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Assessing the Realism of Police Series: Audience Responses to the Russian Television Series Glukhar'

Arsenii Khitrov[1]

Abstract
This study builds upon and expands existing research on the perceived realism of media texts. I study debates that took place across several online forums about Russia's most famous police series *Glukhar'* at a time during which police legitimacy in many countries, including Russia, was in crisis. I address the questions of how media users assess the realism of *Glukhar'* online. I outline 13 means of realism evaluation that media users employ, offering a more systematic and detailed model than those proposed by existing studies. I argue that media users' concern with realism of fictional texts signals their longing for interpretations of the social issues which they think the text refers to. I conclude that media users indeed refer to the real police when they discuss the fictional police, and I identify four patterns in these discussions. I hypothesize that the openness of digital communication might motivate media users to evaluate a media text's realism because they might believe that collectively they will be able to do this accurately.

Keywords
audience, Internet discussion forum, police, television drama, police series, perceived realism

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From 2008 to 2011, when the television series *Glukhar'* was broadcast, the dominant media narrative about Russian police focused on crisis of legitimacy (Zernova, 2012; Khitrov, 2016). This crisis was characterized by an emphasis on corruption, and it triggered elaborate cultural responses in the arts, literature, and television during the 2000s and early 2010s. For example, from 2003 until 2006, an emblematic legal case that framed public perception of the police in Russia was the so-called "werewolves in uniform" affair, when several members of the Ministry of Emergency Situations and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (which oversees the police force in Russia) organized a group that systematically blackmailed and extorted small businesses and collaborated with criminal organizations. The name of the affair was coined by the Minister of Internal Affairs to refer to police officers who secretly engaged in criminal activity, similarly to werewolves from folklore stories who look like human beings during the day, but become half beasts during the night. This legal case, widely discussed in news media, became art in 2004, when celebrity author Viktor Pelevin wrote the fantasy novel *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf*. It featured an actual werewolf who worked as a police officer. The art group *Voina*, some of the members of which later formed *Pussy Riot*, challenged the Russian police and referred to police corruption in most of their performances. In general, the image of the police that dominated writers' and artists' interpretations at that time was that of a bad cop who transgresses the law and threatens society by their uncontrolled power.

The state responded to these cultural phenomena by launching police reforms in 2009, and one of the first measures included symbolic actions such as rebranding of the police, namely changing the old title of the organization "militsiia" to the more international-sounding "politsiia" and introducing a new uniform design. As the reform was gaining momentum, two widely reported events took place. In 2009, Police Major Denis Evsiukov killed two people, injured seven, and took hostages in a Moscow supermarket. Another police officer, Alexei Dymovskii, uploaded several videos on *YouTube* reporting cases of corruption within the police force. *Glukhar'* reenacted both events: One of the protagonists of the series who was experiencing mental health issues shot his gun at a crowd of people, very much like Evsukov had done; another protagonist recorded a video in which he criticized his superiors and uploaded the video on social media, similarly to what Dymovskii did.

Images of police corruption and violence in news media and popular culture signaled a crisis of police legitimacy. The images and subsequent police reform that aimed to address this crisis all formed the context in which the TV series *Glukhar'* appeared on Russian TV in 2008. Similar to how writers and artists depicted Russian police, the series reflects this crisis of legitimacy by depicting the police transgressing the law by giving and taking bribes, and sometimes by torturing and even killing people (Khitrov, 2016). It seems that this image resonated with audiences: Data gathered by *TNS Russia Media & Custom Research*

at that time shows that *Glukhar'* became the most popular program on Russian TV overall, the most popular TV series and the most popular program on the private TV channel *NTV* during its last week on air (Borodina, 2011a, 2011b; "Telereitingi: 'Glukhar'' pribavil i v reitinge, i v dole," 2010). Moreover, 2 months before the series finale, Rashid Nurgaliev, Russia's Interior Affairs Minister at the time, publicly stated that he liked *Glukhar'* and believed the series was the first of its kind to depict "our life and our psychology" ("Nurgaliev smotrit serial 'Glukhar'', schitaia ego samym ob"ektivnym," 2011).

