consumption of standardized, mass commodities in nuclear family households and the provision of standardized,

collective goods and services by the bureaucratic state (pp. 253-254). A Fordist production system involves homogenous production and consumption on a mass scale. However, the production of those goods incorporates a “multi-divisional” labor force in which individuals use specialized tools and skills in order to collectively produce goods (p. 256).

Mass produced education also means a separation of academic disciplines, in which faculty specialized in each area engage in mass intellectual production, and together, in the mass production of educated individuals, filled with information and stamped with a degree, who then enter the work force to fit into whatever job “slot” may be available for them. Over the last century, the process has become intensely rationalized. Multiple “silos” of intellectual production have developed across universities, each with its own theoretical grounding, pedagogical approaches, peer-reviewed journals, academic conferences, and normative pursuits. At the University of Colorado, the study of journalism and mass communication has stood as a uniquely separate discipline not only from other fields of science, engineering, and the humanities on its campus, but also from other forms of communication studies, such as interpersonal and organizational communication, rhetoric, and film studies.

Changing relations of social production occurring within the news ecology signals a move toward post-Fordism. Here the operative word is “flexibility.” Jessop describes post-Fordism as a more flexible production process than that assumed by the traditional Fordist model. Production relies on flexible machines or systems, especially communications technologies, which offer innovative methods of transcending the central control over labor and materials found in Fordism. Additionally, post-Fordism assumes a flexible and innovative pattern of accumulation based on flexible production methods (see pp. 257-

260). The expanse of the digital communications industry, and continued innovation in electronic forms of communication since the 1990s, reflects much of the post-Fordist model of production. Universities, namely the University of Colorado, have emphasized greater interdisciplinarity between departments on campus. For example, CU's "Flagship 2030" initiative for future planning includes "transcending traditional academic boundaries":

We will build upon our excellent record in interdisciplinary research and creative work to become a global leader in ventures that span traditional academic fields. We will strengthen the university's advocacy, support, recognition, and financial incentives for faculty and students who engage and excel in interdisciplinary work ("Flagship 2030" Executive Summary, 2008).

Most notably, a post-Fordist model for academic production would mean weakening or dismantling the silos erected by the industrial model. Academic programs would entail greater flexibility in structure and in curricula offered to students.

This leads to the second salient way that the transformation of the news ecology has impacted journalism work: the fluidity of journalism work across various communication industries.

We talked a little bit about journalism being this singular entity, and increasingly it's not. It's become more diverse than it ever was when I was working in the 1980s (David Allen, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee).

The news industry as the primary source of news and information has dissipated over the last two decades. Other programming formats and media platforms, such as popular documentaries, comedy programs, and social media arose as significant sources of information during the 2000s. A 2012 Pew Research study discovered that, with the exception of cable news, a smaller percentage of individuals rely on "traditional" news delivery formats, such as local television news, national network evening news,

newspapers, and morning television news programs as information sources. Interestingly, the percentage of individuals who rely on formats that offer more non-objective forms of news, such as cable talk programs and late night comedy and talk shows have grown. Pew did not start measuring social media sites, such as Facebook or YouTube videos, until its 2012 study, but news users have been transitioning from traditional media platforms to the internet in significant numbers, from nine percent in 2000 to 25 percent in 2012 (Pew Research, 2012).

As news users migrate to news sources with more selective and personalized sources of information, journalism becomes less a unique institution from other communication industries. As Chapter 5 argued, the professional barriers and unique ethics that separated professionalized journalism from non-journalistic professions have grown more porous. Jeffrey Alan John argues that because “everyone can now be a ‘journalist,’” journalistic standards have diminished. Quoting Barbie Zelizer, he identifies a growing encroachment of academic curricula in communication into professional journalism education programs. Graduates from these programs are individuals “steeped in ‘communicology’ who carry degrees stamped ‘journalism’ or ‘mass communication,’ but who are unable to gather facts in an interview, discern fact from propaganda in the exchange, or write a good sentence to describe it.” As a solution, John argues that journalism programs should establish certification systems that assign “an imprimatur that certifies the exceptional qualities of the bearer” (John, 2013, p. 284). Such a system would become a challenge to American free expression, which presumes that Congress cannot restrain speech prior to publication except in very specific instances. John provides no reasoning for how a certification system can overcome a First Amendment challenge. In

fact, he argues that the First Amendment caused the breakdown in the first place. “We traditionally and by almost knee-jerk reaction challenge any such limits because we have the First Amendment,” he writes. Technically, anyone can publish, which “means the teen blogger in his parents’ basement has access to the web and publication fully equivalent to that of a veteran correspondent covering the U.S. Supreme Court” (p. 283).

Other scholars, such as Robert Jensen of the University of Texas, believe that such efforts to reinforce professional barriers mean little when the current professional model remains wrapped in capitalist ideology and continues to inadequately serve the public interest.

The problem is the vast majority of faculty at American journalism schools don’t share my critique of the professional model.... So what happens, I think, is that people try to shoehorn the existing professional model with minor modifications.... They’re trying to shoehorn that into this rapidly changing technology and business model. I think it’s a failed project—I don’t think you can do it. It will always be a cobbled together mess. And so a different strategy would be to scrap the old professional model and try to, instead of following the industry... we should be trying to lead.

Despite challenges to the industrial model of education, and to the dissipation of “silos” of intellectual production at universities, including the study of journalism, journalism programs still value the teaching of basic reporting techniques and values. It is important, then, to understand that the changes afoot in the news ecology impact the theory of journalism and the practice of journalism in different ways. While objectivity as a theoretical journalistic value, for example, has experienced significant transition because of changes in the social relations of news production, reporters continue to apply truthfulness, fairness, factuality, verification, and other long-held principles to their daily work, as well as the practical skills of writing articles and editing news packages. This is not to say, however, that the space in which journalists employ these skills has remained static, because the number of media platforms on which journalists use these skills each

day has both grown and transformed. All of this influences how universities determine the structure and epistemological approaches to journalism education programs.

Effects on Journalism Education

Journalism education programs have entered an era in which training future reporters solely to enter a specific profession has grown more difficult. Cherian George (2011) argues that preparing students for careers in news organizations should no longer be the preeminent goal of such programs. He cautions against “putting all of our eggs in one basket” and for re-conceptualizing journalism education so that it does not privilege professionalization. He encourages universities to consider three “subtle” changes to the structures of their programs: first, broadening the scope of journalism courses to include relevant genres beyond the core professional and commercial model; second, teaching students to include non-professionals as potential collaborators who can “play a significant, albeit amateur, role in the conversation”; and third, drawing from more diverse examples of journalism “excellence” in order to expose students to “journalism’s increasingly eclectic repertoire” (pp. 264 and 265). The journalism academics interviewed for this work generally agree with this perspective:

There is a way in which some of that new fluid ecology is filtering into the way we teach in even more traditional media, as well as what the students are taking away with them when they go and take non-traditional journalism jobs (Journalism Professor).

I think we are setting our students up for that, in fact—that we’re making them into sort of multi-media reporters. So we used to talk about convergence, and I guess we maybe still do, but it’s the idea about having a variety of skills that work across multiple platforms (Tim Vos, University of Missouri).

A skills-based curriculum that steers away from focusing solely on training for a specific profession fits better within a modern news ecology in which journalism roles are more fluid. Du and Thornburg (2011) argue that journalism programs should teach

multiple aspects of journalism and technology, instead of specializing only in one or two types of tasks, in order to close the education-practice gap. Donica Mensing (2010, 2011) argues for realigning journalism education from an industry-centered model to a community-centered model that emphasizes working with the community in order to improve accountability, moves away from a reporter-centered education to a more networked journalism model, and develops a “culture of inquiry” within the school (Mensing, 2010, p. 517). At least one of the educators interviewed for this research believes that the need for embracing change in instruction leads to a need for teaching greater autonomy to future journalists.

We feel a tremendous need to introduce—it’s a debate that you have in journalism education that I think is very, very difficult to overcome, especially for public universities that are oftentimes cash-strapped and very limited in the amount of time that they have students on campus. How do you teach students all of these things? How do you keep faculty up to date?... Increasingly I find myself telling my students, “You’re never going to learn all of this in these classes. And so you have to take responsibility for your own education, and you have to learn the stuff outside of the classroom” (David Allen, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee).

Despite the argument among academic circles that journalism programs should move away from teaching professional specialization, and toward task diversity, journalism ethics professors still believe that the teaching of core ethical values should and will remain a part of journalism programs.

A journalism student must be trained in ethics first. The emerging media platforms don’t really matter. Journalism practiced with a quill pen is identical to a journalism podcast. Journalists have to learn to use the equipment, but the job isn’t about the equipment (John Watson, American University).

I think that, you know, those basic core ideas I think is what we can work with, and the idea of understanding how we implement those ideals or beliefs, or however you want to call them, and how you put them into practice within those various technological forms is what we can do (David Allen, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee).

It’s important that the principles survive of what constitutes responsible journalism (Fred Brown, University of Denver/Society of Professional Journalists).

Hence, journalism education's future lies in its ability to reimagine its relationship not only with other areas of communication studies, but also with other disciplines on campus. Because the space in which communication work occurs has grown across different industries, other professions seek to incorporate communication knowledge into their training (business analytics and social media data mining being but two recent examples). Communication studies is growing into a central feature of university education, increasing the need for a more flexible, interdisciplinary curricula to prepare students for the fluid media ecology of the "real world."

The Post-Fordist University

Where once mechanical and analog technologies kept production methods for different media forms separate (any student studying Radio-TV-Film in the past who has both spliced film and operated a television camera can attest to this), today all media forms, both old and new, speak the same binary language of 1's and 0's. Digitization has homogenized communication work, including news production, and has permitted easier access for non-professionals. Lee-Wright and Phillips (2012) explain that while digital technology "makes content capture easier, it also makes its centralization, duplication and distribution easier" (p. 68). Within the newsroom, this permits reporters to pool information into a digital hub, which permits open access to other reporters. Outside of the newsroom, the role of non-professionals in the information gathering process is irrefutable, as video recorded with mobile devices can shape the day's news cycle.²⁰ In other areas of communication work, amateur filmmakers no longer need to purchase preemptively

²⁰ A clandestine cellular phone recording of a "private" Mitt Romney talk to Republican donors in June 2012, in which Romney dismissed 47% of Americans as takers who rely on government support, became a major news story and an important symbolic tool for Barack Obama's eventual reelection to the White House.

expensive and cumbersome filming and editing equipment to complete a documentary or film. Alternative online news organizations, such as Raw Story, truthout.org, and The Real News also have grown in number because of easier access to technologies and the greater transmutability of digital footage from one medium to another. Digitization has also influenced greater experimentation with different artistic forms. For example, the development of “screen dance” as an online art form combines choreography and filmmaking skills in a wide range of expressions from artistic storytelling to political speech.

Digitization has translated into stronger ties between different communication disciplines on campus as well, and other disciplines, such as political science, business, computer science, and some of the humanities, incorporate the study of communication into their curricula. Tim Vos of the University of Missouri explains:

Yeah, I mean I definitely see that happening in our own program where there are attempts to connect to other programs. Just an area that we really haven't talked about yet, some of our journalism students pair with computer science students and they work on apps for iPhones and iPads—you know, those sorts of platforms that become other ways for distributing journalistic content. So just another sort of example of how that happens even on a technical level. But the way that journalism education has worked in terms of the accreditation requirements, it's meant to be interdisciplinary, and I don't see that changing.... It's necessary to know how to package information in a fluid marketplace, and then to have various areas of expertise, as well.

Michael Bromley (2011) offers a list of contemporary trends in the twenty-first century university education model (p. 104):

- An attempted reorientation from an inward focus to looking out to the world at large;
- the centralization of the range of studies of communication, including journalism, in the curricula of universities in many places;
- the recognition of and engagement with (students') encountered knowledge;
- a change of concentration in the study of communication and related fields from deconstruction to creation;
- an awareness of asynchronous “ubiquitous learning, that is, ‘any time, any place, and any one’ learning”;

- the impact of digital information and communication technologies (ICTs);
- the collapse of distinctions between study, work, leisure, creativity, citizenship;
- the massification of higher education over the long twentieth century.

He argues that, because of these developments, higher education is moving toward more “student-centered” learning based on participation, experimentation, and enhanced agency.

More significantly, he believes that “journalism, perhaps more than any other applied communication fields, sits at the nexus of many” of these developments (p. 105). “An information-rich, knowledge-based culture, in which complex systems are resistant to scientific rationalist controls, needs more, and a greater diversity of, critical brokers of information flows and counter-flows, and the debates they generate” (p. 107).

Additionally, he argues, the universalist, uniform, “professional” model is incapable of sufficient reformation. In a sense, Bromley maintains that universities should move away from the industrial model to one that emphasizes flexibility—in other words, from a Fordist to a post-Fordist model for intellectual production.

Journalism Education in Transition at the University of Colorado

This research has argued that the waning of the rationalized, objective, professional press model, and the rise of a more fluid, subjective, less professionalized news ecology, signals an industry experiencing significant transition. Schumpeter (2010) described broad changes in the technological base of capitalist societies, which occur every fifty years or so, as moments of “creative destruction.” In *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, he writes²¹:

²¹ The argument here is not to label the university, especially a public university such as the University of Colorado, a “capitalist enterprise.” Such a label carries heavy normative implications for the relationship between democracy and capitalism and is not an idea the researcher values. Rather, the use of Schumpeter

The fundamental impulse that sets and keeps the capitalist engine in motion comes from the new consumers' goods, the new methods of production or transportation, the new markets, the new forms of industrial organization that capitalist enterprise creates (pp. 72-73).

The deconstruction of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SJMC) and the eventual rise of a new interdisciplinary college at the University of Colorado, signals an era of significant transition underway for the teaching of communication work. Christopher Braider, Director of the Journalism and Mass Communication program, in an interview said, "The old model was Henry Ford has the plant and you go work for him, but now plants figure much less prominently in American economic life. We don't organize work that way anymore. The nature of the objects we produce aren't like that anymore. So we need a new sense of what a workplace is, and who a worker is." Communication studies at universities across the country face similar challenges to long-held ideological presumptions for how higher education systems should operate.

The information, communication, journalism, media, and technology (ICJMT) initiative that occurred during the 2011-2012 academic year worked as a discursive process during which many faculty members, from several disciplines on the CU campus, explored different epistemic foundations for the college. Of the several steps that CU has taken over the last few years in the conceptualization and implementation of a new college, the ICJMT process entailed significant brainstorming on epistemological approaches to the new college, new curriculum, and potential new areas of study during which post-Fordist ideology would have an identifiable influence. The eight discussion groups met individually during the school year, and later provided upward feedback to the ICJMT steering committee in the fall of 2011. On April 16, 2012, the steering committee released

means to outline how transformations created by capitalist enterprise outside of the university, and their corresponding relations of production, impact the teaching of potential workers.

its report to the provost, proposing a “College of Media, Design, and the Arts,” as well as a corresponding institute “dedicated to research and creative work at the leading edge of innovation in information and communication technology”—the most comprehensive proposal for a new academic entity offered at that time (Steering Committee Report, 2012, p. 23).

This research will review language used within the final reports submitted to the ICJMT steering committee, and the steering committee’s final proposal sent to the provost, for examples of post-Fordist ideology. As criteria for analysis, it will borrow from and expand upon Michael Bromley’s list of contemporary trends in higher education. The six criteria will entail:

- An outward focus to the greater community and the “world at large”
- Information and communication technologies (ICTs) as tools for education and as objects of study
- Emphasis on student experimentation, entrepreneurship, and agency
- An epistemological approach that emphasizes creation as well as the deconstruction of concepts (merging communication practice and theory)
- Increased connections between communication studies (particularly journalism) with other disciplines on campus
- A focus on improving task diversity and moving away from profession-based training

The units of analysis will be words and phrases that mirror these criteria from the reports from the ICJMT process. For example, indicators of “increased connections between communication studies and other disciplines” will involve language such as “interdisciplinarity” and “collaboration between departments.” Language signaling an emphasis on student experimentation, entrepreneurship, or agency might entail “innovation,” suggestions for the establishment of “laboratories,” or for “self-guided” curriculum.

One important caveat: the analysis will not account for the influence of political tensions that are endemic at any university, especially surrounding any potential redistribution of resources and personnel. University politics do have an influence on broad campus-wide initiatives such as the ICJMT process, but because of the need to find a new home for the discontinued SJMC at CU, and because of strong philosophical direction from university administrators, discussions and actions toward the formation of a new college seem to have so far survived (as of this writing) much of the political tension that prevented change in the past. Therefore, this research will focus solely on the presence of a post-Fordist ideology within discussions of the new college.

1. Enhancing Student Focus on Community and the World Outside

As this research has uncovered, establishing a community focus for journalism has become an important public expectation for news organizations and a key component of post-Fordist higher education. The discussion group reports contain some examples of pedagogical approaches to enhancing students' attentions to the community and world outside of the boundaries of their university. Language grounded in this idea appeared most prevalently in the cross-platform nonfiction group, in which they expressed a "desire to promote human rights and social change through creative nonfiction" (Cross-Platform Non-Fiction Report, 2011, p. 3) and suggested that the new College "emphasize humanistic goals" and that "there is pedagogical and practical value to engaging students with the world around them" (p. 7). Additionally, the journalism, science, and environment group emphasized that CU journalism students already offer the Boulder community environmental news, but that new opportunities "to collaborate across the university to inform our community on a wide variety of issues" existed (Journalism at the University of

Colorado, 2011, p. 6). Also, some of the groups emphasized using new curricula in order to improve CU's role as a media innovator and "enable CU to play an active role in the international community" (Art Media Technology, 2011, p. 6).

No explicit language indicating a community or world focus appeared within the steering committee report. One possible reason for the absence of an overt community-focus in the proposal may be that the report focused more on a potential structure and curriculum for the college than on normative goals for the teaching of specific types of communication theory and work. This is not to say, however, that the normative impetus behind the proposed College of Media, Design, and the Arts rejected the establishment of a community focus. Presumably, a college that emphasizes porousness would build methods for students to focus on community and human-interest needs.