Russian media enthusiastically covered the success of *Glukhar'*, publishing and airing reviews of the series and interviews with its creators and actors (Borodina, 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Gusiatinskii, 2010; "Telereitingi: 'Glukhar' pribavil I v Reitinge, I v Dole,' 2010). The dominant theme in the media was the overall realism of the series. While some critics condemned the series for depicting corruption (Sadkov, 2010), others noted that the presence of corruption in *Glukhar'* made the series more realistic (Kostiukevich, 2008) and its characters life-like and even humane. Many critics associated the major motifs of *Glukhar'* with the Soviet series *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed* (1979), in which the core moral dilemma was one between law and justice, and the two sometimes contradicted each other (Bogomolov, 2008). Some mainstream media journalists emphasized that *Glukhar'* was based on true stories, which they "verified" by quoting users from online forums frequented by police officers ("Serial 'Glukhar'': Maksim Averin Chestno Brosilsia S Balkona," 2008).

As Leishman and Mason (2003, pp. 67–86) and Reiner (2010, pp. 187–188, 194, 195) show, police transgressions of the law is a widespread motif in contemporary police TV series worldwide. These same scholars use typologies of law enforcement narratives to show that these series differ according to the degree of the transgressions and their justifications for the transgressions. While *Glukhar'* reproduces some features of what Reiner calls the "vigilante" type of law enforcement narrative, in which "the street-wise cop, understanding the vicious nature of criminals, can deal effectively with them, defying any restraints posed by legal or departmental rules and regulations" (p. 194), the series does not fall neatly into this or any one of his generic categories. As Khitrov (2016) has shown, the cultural and historical contexts in which *Glukhar'* emerged are helpful for understanding the series. But did the audiences themselves make the connection between the series and its context, between the fictional police and the real police, and if yes, then how? How does the audience's evaluation of the series resonate with concerns about police violence, corruption, and symbolic power expressed through news media and cultural products of the time, if at all? In order to answer the first question, I look at how media users assess the series' realism. I believe that it is through the assessment of a fictional media text's realism that media users establish overall connections between text and reality and carry out the broader discursive

work of making sense of social reality. In other words, my theoretical claim is that when media users assess a fictional media text's realism, they make sense of the social reality which they believe this text refers to. By "realism assessment," I mean media users' statements about the criteria they use to evaluate a text's realism or nonrealism. The second question can be answered by looking at whether media users discuss the real police and issues related to real-life policing of that time when they talk about the fictional police, and if yes, what their opinions are. These are the questions I address in this study. In order to answer them, I will look to the social media activities of media users who discuss the series online.

Perceptions of TV Realism

To analyze how viewers of *Glukhar'* assess the series' realism, I draw from studies of perceived realism, primarily from the work of Alice Hall (2003). Hall develops a typology of definitions of realism as a synthesis of existing theoretical definitions and definitions which the participants of her study constructed. She distinguishes six judgments on "what it means to say that something was realistic" (Hall, 2003, p. 629): plausibility, typicality, factuality, emotional involvement, narrative consistency, and perceptual persuasiveness. She calls them conceptualizations, criteria, markers or conceptions of realism, and realism factors (Hall, 2003, pp. 624, 632, 635, 639). Hall argues that people often combine these definitions. In other words, "audiences' conceptualizations of media realism are multidimensional" (Hall, 2003, p. 638).