2. ICTs as Tools for Education and Objects of Study

The discussion group reports contain multiple references to the use of ICTs in training and research, which naturally mirrors the provost's charge to create a college that incorporates the study and use of new technologies. For example, the media studies, communication, and mass communication group suggested a focus on the cultural studies of "screen culture" and "mobility studies" (focusing on the effect and the use of mobile digital technologies on culture) (Media Studies Report, 2011, p. 7.) The advertising and design group emphasized the teaching of "various types of digital analytics" and introducing students to "theories that seek to explain digital technology's impact on culture and its changing relationship with communication" (Advertising and Design Report, 2011, p. 5). The digital humanities group's stated goal involved "forming a natural bridge with the fields of computing, library science, and media and cultural studies in scholarship and

pedagogy” (Digital Humanities Report, 2011, p. 2). The computing and technology group argued that the ICJMT process, while focusing on the humanities, social sciences, and technology, should also account for computing and computational science’s benefit to the traditional studies of communication and journalism. “An example,” the group writes, “is the difference between using technology to further existing journalism methods compared to using *e.g.* machine learning, natural language processing, and data-centric computing to transform how journalism is conducted” (Computing Group Report, 2011, p. 2).

However, nearly all of the discussion groups avoid making the study of technology the center of any area of discipline. This may reflect many of the participating faculty’s adverse reaction to any form of technological-determinism in the new college, which became the death knell of the proposed “College of Information” during the 2009-2010 school year. Rather, the discussion groups folded digital technologies into already established disciplines. In essence, technologies become tools for improved learning and enhanced creativity and as objects of critical and cultural analysis—an important element of post-Fordist thinking.

The steering committee report weaves the application and study of digital technologies throughout its entire proposal. Again, the provost’s charge to the ICJMT process included the development of innovative methods of incorporating digital technologies into traditional disciplines. The suggestion for a new department of “information studies” is of particular interest in the steering committee report. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, media technologies now speak the same digital language, and the easy transference of data between once disparate economic sectors has commodified information in post-Fordist economies. The department of information

studies would be a “home for instruction and research in social and cultural matters of ICT use, including human-centered computing; social computing applications and analytics, including data visualization; digital data archiving, preservation, and curation; and information policy” (Steering Committee Report, p. 11). Here information becomes a commodity whose development, use, preservation, and governance serves as an important area of study. The language of post-Fordist ideology is very much present here: In essence, the department of information studies would teach the production, maintenance, storing, and regulation of information “goods.”

3. Student Experimentation, Entrepreneurship, and Agency

Jessop’s description of post-Fordism emphasized the use of “flexible” technologies and work methods in order to transcend the centralization of production and resources. The establishment of “laboratories” in which students can experiment with creative projects became an important feature in a few of the discussion group reports. The cross-platform non-fiction group proposed “a non-fiction lab, which could combine faculty expertise with technology in order to produce project-based learning experiments” (Cross-platform Non-fiction Report, p. 5). The media studies, communication, and mass communication group emphasized organizing research groups “whose work, meetings, collaborations, experiments, and creations take place in *labs*” (Media Studies Report, p. 10). The journalism, science, and environment group proposed extending journalism’s reach through, among other methods, “interdisciplinary clinical laboratory settings” (Journalism at the University of Colorado, p. 3). The art, media, and technology group proposed a graduate “collaborative laboratory environment with interdisciplinary faculty” (Art Media Technology Report, p. 10).

The focus on “laboratories” throughout the reports is intriguing: It demonstrates an acknowledgment that the academic environment must become more agile, adaptive, and constructive in its pedagogical approach. Students (particularly undergraduates) should become agents in their educational experience. This development becomes particularly important for journalism students. Practice has long been a part of journalism training, but that training typically centers on a specific set of professional standards established by decades of industry ritualization. Laboratory settings for journalism students would permit them to experiment with their own methods of information collection and dissemination, and perhaps even create their entrepreneurial newsgathering endeavors.

The steering committee’s proposal for a research institute focused on “innovation in information and communication technology” mirrors the laboratory settings that many of the discussion groups suggested. Not only would the institute develop “technological prototypes that will help solve social problems and will enable advanced academic or creative work,” but it would also “analyze and forecast the past, present, and future of ICT” (Steering Committee Report, p. 23).

4. Merging Communication Practice and Theory

One of the most common themes throughout all of the reports entailed the combining of theoretical and practical pedagogical approaches to learning. The JMC has traditionally separated journalism skills courses from studies of media theory and criticism. Part 1 of this project discussed how the blending of theory and practice functions within the journalism newsroom for both straight news and for opinion-based reporting. Also, Professor Robert Jensen in Chapter 6 argued that journalists should develop a critical perspective in their reporting. In many journalism programs, students must study a small

amount of theory, at the very least courses in media ethics and communication law, as part of their core requirement. Bromley lists the blending of creation and deconstruction as a major modern trend in university studies.

However, media studies courses at CU do not ordinarily use media creation as a pedagogical method. Those courses typically rely on reading, discussion, and analytical writing as teaching tools. The discussion groups saw this as an area of potential improvement within the proposed new college. For example, the cross-platform nonfiction group strongly emphasized the synergy between practice and theory. The media studies group argued that “theory and practice ought to be equally valued in both research and teaching at the new college” (Media Studies Report, p. 10). The art, media, and technology group suggested a new “practice-based research unit” that relies on the creation of “new forms of art, literature, performance, theory, design, curation, exhibition, and publication” as a means to investigate the “recent and pervasive” use of digital media (Art Media Technology Report, p. 1). Such efforts would make the process of understanding much more experiential for the student.

The steering committee report mirrors this philosophy. The proposed College of Media, Design, and the Arts “will accomplish a greater synergy between a professional education and existing campus strengths in scholarship, research, and creative work—in other words, between theory and practice—in a way that has been traditionally the province only of disciplines such as engineering” (Steering Committee Report, p. 5). One can see now how important the establishment of laboratory environments, discussed earlier, becomes in this setting, not only to enhance experimentation but also to allow opportunities for learning through “doing.”

5. Internal and Campus-wide Interdisciplinarity

Numerous examples of cross-disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity appear in both the discussion group and steering committee reports. Not only was interdisciplinarity one of the provost's top priorities for the new college, but it also serves as a key goal of CU's Flagship 2030 initiative. Examples of interdisciplinarity appear in two main ways. First, it appears internally within the proposed college. Nearly all of the discussion group reports emphasize "porous boundaries," "collaborative projects," or "team-taught courses." At least a few of the reports discuss joint research projects and theory courses. The merger of several departments within the proposed college, as decreed by the provost's charge to the ICJMT Committee, makes multiple forms of collaboration structurally possible, both within the various studies of communication, journalism, as well as the arts, technology studies, and computing. Both the discussion group reports and the steering committee report emphasize the breaking down of silos. Also, the steering committee synthesizes different methods of cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary education throughout its report. It states that the College of Media, Design, and the Arts should "bring together CU Boulder disciplines that are currently divided" (Steering Committee Report, p. 6).

Second, interdisciplinarity appears externally in relationships formed with other units on campus. For example, both the media studies discussion group suggests that the new college could "serve the broader university" by offering "media literacy" or "media fluency" courses to the greater CU community with a focus on the deconstruction of narrative and storytelling (Media Studies Report, p. 8). The advertising and design group suggested that its focus on "design thinking" could foster "intellectual partnerships with colleagues in other disciplines," leading to the development of "both collaborative research

projects and the development of interdisciplinary courses” (Art and Design Report, pp. 3-4).

This is where the horizontally and vertically fluid media ecology becomes most salient within discussions of the new college, and where post-Fordist ideology best presents itself. Internal interdisciplinarity maps well to the horizontal fluidity discussed throughout this research. Aspiring journalists would benefit from greater access to alternative methods of news and information delivery, whether they decide to study traditional newsgathering, alternative “non-objective” reporting, or a combination of both. Also, the external interdisciplinarity with other departments on campus outside of the proposed college mirrors vertical media fluidity within the modern ecology. Other disciplinary influences, such as methods of narrative development, and different information delivery formats and platforms, broaden the definition of maintaining an informed citizenry. As earlier chapters in this research covered, individuals no longer rely solely on traditional news delivery systems in order to inform themselves. Popular documentaries, comedy programs, digital artistic expression available online, among others means, also provide symbolic content to the public sphere. This aspect of the new college’s epistemological foundation makes it very amenable to the modern media ecology by permitting a student the means for exploring alternative methods for informing the public.

6. Task-Oriented Diversity Versus Profession-based Training

Porous professional boundaries have grown into a major theme in Part 2 of this research. As Chapter 6 discussed, journalism educators have been debating the value of reinforcing professional barriers by establishing new journalistic values that better fit the

more subjective modern news ecology, such as transparency and pragmatic objectivity. Additionally, some of the journalism educators interviewed for this project see a greater focus on a more flexible skills-based education as being far more useful to students than one that emphasizes training for specific professions. Flexible specialization in the production process is also a key component of post-Fordist ideology.

It is a surprise, then, that these values do not appear more often within the discussion group reports or within the steering committee report. While the discussion groups focus on constructive methods of bridging gaps between disparate departments on campus and within the new college, they offer very little evidence that they have deconstructed common tasks that can transition between different forms of communication work. The closest that any of the discussion groups come to offering more task-oriented training appears within the media studies, communication, and mass communication group's reference to narrative and storytelling as a common object of study. Rather, each of the discussion groups focus on what each major disciplinary area can offer to the college—more a fusion of present silos than a true breaking down of disciplinary boundaries. Examples of specific tasks that could be transferrable between different forms of media work entail creative and journalistic writing, digital editing, creative visual design, and so forth.

The steering committee report offers some suggestions for more task-oriented training. “Students in Broadcast Journalism, Print Journalism, and Multimedia Journalism will take full advantage of the new areas of teaching, research, and creative work,” the report states. “Likewise, Media Studies students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels will benefit from new opportunities to acquire advanced research skills by learning

about the archiving, preservation, and curation of digital image, text, and sound data” (Steering Committee Report, p. 10). The advertising and design group’s proposal for “design thinking” also has some transferability between different kinds of communication work.

To be fair in this analysis, the extent to which individual tasks would become deconstructed and universally applicable within the college may be simply a matter of what individual courses the college offers—an issue that was too premature for the ICJMT process to address. Also, language within the journalism, science, and environment report indicates a “continued demand for professional journalism education” and “compelling” reasons to “continue professional journalism education” (p. 4). This offers a very salient perspective: Within all of the change underway in communication and journalism education at major universities, professional journalism will continue to exist, and students will need to continue learning professional journalism skills. However, if this entire project has underscored one reality, it is that regardless of how newsrooms and journalism education programs reinforce professional barriers that differentiate practitioners from non-practitioners, those barriers have become porous and bi-directional. Any journalism education program would have to account for this reality.

Fallout and the College of Media, Information, and Communication

Despite brainstorming and conceptualizing a new interdisciplinary college, the College of Media, Design, and the Arts served as only a stepping-stone in the process toward a final proposal for the Board of Regents. The ICJMT steering committee’s report found much support after its release, but also faced significant resistance from individual departments during the summer of 2012 who believed that the college was too ambitious

in scope. In response to the report, Provost Russ Moore appointed an external review committee comprised of experts from other universities, tasked with exploring the feasibility of the new college. He also explored more detailed elements for the college by offering grants to groups of faculty to explore innovative curricula for the new college.

On June 25, 2013, the provost announced the formation of a slightly different college: The College of Media, Information, and Communication, that he plans to present to the CU Board of Regents for approval in the spring of 2014. He also created an implementation committee to oversee the specific development of curriculum, degree programs, resources, personnel, and other key administrative decisions needed for the formation of a new entity. In his charge to the implementation committee, the provost described the CMCI as “independent,” “not insular, but rather porous and open to as many avenues of collaboration to the other schools and colleges as possible” (Moore Press Release, 2013). The CMCI will house seven departments, i.e., communication, advertising and design, journalism, media studies, media production, the digital media arts, and information studies. The provost also appointed Professor Christopher Braider, who already serves as the Director of the Journalism and Mass Communication program, as Director for the new College of Media, Communication, and Information.

Serendipity struck during the summer of 2013 when Braider traveled to Washington, D.C., to visit *The Washington Post* to discuss potential internship programs for JMC students. That same day, August 5, Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos announced his plans to purchase the *Post* from the Graham family, who had owned and managed the paper since the 1930s. Braider identified parallels between CU’s efforts to establish a new college and the changes that seem to be underway at the *Post*. In an interview, he explains,

We are trying to put journalism in a context in which it will have access to the best thinking that CU can provide in the areas of entrepreneurship, but also of the widest possible use of digital media for the purposes of expression and communication and outreach and networking, and so on. So that was part of it. The other part of it was that in doing so, we're trying to, as exactly we suspect Bezos is, to get outside whatever box we think we're in. To try to find some entirely new way of posing the old questions and seeking for new solutions. So the great hope with Bezos buying the *Post* is, precisely because he doesn't come from within the journalistic world, he will be able to bring an entirely new set of perspectives and insights and senses of possibility to the question of rebuilding the business model than anyone in journalism can. So similarly we're trying to get ourselves out of the traditional box in which journalism education has been conducted both here and elsewhere.

Post-Fordist ideology is very much alive within Braider's response. When asked to reflect on this, Braider said,

That's a very nice way to think about it, and in that way it again reflects just the nature of the economic, as well as social and technological changes that have overtaken the country as a whole, and journalism along with it. Journalism, too, was built on the old industrial model and, you know, many hands contributing to the creation of one article, which was the newspaper, and how it came out at the other end. Whereas, nowadays, our students—because it's true of journalists—have to be able to create texts, have to be able to create video, they have to be able to edit their own video, they have to be able to record and edit sound, they have to be able to tweet the news out, they have to be able to push it out on Facebook, they have to be able to push it out on their website, as long as websites still exist, and that's even up for question. So that is a post-industrial mode of work. And it's also post-industrial in the sense that one of the things we hope we're providing our students the tools that they'll need to create their own economic way in the world, so it isn't simply going to be a matter of giving them the tools they'll need to satisfy the employers that are out there today, but also the tools they need in order to create their own enterprises intellectually but also economically.

Conclusions

It is unfortunate that this case study cannot incorporate the provost's final proposal to the University of Colorado Board of Regents. However, if the textual analysis conducted here is any indication, the College of Media, Communication, and Information will serve as a product of post-Fordist thinking in higher education. As Braider explains, the new college will not only provide a new means of communication and information education at CU, but will also serve as a model for colleges in general, eschewing the silo-logic of the old industrial model.

That this change in the educational model started with the study of communication is, arguably, no accident. Information has become the primary commodity of trade. The

method of gathering, sculpting, and disseminating information has grown to become a key component of government, private, non-profit, security, health, and even the traditional manufacturing and engineering sectors. Any university endeavoring to prepare its students to enter the modern economy must embrace communication's catholic reach into every other discipline on campus and structure its programs thusly.

This case study offers a few important considerations for other universities looking to make a transition. In the future, journalism programs may very well entail:

- *A stronger relationship between the student journalist and his or her community:* The move from an industrial model to a community-focused model not only mirrors current trends in public desires for news organizations, but it also maps better to a media ecology in which journalists and the public enjoy a more bi-directional relationship.
- *Greater experimentation with digital technologies:* The “laboratory” settings suggested by several of the discussion groups indicate that many educators acknowledge that the current media ecology still remains unsettled and may not be so for some time. The best means of university programs to keep up with the changing media universe is by merging theory and practice, emphasizing creation as a pedagogical method as well as deconstruction.
- *Greater emphasis on reflexivity in journalism training:* The modern media ecology demands a more subjective focus on information gathering. Concurrently, student journalists will have to improve their reflexive skills when determining the value of information when constructing stories. Much of this pushes against the old professionalized “objective” model for news, which has all but vanished from journalism instruction. Rather, students will practice “fair” reporting that emphasizes reflexive processes.
- *Media literacy/fluency will become a core component of a university education:* Students in all disciplines will need to learn how to discern the quality of the information they acquire as consumers, critics, and citizens. Media literacy/fluency, offered by communication studies, will become an indispensable component to a modern university education.
- *Professional training will remain, but the teaching of task diversity in communication education will grow:* As mentioned earlier in this chapter, all media now speak the same digital language. Specific skills transport much more easily from one communication focus to another, and training for specific classes of communication work is becoming antiquated. This is not to say that universities will cease teaching professional journalism *skills* and ethics, but that a student will learn those skills along with with

other forms of communicative proficiencies that they can then apply to a diversity of communication workplaces.

The waning of journalistic objectivity as a stated norm of newsgathering reflects not only a changing news climate but a changing communication climate. Likewise, university journalism programs also are adapting to account for journalism's porous borders with other forms of communication work. Journalism education no longer stands as a profession set apart, and the University of Colorado's efforts to establish a new college reflect this reality.

Chapter 8: Summary, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

A Modern News Ecology or a Modern *Media Ecology*?

Fluidity became a significant term throughout this project. In Part 1, the modern news ecology arose as a key construct for understanding the dynamic economic and technological environment that impacts journalism work. The horizontal fluidity within the modern ecology accounts for the multi-modal nature of some contemporary reporting, in which reporters can adopt multiple roles, from a hard news reporter, to a reporter focused on news analysis or opinion, sometimes for the same story. The vertical fluidity accounts for the many platforms through which information now reaches the public sphere, which do not always comport to a standard news format. Fluidity also refers to the bi-lateral, decentralized relationship between reporters and their audiences—a potential reason for the increase in public expectation for community-focused journalism. Many audiences no longer wish to see reporters stand on the sidelines as referees of public debate between political elites. Therefore, the objective distance that journalists traditionally have maintained from the public sphere has itself become more fluid, as the dynamic nature of modern newsgathering means that, sometimes, they have to enter the fray.