Hall (2003) defines plausibility as something that could happen in real life, which has "the potential to occur in the real world" (p. 629). The opposite, or something implausible, would be something that would not happen in real life. Typicality is a specification of plausibility: Being typical means being plausible and common, "representative of a larger population" (Hall, 2003, p. 632). A text that is considered to be realistic because of its factuality is a text that "accurately represented a specific, real-world event or person" (Hall, 2003, p. 633). Involvement means "the potential for the audience to become involved with or to relate to media characters" (Hall, 2003, p. 635). Narrative consistency is at play when a media text "is internally coherent, that doesn't contradict itself, and leaves nothing jarringly unexplained" (Hall, 2003, p. 639). Finally, perceptual persuasiveness is "the degree to which a text creates a compelling visual illusion, independent of the degree to which the content of the text may relate to real-world experience" (Hall, 2003, p. 637).

There is also a second important aspect of judgments about media realism which Hall mentions, but does not develop systematically. This is what she calls "[t]he means through which the participants evaluated the plausibility of media representations" (Hall, 2003, p. 631) or, in other words, the basis for comparison of media texts with reality (Hall, 2003, p. 634). While definitions of realism

answer the question of what realism is, the means of evaluation answer the question of why a text is realistic or unrealistic. These means of evaluation are "plot events" (Hall, 2003, p. 630), "the way the characters spoke" (Hall, 2003, p. 630), "the characters' standard of living" (Hall, 2003, p. 630), "relationship patterns" (Hall, 2003, p. 631), "cultural knowledge, information from other people" (Hall, 2003, p. 631), "information from other texts" (Hall, 2003, p. 631), "personal experience" (Hall, 2003, p. 631), and "aspects of the production process" (Hall, 2003, p. 634). Hall (2003) outlines some correlations between definitions of realism and means of realism evaluation: "Typicality and plausibility tended to be based on personal experience with the world, whereas factuality judgments tended to draw on audiences' understandings of production processes and on knowledge gleaned from other texts." (p. 639). In this article, I develop a systematic typology of the means of evaluation, thus advancing Hall's model. Together, definitions of realism and means of its evaluation form a matrix of categories which can be used in further studies of media users' interpretation of fictional media texts' realism. By implication, my typology would be helpful for studies of how media users connect fictional media texts and their contexts, and how they make sense of the contexts. In this article, I do not bring definitions of realism and criteria of realism together into a matrix. Rather, my task is to reveal the most common means of realism evaluation only. Definitions of realism developed by Hall and means of realism evaluation proposed in my study can be used together in further studies. Last, to further this study and the work of Hall, it would be helpful to also discuss measurements of the degree of realism. All these elements together would allow a researcher to answer the following three questions: How do media users define realism? Why do they think that a text is realistic or unrealistic? And, finally, how realistic or unrealistic is a given text?

Data and Methods of Analysis

I gathered data in the following stages. First, I selected the most relevant[1] and the most visited[2] websites where *Glukhar'* was discussed in detail at the time of data collection (August–September 2014). I came up with a selection of six websites: one dedicated to cinema and theater news with a forum where fans discuss everything related to films and plays (*kino-teatr.ru*); one algorithm-based recommendation system where users can post reviews on cultural products they like and the system recommends cultural products they might like based on their past preferences (*imhonet.ru*); one website which publishes materials about pregnancy, children, family, with a large forum (*forumok.ru*); one forum where Russian police officers discuss various matters (*police-russia.com*), one similar Ukrainian police forum (*police-ua.com*); and one forum dedicated to popular psychology (*psycheforum.ru*).

Second, I selected the most relevant and longest forum threads from each of these websites. The resulting data set comprised 1,323,802 words. I took the longest thread from each website. From each of the resulting six threads, I chose the first 30 entries, 30 entries from the middle, and the last 30 entries. Additionally, I took into consideration one whole thread from *kino-teatr.ru,* containing 280 entries. I did this with the aim of carrying out in-depth analysis of conversations longer than those in 30-message–long extracts, in order to be able to identify meanings that might be overlooked otherwise. Thus, the final sample included 90 entries from each of the six threads, which comprised 540 entries, and the entire seventh thread, that included 280 entries. This amounts to 820 entries in total. The earliest entry in my sample was published on December 4, 2008, and the last one was published on April 14, 2014.

Methodologically, I drew from content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Saldaña, 2009) with elements of discourse analysis. I coded the material in several rounds. My coding unit was the entry; the context unit was the discussion. The whole forum thread could coincide with the discussion or be a collection of several discussions. Coding of entries was exhaustive, but not mutually exclusive.

It is worth mentioning that one of the websites I drew from is built as a database with the possibility to discuss items (*imhonet.ru*), and three contained nothing except for forums (*police-russia.com*, *police-ua.com*, *psycheforum.ru*). Two of the websites regularly publish articles, contain reference materials, and have forums (*forumok.ru* and *kino-teatr.ru*). All websites discussed here except for *imhonet.ru* continued to function at the moment of editing this article (March 2018), but they have the look and functionality of websites before the proliferation of social media. I found discussions about *Glukhar'* on social network sites such as Facebook and the popular Russian social network VK, but they were neither detailed nor long.

All forum content is publicly accessible without registration or permission. I did not inform the website owners or their users about my research because I did not participate in discussions and did not interact with users in any other way. Most users went by screen names, and even though in some cases they had individual profiles, I did not consult these profiles, and focused only on statements, without taking into account which users wrote what type of statement (the forums I studied hide user statuses and their identities if users wish). I was interested in discursive patterns appearing in discussions, and not in individuals.

Only *kino-teatr.ru* out of six websites allows now personalization of accounts through Facebook, VK, and *mail.ru*, but it was not evident that this was done at the time of data collection. *Imhonet.ru* allowed this type of personalization until its closure in 2017. The disassociation of forum profiles from social media profiles might theoretically give users more freedom in experimenting with their online personalities compared to online platforms which allow users to link their profiles to social media. Additionally, none of the forums had any

limitations on the length of posts, and some users used this to express their ideas in detail. All six forums allow a chronological sequence of posts and not trees of discussions. Even though discussions between particular users took place, they were not separate from the other posts, allowing for viewing by anyone, even those who would have preferred not to see everything but to follow only one discussion. Theoretically, this feature makes discussions more inclusive.

The two police-frequented forums I analyze do not make it explicit that their users were members of the police, but I can conclude nonetheless that most of the users were police officers because they indicated their affiliation with the police by referring to details of their investigations, decisions made by their superiors, and used technical and professional jargon. Some participants of the discussions made clear that they are not members of the police, and the dialectic of the insider/outsider positions was a subject of conversation.

The thematic diversity of my selected websites makes it difficult to argue that the content I study is generated by fans only. There is only one platform which can be qualified a platform of fans (*kino-teart.ru*), because it is thematically focused on works of cinema, television, and theatee. Other communities I study primarily emerged around the general topic of the website or the forum, and their interest in the series was only secondary. There were no additional specific features that could make discussions on some forums significantly different from discussions on other forums within my sample.

Findings

In 518 entries of 820, users discussed either the series only, focusing on its televisual qualities or its actors, without any references to realism, or issues related neither to the series nor to real-world policing. In 302 entries, users assessed the realism of the series or talked about fictional policing in relation to real-world policing. The synthesis that I propose below is the result of my analysis of these 302 entries only. I divide my findings in two parts: In the first part, I discuss means of realism evaluation, and in the second part, I outline patterns in discussions about the real-life police. The first part answers my first question about bases for comparison between the series and what media users see as reality which they rely on when assessing realism of *Glukhar'*. The second part answers my second question of whether media users talk about the real-life policing.

Means of Realism Evaluation

Patterns of assessment discussed later were similar across all six platforms. I have found examples of all the definitions of realism which Hall formulated, as well as of some of the means of realism evaluation she mentions. However, I have identified some additional means of evaluation that transcend Hall's

study, and I present them later. This classification adds to Hall's findings and makes her model more detailed, nuanced, and consistent. I have identified 13 means of realism evaluation which I have grouped into four main categories.