However, to say that the dynamicity described in this research only impacts news production would be too narrow. The mechanical and analog technologies used to produce different media content (print, radio, film, and television), at one time specialized and immutable, now speak the same digital language. Additionally, potential sources for news, especially for younger audiences, do not always derive directly from traditional newsrooms. Although a news organization might compile a story, they do not always serve

as the main location for exhibition. Social media, comedy programs, blogs, and online news aggregators have grown as sources of information, and in the case of blogs and news aggregators, can sometimes be alternative sources for original news. Therefore, although much of this research referred to the impact of the modern *news* ecology on journalism, the modern *media* ecology more precisely defines the fluid technological, economic, and social environment that has granted the practice of journalism its current dynamicity in form and function, which in turn has made objective forms of newsgathering less practicable.

Universities also are experiencing a transitional period. Training students to perform communication work has grown more dynamic in response to dramatically evolving modes of media production. The new College of Media, Information, and Communication developing at the University of Colorado deconstructs the old industrial model of intellectual production, creating a pedagogical method that focuses on entrepreneurship, innovation, student agency, interdisciplinarity, and communications technologies. So, in a sense, communication education at the modern university is also experiencing its own transition toward fluidity, as the definition of communication work, and how one defines a communication worker in this country, undergoes its own metamorphosis.

From Comte to CU Boulder: Objectivity in the Modern Media Ecology

Studying the current condition, and the perceived “failure,” of the concept of journalistic objectivity is like peeling an onion. At first, the theoretical incongruity between Comte’s “objective” understanding and the more subjective concept of American free speech seems like a feasible answer. In other words, the quest for truth derived by separating facts from values clashes with the pursuit of truth through free expression.

Separating facts from values, and then hoping that whatever “objective” knowledge derived from reporting could survive in that form within the more subjective American public sphere, seems like a futile mission. However, this potential explanation wilts when one explores journalistic objectivity’s history and uncovers that the version of objectivity adopted by newsrooms during the early twentieth century mirrors more logical positivism, which relies on a reductive method of scientific reason, than on Comte’s sociological quest. But more importantly, as argued by Michael Shudson and others in Chapter 1, objectivity remained a concept that failed before it even began. Journalists at the turn of the century knew quite well that their profession could never fully embrace objectivity in practice. However, objectivity thrived as a short-lived news genre during a remarkable period of stability in the American public sphere—a relatively homogenous political, technological, and economic environment following World War Two that legitimized the concept as an unimpeachable journalistic value. The unraveling of these conditions may have made objectivity a less tenable value in reporting, but that answer was unclear.

So it became important, then, to speak to reporters. Chapter 2 uncovered that while objectivity remains a powerful symbol for reporting both inside the newsroom and in the minds of the public, reporters have never truly reified it into practice. Rather, journalists consider “fairness” as the true keystone value in ethical journalism practice. Fair reporting constitutes a reflexive process where reporters keep their internal logic in check as they construct news stories. Fairness also allows journalists to report and opine in more ideological news environments, so that as they critically assess the subjects of their stories, they can still keep in check the values of truth and factuality. Chapters 3 and 4 provided more nuance to this process, as journalists concentrate not only on managing their dual

roles of “journalist” and “citizen,” but do so keeping in mind that they must maintain the impression of being a fair journalist to the audiences that they serve. Hence, “fair” journalism better fits the modern media ecology than “objective” journalism.

Analyzing objectivity as a value purportedly taught in journalism instruction in Chapter 5 turned out to be somewhat derivative from the analysis conducted in Part 1. As objective journalism has faded to the background within the modern media ecology, its utility as a value taught to journalism students has waned in kind. The alternative conceptualizations of objectivity discussed in Chapter 6, like fairness, focus more on providing structure to reporters’ reflexive instincts. One of the most significant findings of Part 2, however, lies in the porousness of professional barriers, which has transformed relations of production within the news industry. It became especially clear that objectivity no longer serves as an object of study in and of itself, but as a sign that transitioning socio-economic forces, and technological changes, have reshaped the environment of modern American reporting. In essence, objectivity is only a symptom of larger changes at work. The modern media ecology has decentralized the exchange of information and control over the resources necessary for symbolic arbitration from politicians to the public.

The core of this research, then, lies in the case study of journalism education in transition at the University of Colorado. The move toward a more post-Fordist, or post-industrialist, economic system has redefined not only communication education at the University of Colorado, but has been a primary driver of the modern media ecology in general. The discovery, management, and dissemination of information have become primary commodities of trade in almost every sector of the current American economy. The “fluidity” that defines so much of modern mediated communication reflects the very

nature of a post-Fordist economic philosophy. Not only has journalism production become less centralized, elitist, and objective, but so has media production, as well. Educating individuals to enter specific communication professions is growing more and more outmoded; therefore, universities must adjust the episteme of communication programs to focus more on multi-modal tasks than on professional specialization.

However, it is important to keep in mind that, in the midst of so much change, many aspects of the “old” media system remain firmly in place. This transition is in no way discrete. Professional journalism, and corresponding professional training, will continue. So will “traditional” media platforms, such as broadcast and print. And most importantly, so will the notion that journalists must maintain a professional and ideological distance from the public debate. And at some point, the digital transition will settle. We will no longer differentiate “new” media from the “old,” and “digital” media from the “analog.” One day, we will refer to all of them, once again, as simply “media.” An adjusted status quo, perhaps not too unlike the status quo that has defined mediated communication during the last century, will solidify. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Limitations and Potential Future Research

This journey certainly had a bump or two along the way. Larger numbers of informants for both interview groups—Washington, D.C.-based journalists who cover national politics, and university educators who teach journalism ethics—would have improved the generalizability of its analyses and conclusions. However, the researcher possessed limited time and resources needed for better recruitment, and for the first group, had to account for the distraction that the 2012 presidential election would pose to prospective informants during that fall. The researcher needed to conduct the recruitment

and interview process quickly during the spring and summer months in order to ensure the best possible access to potential subjects. Additionally, the research process could have benefited from a more stratified selection of educators. Not all educators who teach journalism ethics have backgrounds in journalism and their focuses vary. Some of the educators concentrate their teaching almost solely on skills-based ethics instruction. Others focus on a mixture of skills-based ethics instruction at the undergraduate level and theory-based courses at the graduate level. Slight adjustments to interview strategies had to be made in order to compensate for these variations in experience and professional focus. This caused some confusion while organizing the data for analysis, as the already small group of informants had to be carved into even smaller groups in order to compile responses regarding teaching strategies, personal philosophies about objectivity, alternative approaches to conceptualizing objectivity, and so on. Any future research on journalism educators should entail a larger, more carefully stratified sample. Additionally, because interviews have no objective means of verifying the complete authenticity of an interview subject's answers, the possibility remains that the informants could have been engaged in a kind of impression management during the interviews. This concern is a bit more cynical, because everyone, especially those striving to preserve ethical identities in the face of public expectations, engages in impression management. However, it is important to at least underscore this potential weakness in using personal interviews as a source of information.

The results of this project are rife with potential future research possibilities. First, a study on how journalism students assess and internalize ethical issues, such as abdicating aspects of their ability to publicly express their opinions, can illustrate how ethics

instruction becomes transferred in the university classroom setting. Also, ethnographic research of large newsrooms, or perhaps a study that shadows a few national reporters, can better illustrate how journalists working in these settings structure their day in order to function within the multi-modal environment demanded by modern newsgathering, and how these rituals pose challenges to the quality of their reporting. Additionally, a couple of the alternatives to objectivity discussed in Chapter 6, namely transparency and pragmatic objectivity, can serve as excellent objects of analysis for experimental studies in newsrooms. For example, can the concerted application of transparency, or pragmatic objectivity, to daily newsgathering routines improve a newsroom's connection to its community? Additionally, a study focusing on differences in discursive habits between reporters working in mainstream versus more ideological newsrooms would add more nuance to this study. There are also potential objects of study in the construction of ethical identities of journalists, broader surveys of public expectations for community-based journalism, as well as future studies of "post-Fordist" journalism education as the College of Media, Communication, and Information takes form at the University of Colorado.

Addendum: An Interview with Professor Michael Schudson of Columbia University

In the summer of 2013, Professor Michael Schudson of Columbia University, who has published extensively on the subject of journalistic objectivity, agreed to an interview. Following is a full transcript of his reflections on his own work and on some of the findings of this project.

How would you assess objectivity's relevance as a modern American journalism ethic?

Well, it remains a well-recognized feature of American, more so than other, journalisms. Europeans and others still think of it as a distinctively American feature even though some of them are more likely to affirm it as well as they did 100 years or even 50 years ago. In the U.S., it's been challenged practically from the moment it was articulated in the World War One era, and it was seriously challenged in the 1960s which was, as in the '20s, a period of considerable conflict and controversy in journalism. And so, even as the concept was in some ways being applied more rigorously at that time, it was also being attacked as insufficient for really getting at truth as it was supposed to be doing. I sort of summarized that in the last chapter of *Discovering the News*, and others have, too. And there's a renewed critique in the last decade or so, and that's not so much that people found new things wrong with objectivity, but that they've had a new ideal that seemed to pose a serious challenge—that was to talk about transparency as the application of journalists rather than objectivity.