These means of evaluation are not mutually exclusive, which implies that I sometimes found two or more means mentioned in one entry. Also, it is important to emphasize that different users could have used the same means for opposite purposes: to argue that the series is realistic, as well as to contest its realism. Overall, in 79 entries, media users stated clearly that the series is realistic, and in 63 entries they said it was not. I could not definitively attribute the remaining 160 entries to either of these groups, for even though these messages related the series to reality, they did not evaluate it in terms of how realistic it was.

In the subsequent sections, I will analyze in greater detail the 13 means of evaluation, grouped into four main categories. I rename Hall's category of "personal experience" into *first-hand experience* and split it into four subcategories, which include personal and almost personal experiences. I use her category of *other texts,* but I split it into three subcategories. I generalize several of her categories that relate to the series qualities into the broader idea of *the intrinsic qualities of the series*. I did not find examples of her categories of "the way the characters spoke" (Hall, 2003, p. 630), "the characters' standard of living" (Hall, 2003, p. 630), and "relationship patterns" (Hall, 2003, p. 631), which can be grouped under the category of intrinsic qualities, and found in other media users' discussions. I split her category of "cultural knowledge, information from other people" (Hall, 2003, p. 631) into two categories, *opinions received from police officers,* which I attribute to the category of "first-hand experience," and to a separate category of *general sources of knowledge*.

First-hand experience. As I analyzed two forums created especially for and perhaps by the members of the police, I came across many entries in which users referred to their *personal experience of being police officers*. A representative evaluation of the series' realism on the basis of direct experience would sound like this: "in my previous life I spent two years as an investigator in the city police force. My opinion of the series is this: never have I seen any investigators like Glukharev." Overall, only 10% of utterances from the Ukrainian forum and 3.33% from the Russian forum stated that the series was realistic, and 27.78% on the Ukrainian forum and 13.33% on the Russian forum stated it was not. In some cases, users did not disclose whether they worked for the police, but they regarded this experience as the only legitimate foundation for the evaluation of the series as realistic or unrealistic: "You wrote that *Glukhar'* is simply ridiculous. But are you an employee of the police force?"; "if you are a police officer yourself, then I would believe you."

Interestingly, users of the police forums reported that some heads of local Russian police stations started to recommend to their subordinates to watch the

series and as a set of instructions for their professional activities. These reports emerged after the Minister of Internal Affairs Nurgaliev said in 2011 that the series was objective.

Users who were not police officers, but who had *direct experience of interacting with the police* regarded this experience as the basis for evaluating the plausibility of the series: "as for the truth of life in this film, then I can't judge any of that, since I luckily never had that much to do with the police."

A separate group of bases for comparison is composed of *references to opinions heard from police officers*, either from users' friends working at the police, or from users who said they were police officers: "Real police officers comment on the pages of the actors from *Glukhar'*, including people from the Criminal Investigation Department, and their reactions are all very positive."; "My police friends just hate it." In some complex entries, one can see how users try to reconcile gripping media narratives about police corruption with their experiences of being acquainted with police officers:

> If cinematographers film a series about Evsiukov [a police officer who massacred people in a Russian supermarket in 2009] or about how cops beat the people they detain half to death at the police department, take bribes, then I would believe it (even though I don't overgeneralize, since my friends who work for the police are good people).

They are not ready to decline one interpretation in favor of another; instead, they retain both. In this case, the user reconciles two contradictory bases for comparison by the statement that they do not overgeneralize. In this group of entries, there were condemnations of the series producers for their ignorance of how police officers really work, as well as condemnations of the supposed absence of professional police consultants in the series.

When people had no personal experience of interaction with the police, but still espoused direct experience as a criterion for judging how realistic the series was, they based their evaluations on *analogies drawn from personal experience*. They extrapolated their assessments from familiar experiences to the unknown domain of police work, for instance, from experience with the Russian army and its televisual images to the realities of the Russian police and its portrayals in *Glukhar'*.

Posts I collected under this type of means of evaluation contain many references to the historical context of policing in Russia at that time. Thus, media users do not see policing as an abstract and stable entity, but rather as a very concrete, historically and geographically specific and variable practice. In other words, they do not compare the series with abstract policing, but compare it rather with specific examples of policing. This observation leads me to formulate the following hypothesis: The study of what media users say about fictional police could be a window to their attitudes, especially subtle and implicit

attitudes, toward the police and policing. The analysis that would stem from this hypothesis would bring to the surface specific content of the symbolic power of the police, especially elements that are grounded in popular culture and dominant myths about the police.

Other texts. The next group of evaluation means comprises references to mediated factual and fictional images. Users referred to two figures from *the factual media* most often: two infamous police officers, Denis Evsiukov, who killed civilians in a Moscow supermarket, and Alexei Dymovskii, who posted a video on *YouTube* in which he revealed certain facts relating to police corruption. Users relying on media stories regarded these officers as markers of reality, and they also viewed *Glukhar'* as "an attempt to explain" real-life events that involve these officers.

Users also mentioned *other television programs* (e.g., the famous Russian comedy series *Nasha Rasha*) as TV depictions of extremely fictional scenarios, or as TV depictions of reality (e.g., documentaries), and these were used as markers to which *Glukhar'* could be compared.

References to *other fictional police series and crime movies* were particularly popular in the corpus. In many entries, users claimed the series was plausible because it was not similar to "fairy tales" and did not portray "supermen," "machismo," and "Western *ramboes*," because it "drastically differs from others of its kind. It has life-like humour, life-like situations." Users also mentioned some Soviet, European, and American movies, but mostly they compared *Glukhar'* to contemporary Russian series: "Films are less convincing when they depict cops driving expensive cars, living in great apartments, smoking expensive cigarettes . . . but also complaining about small salaries, and judging by the story they're apparently really honest goody two-shoes." This distrust in the image of the honest police officer is further developed by another user who expresses his anger toward images in American and European series (I've had it with all these supermen copied from the West) and legitimizes corruption and theft in real world:

> Cops are also people. They have to feed their families, they also want to eat good food. And tell me—here's what I don't understand: Everyone talks about bribes and stealing . . . but we ALL steal when we can—and oligarch goes for millions, a tractor driver takes some fuel at the kolkhoz [collective farm]. Now tell me, if you could, would you withhold from stealing?

An omnipresent trend throughout the corpus was for users to justify corruption by linking the series to real-world social problems and common practices.

Code co-occurrence analysis (see Table 2) revealed that in 19 cases, users evaluated the series as realistic on the basis of its difference from other series, while they evaluated it as unrealistic on the same basis only in two cases.

This pattern supports Hall's (2003) claim that "[t]he perceived factuality of a specific text depended upon the degree to which it is seen to agree with representations in previously encountered texts." (p. 634).

It could be added here that the agreement or disagreement between texts is the agreement or disagreement between different codes: codes of different media platforms (*YouTube* vs. television), genre codes (drama vs. comedy), and cultural codes ("Western *ramboes*" vs. police officers from Soviet films). The insertion of one media platform into another, as in the case of the reenacting of Dymovskii's *YouTube* videos in *Glukhar'*, seems to reinforce *Glukhar'*'s realism because the *YouTube* videos made by Dymovskii are seen as "real."

Intrinsic qualities of the series. The next group of means of evaluating realism includes intrinsic qualities of the series. The first means is *the series plot and overall coherence*. Users paid attention to the inconsistency between what the characters say and what they do:

> In the film, they repeat the same thing a hundred times—about how many cases each person has to work on. Then how do the main characters spend all day driving around and running their own personal errands? Who is dealing with the whole pile of cases they have?

The actors' play is another intrinsic means of evaluation: One media user who criticizes the unconvincing acting of a major character also comments on the series promotion logo, which reads "The first believable series," in the following manner: "Can I please pick what series to believe myself?" Another media user relies on the character's integrity to assess the authenticity of the series: "Every character is a whole world based on today's reality!" References to *moral flaws of the characters* make up the last criterion in this category. Users say the series depicts common people, with their merits and flaws, and these flaws make the series believable or unbelievable.