I'd like to turn back to some history, if I may. And actually, I would like to go back to *Discovering the News*, which you published in 1978 originally. And in that book you described a list sociological factors that led to the press's establishing of professional standards during the post-World War One era. And I'm going to paraphrase you here, but you say essentially that the post-World War One era view reflected an American society that seemed both troubled and hopeful during a time when many had lost confidence in public systems seemed not to work, where corporations controlled the supply and demand, where machines controlled elections, and when powerful publishers, and the need for mass entertainment, not the need for truth, governed the press. I think what struck me about this is how eerily similar your description of this era is to today's political-economic climate. It seems that journalism's adoption of the objectivity standard was in response to the chaos of the post-WW1 era and today journalism is once more going through a dramatic epistemic change. Do you think that this is a parallel worth drawing?

Yes, but I guess I see more parallel between the conflicts around objectivity in the '20s

and the '60s, '70s than to today. I mean, the challenges to objectivity today are of a different sort and the one that gets a lot of attention is that we have more advocacy media, self-consciously argumentative, biased media than we used to. Once upon a time, we had—and this refers primarily to television—once upon a time we had three objective news sources: ABC, NBC, [and] CBS. No one talked about PBS. Now, all of the sudden, we have [an] explosion of cable and we have Fox and MSNBC and they have large audiences and they are avowedly opinionated to the right and left respectively. This is true but what's important is—I think is really blown out of proportion, and I think the fault for that lies primarily with liberals who have had panic attacks about Fox News when Fox, in fact, still has a smaller audience than ABC, NBC, and CBS. But, and you know it, Fox has made an impression. I don't think it's the end of the world, and in fact I also don't think it's the end of objectivity. The networks and the major newspapers and other news sources continue to find a viable way and the professional way to proceed. So that's the first source of challenge in my sense of it. You know, I think it's important that it's been exaggerated.

A second challenge has been from the internet in a couple of ways. First, the new digital media in general has made every citizen a journalist, or potential journalist, an eyewitness and a relayer of news. It's made it difficult to know [about] the economic crisis for journalism [after] cutting back on foreign correspondents, and so on. There is more space for citizen journalists to make a real contribution to journalism and what is happening. And there is an unbelievable explosion of not so much reporting, though it includes reporting, but opinion online. And, you know, some of it is completely irresponsible and a lot of it is absolutely terrific. So in that environment objectivity as such doesn't disappear but it kind of recedes as people say, "Well, you know, that was really never the only thing I was looking for in journalism, you know, as a consumer. Yes, I do trust more in some news outlets than in others, and yes, I want to know that there's some place that I can turn to for reliable news, but I'm also looking for opinion, something with a bit of an edge, something with a bit of humor." And when you think about it, that was one of the things people always found valuable in the news. Which of the Chicago papers was Mike Royko writing for? That's the one you wanted to pick up, because he was more objective? Not at all. Because he was funny, sharp, sassy, tuned in, and there were columnists like that, and sections like that in newspapers all over the place. So this, as I say, I think the upshot is not that objectivity disappears, not that it becomes outmoded, but that there's a wider recognition that it's not the only thing journalism provides today or, for that matter, provided in the past, and there are other services that journalism does for us.

So then the other part of the internet that is complicating an interesting challenge to objectivity is that it provides so readily for people who are online so many opportunities to check the facts themselves. To get multiple views or perspectives on whatever topic it is that interests them in particular. And, of course, they have to learn to use sources judiciously, and to recognize that they're not going to be getting the whole truth from any of them. You know, how well do people do that? I don't know. I don't know how well they ever did that. But that's a larger question than it used to be and it's one in which professional journalists believing in objectivity are also consumers

of what's available online. And that's what the fact checking organizations do. They use mostly online sources to check factual claims by political figures and the fact checking are in some ways hyper objective. They've taken objectivity to a new level rather than abandoning that. That I find quite interesting. And so the story of objectivity is by no means over. I don't know what happens to journalism if journalists say, "Well we never quite got there so let's just abandon it." I don't see that happening.

What about public expectations for an objective press? What forces, other than those operating within newsrooms—political forces or economic forces, perhaps—do you think have made objectivity a public expectation that is still held by many Americans?

Well, one thing is that people have had the experience of having news they feel they can trust. They might have been wrong about that, but if they're talking about the network evening news, or if they're talking about CNN, or the Associated Press, or in some quarters the New York Times, the news section of the Wall Street Journal, and so forth—most of the major regional metro newspapers. They've had an experience where they felt, I think correctly, that they could pretty well rely on what they read there. There would be exceptions, and some of the exceptions people completely took for granted. If you're reading the Cincinnati newspaper, you're not going to expect that other baseball teams are going to get the same favorable coverage as the Cincinnati Reds. You're also not going to expect that the Cincinnati team is going to go without criticism, but you expect the hometown team to be favored, and we take that for granted. We don't expect that in covering the Democratic and Republican candidates for president. We expect that news to be relatively even-handed, on the front page and not on the editorial page. We make those sorts of distinctions.

What kinds of factors gave objectivity its potency as a journalistic value in the minds of Americans? For example, was this something that newsrooms pushed for or sold to their audience? Was this something that just derived from the scientism that was alive during the progressive era and sort of leaked into the rest of public discourse about journalism?

Right. I think that's true. I think that the self-consciousness among journalists, particularly beginning in that progressive era, that they were providing some kind of public service, and providing a product that readers could rely on. They did sell that. They did promote that as something distinctive that you should want your newspaper for. This was also part of a progressive revolt against politics. Newspapers had been in the nineteenth century very political, very partisan, openly so. And since almost all cities had multiple daily newspapers—one was the Democratic paper; one was the Republican paper. There might be some others as well. But you could tell who a person was voting by seeing which newspaper they were reading on the subway. So as the economics, particularly in the '40s and '50s, of urban newspapers changed, and one newspaper, either the morning or the afternoon paper, became clearly the dominant advertising winner and the dominant force and bought out the rival papers, or the rival papers just folded. The surviving newspaper adopted a kind of loosely public service

ethic, including by the 1960s, '70s, a stronger formulation of an op/ed page with a variety of points of views represented. Not just whatever the editorial policy of the newspaper was. So newspapers were recognizing to some degree that they were serving a general public not clearly delineated by political preference. So, yeah, I think that was certainly a part of it. I mean, the European media really developed in a very different way. They maintained strong partisan identification for another 50 years after it happened in this country.

Also, what about political think tanks? Especially beginning during the early 1970s, many political think tanks and political elites have used objectivity as a bit of a bludgeoning tool, as a means of criticizing journalists for not doing their jobs, or as a way of painting journalists as being supportive of the other side. Do you think that that also has been a force that has reinforced the notion that journalists should be objective in the minds of some Americans?

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah, I would think so. I think that's a good point. Yeah, even some of the strongest critics of our mainstream news organizations adopt some notion of precisely or close to objectivity by saying, "You know, you're not living up to what you professed, and here we can show you." So, yeah, that does reinforce the thing that is professed— objectivity—quite well.

There was a recent book published entitled *Why Americans Hate the News Media and How It Matters*. It's written by a political scientist at Georgetown named Jonathan Ladd. And in this book he argues that objectivity in journalism thrived after World War Two only because of a unique combination of conditions. He talks about how there was great homogeneity in America's political culture at the time. He also talks about the relative homogeneity in news technologies, of course, we were dealing with broadcast and print. And also that there was very little economic disparity between the very wealthiest and the poorest in the country. And all of these factors created a relatively stable set of sociological conditions that made it easier for newsrooms to appeal to a mass audience, and therefore, it made it easier for them to concentrate on producing objective news. We witnessed over the last three or four decades an unraveling of these conditions, and this has also been accompanied by the seeming waning of the objectivity standard in professional journalism. Do you think that we can draw a consistent correlation between these factors—the political cultural, the economic factors that he listed - and changing press values?

I'm a little skeptical. For one thing, at least the data I know show a more complicated economic story in particular. A percentage of the population in poverty was higher in the '50s and early '60s than it has been at any time since at least up until the last ten years, and I'm not sure about the last ten years worth of data. Poverty declined in the '60s, '70s, and even Reagan-era '80s. And it may also be certainly—I believe it is now—sometime in the last ten to twenty years, the very, very rich have grown. But the main locus of poverty in the '50s and '60s was the elderly. And the liberal democrats could do more to remind people of this, but Medicare changed that, Medicare and some

extensions of social security, but particularly Medicare. Medicare, Medicaid made an incredible, large difference. So I think he's wrong about the '50s, the Ozzie and Harriet picture of the '50s, but a lot of people were very poor. Now there was a kind of political consensus there in the Congress, Democrats and Republicans (leaving civil rights aside) tended to work well together, and there was a so-called bi-partisan foreign policy, in particular. The Cold War's kind of shaped that and made foreign policy not a very important area of dissensus between the two parties. So that part is true. Did that affect newsrooms? Well, yes, it probably did, but my own view—the danger I hear in his argument—is to see that as some kind of golden age.

The news media got better after that period, and I have a recent piece with Katherine Fink. It's on my faculty page at Columbia, and it's not in print yet, but it's available online from *Journalism*. We did some comparisons in three newspapers, 1950s to early 2000s—what percentage of stories on the front page were simple, straightforward, objective, "who, what, where, when," hardly ever "why," in the early days. And that model, which I suppose is the AP objective model, was more than 90% of front page stories in the 1955 and 1967 sample, of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Milwaukee Journal*. And now it's about 50%, and it's been about 50% really since 1979 in our data. Slight variations, up and down, but not much. So the old style, kind of by-the-book objective news was unambitious. It was cookie-cutter. It did not give you context. We call the piece "The Rise of Contextual Journalism," which is more interpretive, more analytical, more open to criticism for bias, but can be done, I think, quite responsibly and gives the reader valuable background for putting a recent event in some kind of understandable context. That was very difficult to do when reading a newspaper in the 1950s or the first part of the 1960s. In retrospect, it was just not very interesting or ambitious journalism. And if you want to say that a particular political-economic structure helped support that kind of journalism, and gee, we've lost that and America's going to hell in a handbasket, well I don't like everything about the present, but I do like the journalism about the recent decades. It's actually a big improvement it seems to me, over a kind of rote understanding of objectivity had in effect produced.

It sounds to me as if you buy the political culture part of his argument a little more than you would the economic argument that he poses.

I would have to look at the book closely. A lot changed in the political culture through the '60s and '70s that it's hard for me to see as anything but progress. Women and minorities were more fully enfranchised—minorities had been viciously disenfranchised. That a lot became public, and at least relatively participatory that had been behind closed doors. My favorite example of that is from the beginning of the county's history until 1971, when members of the House of Representatives voted on amendments to bills before the House, they did so secretly. So incredibly important decisions that your representative from your congressional district voted on as late as 1970, you couldn't find out, unless that representative—there was no public record. He might tell you, but you probably wouldn't even know that a vote had taken place. That a vote had a taken place, and what the total was, that was public, but how your representative voted was not part of the record. And that changed with the Legislative

Reorganization Act of 1970, but in retrospect, that's almost unbelievable! What would be more fundamental to a democracy than knowing how the representative you elected voted? But you couldn't find out. Anyway, that's just one instance. There are many others like it. There was a consensus—that's true. But it wasn't a healthy one.

When I interviewed journalists in D.C. last year, several of the journalists said that they value objectivity, but when they described the concept, they described it using more abstract language. One even described it as a kind of phantom value in the newsroom—a kind of abstraction that they don't really practice, but which continues to have a lot of potent symbolic power within the newsroom. But when it came to actually describing the values that guide how they actually do the work that they do, they almost universally said that they strive for fairness as the ultimate goal in their reporting. Why do think that is?

That sounds very familiar. I've heard that myself. I think it's that they have become convinced from the various critiques in the past that objectivity is a phantom, that you can't get there. We all look at the world from a given standpoint. So what's the next best thing? Well, fairness sounds good, and there is a certain set of routines you can go about with fairness. If I criticize a Republican, I need to make a phone call to that Republican and ask for a response. That's fairness. And they use it except when they don't. Ellen Goodman had a column after 9/11, saying, "You know, this does seem to be one of those cases where we're not going to go to someone to make the case that flying airplanes into buildings is a good idea. On this, we don't need the other side." And there are all kinds of cases where that's true. You're not going to look for someone to, after you do this story on the Fourth of July, you don't look for the story from someone who says we shouldn't celebrate the Fourth of July. But on ordinary, everyday stories, you can kind of see a set of procedures that will get you to fairness. You can't find a set of procedures, because there aren't any, that will get you to objectivity as such. It's sort of a state of mind. It's a respect for facts. It's a degree of humility and self-criticism of your own points of view, trying to hold them to the side. It's skepticism about what any one of your sources says. It's a willingness to work hard, to deal with the likeliest shortcomings in what you've been able to gather. It's curiosity. It's a seriousness about inquiry. I doubt that if you did the interviews with your journalists and did the same interviews with biologists in a lab, I don't think you'd get a very different response. I think the scientist, unlike us non-scientist outsiders, would say, "Well, you know, there's a lot of judgment involved, and you need the right ethic." And sure, there are a few standard procedures that you have to get down right, but what science depends on is a set of attitudes more than a set of tools. I think that's what you would see.

When I was there, I also interviewed Tom Rosenstiel. At the time he was still at the Project for Excellence in Journalism. And his contention, of course, is that objectivity has been incorrectly defined to mean neutrality when he believes it really should be defined as a method of transparency. And I've also since spoken to Stephen Ward at Wisconsin at Madison, and he conceptualized what he calls "pragmatic objectivity," which is essentially a post-positivist take on traditional objectivity. From both of these interviews, what struck me is that it seems both of

these scholars really seek or really want to maintain the objectivity language, but wish to attach it to some type of new conceptualization of the term. Do you think that keeping the objectivity language is worth doing?

I have not thought about that, except that—I actually picked this up from a student in one of my classes who is very critical of substituting transparency for objectivity. And the argument he made, I thought, was quite a good one and worth repeating, which is that, he says, "Well, what do you mean 'transparency'? What we usually mean by that is 'Well, if I'm reporting on the last presidential campaign, am I myself planning to vote for Romney or for Obama?' And if I'm doing a story on the campaign, I should reveal that. I should say, 'I'm a lifelong Democrat, and I think that Romney is stupid and I'm going to report fairly, but at least you now know what bias I'm coming to this with.'" First, that concedes that your political preference is going to impact your reporting, and maybe it isn't. Maybe you're actually good at professionalism. Maybe you're actually good at bracketing your views, and maybe that's one of the things that has made you a good reporter. So why concede the whole thing? And besides, maybe you like Obama and you're a Mormon, say? Should you be mentioning your Mormonness rather than your Democraticness? It should lead you to vote for Romney. But maybe, instead of revealing you're a Democrat, well obviously you're going to be favoring in your story Obama. If you reveal also that you're a Mormon, maybe we now need to take you more seriously. But now should you mention that you're a Mormon and a Democrat and that you recently had an abortion? That might affect your views, too. And on and on, where do you stop? But I think the student, a journalist, was in particular was making the first part of that argument. He was unwilling to concede that he couldn't be a professional, and that the transparency motto gave up too much of professionalism in his view. I thought it was a good point.

I'd like to now go in a more macro direction in this discussion, if I may, about the state of journalism as an institution. When journalism professionalized in the early twentieth century, it in effect became a rationalized institution, with norms, with a system of discipline in the form of newsroom ethics policies, which of course early on stated objectivity, with formal educational programs, and also by establishing an exclusive body of knowledge that seemed to separate practitioners from non-practitioners. Now I would argue right now that these barriers between professionals and non-professionals have become somewhat deconstructed. I don't know if you agree with this premise, but do think these are signs that journalism is waning as an institution?

Well, I think the premise is correct. There is absolutely a blur between journalists and non-journalists. Parenthetically, there always has been, and if you look at literature in the sociology of professions, it will say journalists are pretty marginal. There isn't any, never has been, still isn't any requirement that you get any formal training in journalism. We've just had the second dean—probably all of the deans of the journalism school here, I don't know—but certainly the last several never took a journalism course, had no advanced degrees, and so on. I mean, you can't do that in medicine. You can't do that in law. You have to be licensed. No one's ever been

licensed to be a journalist in this country. So if a profession is one that controls to a reasonable degree access to that professional status, journalism's nowhere to be found there. So in that respect, it's always been vulnerable. Actors or musicians are similar. No one doubts that there is a professional discipline involved, but do you have to go to Juilliard? No. You might just study on your own and prove yourself to be a first-rate violinist. So does this mean now that major news institutions have been shedding journalists a mile a minute, and other people without any institutional affiliation can and do real journalism online, that journalism is fading or failing? Well, it's providing fewer people full-time paid employment than it did ten years ago, yes. And that's important. Are there compensations for the public? Are there other compensations for that? Yes, I think there are, and they're large: that you can let your fingers do the walking to a thousand news sources on whatever topic interests you. Do you want to know what they think in India about Bradley Manning's sentencing today? You just go online. You don't have to go to some research library or wait for your *Times of India* to arrive in three weeks. And I'm not talking about "you" as a consumer, but the journalist him or herself is in the same position, and can write better-sourced stories more easily than ever before. So we have fewer journalists but we have more news. We have fewer journalists, but we have more reliable news that we can double-check ourselves. It's a very different world. It's one in which important institutions of journalism are threatened. I absolutely agree with that. But is the whole field fading or failing? I wouldn't say that.

For my last question, I'd like to move to the university a little more. I would argue that the university system is based in many ways on the old industrial model. And here at the University of Colorado, we have for the last few years witnessed our stand-alone unit, the School of Journalism and Mass Communication here, being dismantled, and now the University is in the process of incorporating it into a much larger interdisciplinary college in which they're going to be merging the study of journalism with other forms of communication study on campus, also with some of the arts programs on campus, and also with technology studies as well. It seems to me that as journalism purportedly dismantles as an institution that the structure of some journalism education programs is also fragmenting and merging with other disciplines on campus. Could we perhaps be witnessing the future of journalism education in the United States?

The changes in journalism education, I find, but I'm fairly new to journalism education as such, they're incredibly rich, interesting, fascinating. In the six years I've been at Columbia Journalism School, it's become a more interesting place to be. It's a better intellectual mix than it once was, but I'm not a journalist. I'm an academic. I'm an intellectual. So it's not surprising that I would find the ferment inside the journalism schools now, the intellectual ferment, under the pressure of necessity, or what feels like necessity, to be very exciting. And it also seems to me that the problems in journalism are not very far from problems and reconsiderations in the rest of the university—that there are reorganizations around the way we do our research. I mean, the way an academic prepares a research paper, or prepares a lecture in a class is closer than it was to what journalists do in researching a story than it used to be. And that's because of

the way digital technologies make online research more readily available, more convenient, more easy to browse across databases and sources and whatnot than what it used to be. I mean, I think for a lot of very competent journalists in online research, I don't know how they're any different from sociologists or political scientists. I mean, there are differences in how they write, how long they have to write, the sort of questions they're asking. But in the way they then go about addressing those questions, and doing the research behind those questions, I think it gets closer and closer to what social scientists do. So I don't know the details of what's happening at Colorado, but the idea of bringing together several different disciplines that journalism is now becoming itself more like anyway, seems at least in theory —I don't know about the practice—like an experiment worth making.



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Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Washington, DC-based Journalists

Introductory Questions:

1. What interested you initially in journalism? Did you have a particular interest in Washington/politics or is this just where you ended up?
2. (Out of curiosity: Did you earn a journalism degree or degrees?)
3. How much of your professional expertise do you think you picked up in the classroom only, or do you think you learned almost everything on the job?

Practice-Focused Questions:

1. What changes have you seen in the Washington press since the entry of Internet newsgathering? Has it become more competitive specifically because of the Internet? How has it affected deadline pressures?
2. Do you feel that you can't do the job that you want to do because of economic pressures? In what ways?
3. Previous academic research has shown that a more dynamic media environment has opened up new platforms for public debate. Do you think that this has blurred the lines between news versus opinion in mainstream news production? How so?
4. There are many terms that journalists have used to describe the process of separating one's values from the news they're covering: objectivity, fairness, neutrality, etc.: What term or terms do you like to use to describe ethical journalism? Why?
5. Some of the journalists I've already spoken to have described to me aspects of their newsroom cultures that help them produce fairer, better quality work, like informal peer review. But I'd like to understand more about how individual reporters reflexively handle this process: What are some of the ways that you keep the objectivity/fairness of a story in check as you work?
6. How do you handle those moments when your personal views conflict heavily with what you're covering? Is there a specific situation you can describe?
7. (Are you familiar with this?) Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel in their seminal book on journalism ethics *The Elements of Journalism* (2007): Journalists have an obligation to exercise their personal consciousness, writing that "to become a journalist is an act of character." Do you see yourself as engaged in an act of character as a journalist? How so?

8. Certainly a lot has been written about the fragmentation of news audiences, especially when accounting for the growing diversity in news choices. How do you reconcile the fact that even if news organizations can produce truly objective reporting, that a significant number of readers/viewers may not accept the reporting as objective?
9. Arthur Brisbane's "Should the Times Be a Truth Vigilante?" incident: It seemed to me that Brisbane meant to ask his blog readers whether politicians' rhetoric should be challenged immediately within the text of the article. He asked, "Is it possible to be objective and fair when the reporter is choosing to correct one fact over another?" Did you agree with Brisbane's presumptions that such fact checking wasn't occurring, and if so, do you think it's possible to be objective and fair when choosing to correct certain facts over others?
10. Based on the negative reaction by a lot of readers and a few media academics, whose response seemed to be "Isn't that what you should be doing, anyway?" To you, does it seem that the public has a different set of expectations for how journalists should do their jobs than journalists themselves? Are the public and journalists perhaps in different places when it comes fact-checking politicians?

Theoretical Questions:

1. What policies does your newsroom have concerning the political neutrality of reporters? (What can you do/not do?) When you hear that term, what does that mean to you in terms of how you do your job?
2. Is it important to you as a reporter to be thought of as objective/neutral? Why or why not?
3. How about reporters from competing news organizations adhering to those guidelines – do you think that reporters generally remain objective/neutral?
4. There's been a lot of talk in academic circles that objectivity may have actually harmed American journalism by creating the "view from nowhere?" Do you agree with this criticism? Why or why not?
5. There's also been a lot of talk about the growth of "post-objective" journalism, which includes advocacy journalism or public journalism. Can you envision a form of professional journalism that isn't objective?
6. Is there anything else that you'd like to add on the topics we've discussed?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Educators Who Teach Journalism Ethics

Introductory Questions:

1. Which courses do you regularly teach? (On what topics do you focus your research?)
2. Do you teach any undergraduate or graduate level seminars? On what topics?
3. Do you also have a professional background in journalism? Doing what type of work? During which years? How do you believe your professional background enhances, or detracts from, how you instruct journalism students?

Theoretical Questions:

1. Do you believe that objectivity still has a role in modern journalism ethics? Has it never been/always been in your opinion?
2. Are there other values that you believe are more relevant to teaching contemporary journalism than objectivity? What are those, and how are they more relevant? Has this always been the case in your teaching, or has this changed over time?
3. Certainly, many media scholars, especially postmodern scholars, have criticized objective journalism for creating false balances in news stories. Do you agree with this assessment? How does your opinion impact how you teach students about this concept (if you do teach this concept)?
4. I recently interviewed about a dozen journalists who cover Washington. A common issue that arose is the pressure not as much to practice objective journalism but to be sure that both their readers and their sources see them as an objective reporter. Do you believe that teaching journalism ethics involves teaching some amount of impression management?
5. In a recent interview, and also in his book *The Elements of Journalism*, PEJ head Tom Rosenstiel explained that he believes that objectivity over time has been incorrectly defined in journalism practice to mean neutrality, when its true definition involves transparency, or being clear with readers about the process of conveying facts, and the analysis of those facts. Do you agree with Tom's analysis? Why or why not? Would a firmer definition for objectivity, and a more precise methodology, benefit journalism instruction?
6. Many of the journalists I interviewed also said that there is a place for "post-objective" journalism, or advocacy journalism in the public sphere. In your opinion, should advocacy or public journalism become a part of standard journalism education?

Practical Questions:

1. What proportion of your teaching would you classify as theoretical? Practical? Do you value one of these focuses more than the other? Why?
2. When covering ethical reporting, do you teach your students about journalistic objectivity, or at least introduce a critical evaluation of the concept? Why or why not? How do you define that term to your students?
3. Does any part of your instruction involve the issue of how, and to what extent, a journalist should be politically active (voting, etc.)? What is your personal philosophy on this topic? How do you convey this to your students?
4. Given that many newsrooms already prohibit their journalists from engaging in political activities, how much of a concern does eschewing his or her role as a citizen seem to be for your students?
5. A few of the journalists I interviewed also described a professional world in which their jobs flow more easily between hard news, news analysis, opinion, etc. This seems to have changed somewhat from the more prescribed days of professional journalism in which each journalist had one primary focus. Have you noticed such a change, and how has this impacted how you teach the levels of detached observation (objectivity) dictated by each of these news forms?
6. Also, platforms on which news gets generated have increased, between hard news reporting, to blogging, to documentaries, even to the use of the arts to convey information to citizens. Do you see these kinds of changes as impacting how professional journalists are trained? In what ways? What professional values do you believe will be maintained?

Appendix C: List of Informants and Interview Dates

David Allen	Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee	March 20, 2013
Alex Altman	Washington Correspondent, <i>Time</i>	July 27, 2012
Dan Balz	Chief Correspondent, <i>The Washington Post</i>	July 30, 2012
Fred Brown	Political Columnist, <i>The Denver Post</i>	November 28, 2012
	Instructor of Journalism Ethics, University of Denver	
Stephanie Condon	Political Reporter, CBS Interactive	July 27, 2012
Rebecca Corbett	Deputy Washington Bureau Chief, <i>The New York Times</i> (Now Senior Enterprise Editor, <i>The New York Times</i>)	July 30, 2012
Mike Doyle	National Correspondent, McClatchy Newspapers	July 31, 2012
Robert Jensen	Professor of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin	February 15, 2013
Jan Leach	Associate Professor, Kent State University	March 27, 2013
Kelly McBride	Senior Faculty, Ethics, Reporting and Writing The Poynter Institute	April 11, 2013
Doyle McManus	Washington Columnist, <i>Los Angeles Times</i>	July 25, 2012
Journalism Professor		March 13, 2013
Radio Reporter		July 26, 2012
Tom Rosenstiel	Founder/Director, Project for Excellence in Journalism (Now Executive Director, American Press Institute)	August 2, 2012
Michael Schudson	Professor of Journalism, Columbia University	August 22, 2013
Alex Seitz-Wald	Political Reporter, Salon.com	July 24, 2012
Paul Singer	Politics Editor, <i>USA Today</i>	July 26, 2012
Tim Vos	Associate Professor, University of Missouri	April 15, 2013
Stephen Ward	Professor and Director of Center for Journalism Ethics University of Wisconsin, Madison	April 14, 2013
John Watson	Associate Professor, American University	May 24, 2013
Roger Wilkison	Editor, Voice of America	November 30, 2012