In seven instances, users referred to *aspects of the production process*. They mostly criticized the creators of the series for the fact that consultants did a bad job. This point suggests that in case a TV series is seen as realistic, credited consultants might reinforce the series' realism in the eyes of media users, because they will be able attribute realism to the contribution of consultants. At the same time, realism of a series might strengthen a consultant's symbolic power, and the absence of realism might undermine it.

General sources of knowledge. The last group of means of evaluation is composed of references to general sources of knowledge, such as "*life*," "*reality*," "*truth*," and "*common knowledge*" (things that "everybody knows"): "that's just how it happens in life"; "I'm watching it a second time and it's as if I'm watching the chronicles of someone's life"; "everybody knows how cops breach the law, that's

why they think the series is realistic.” Code co-occurrence analysis (see Table 2) has shown that users evaluated the series as plausible on the basis of its relation to life, reality, or truth in 27 cases, while they evaluated the series as not plausible on the same basis in 11 cases.

This means of evaluation is the least specific. It could be described as a condensation of some of the previously mentioned means of evaluation (personal experience, stories heard from others, and received from the media), as well as a hypothetical vision of what others might be thinking. Media users tend not to approach it analytically, not to split it into elements, but rather to treat it holistically and as something self-evident, based on a priori knowledge.

General remarks. This study has demonstrated that media users drew connections between *Glukhar'* and its context by assessing the series' realism. They assessed the realism of the show using several means of evaluation, which I analysed earlier. Four means of evaluation were particularly popular among users in my data sample: “life,” “reality,” and “truth” (41 occurrences); references to other police series and crime movies (23 occurrences); the personal experience of being an officer (15 occurrences); and actors' play (10 occurrences; see Table 1). The second most popular means of evaluation is the comparison of series with other television series. More broadly, references to general, unspecified, common sense sources of knowledge (45 instances) outnumber references to first-hand experience (30 instances). Co-occurrence analysis has shown that the series are seen as realistic when they are compared with other mediated images or with preconceived ideas about reality in general (see Table 2). Yet it is important to

Table 1. Means of Evaluation and Number of Occurrences.

Groups of means of evaluation and number of occurrences	Means of evaluation and number of occurrences
First-hand experience, 30	Personal, first-hand experience of being a police officer, 15
	First-hand experience of interacting with the police, 3
	Opinions received from police officers, either police-friends, or from the Internet, 9
	Analogy drawn from personal experience, 3
Other texts, 27	Facts from the media, 2
	Other television programs, 2
	Other fictional police series and crime movies, 23
The series' intrinsic qualities, 33	The series' plot and overall coherence, 8
	The actors' play, 10
	Moral flaws of the characters, 8
	Aspects of the production process, 7
General sources of knowledge, 45	“Life,” “reality,” and “truth,” 41
	Common knowledge, 4

Table 2. Co-Occurrence Analysis, Number of Co-Occurrences.

	Unrealistic	Realistic	Uncertain		Unrealistic	Realistic	Uncertain
Personal, first-hand experience of being a police officer	8	5	1	References to first-hand experience	14	12	1
First-hand experience of interacting with the police	1	2	0				
Opinions received from police officers, either police-friends, or from the Internet	4	3	0				
Analogy drawn from personal experience	1	2	0				
Facts from the media	0	1	0	References to the media	9	22	4
Other television programs	2	0	2				
Other fictional police series and crime movies	2	19	0				
Aspects of the production process	5	2	2				
The show's plot and overall coherence	5	2	0	The series' intrinsic qualities	8	16	0
The actors' play	2	8	0				
Moral flaws of the characters	1	6	0				
"Life," "reality," and "truth"	11	27	0	General sources of knowledge	13	30	0
Common knowledge	2	3	0				

emphasize that this data is by no means statistically representative, because my sample contained two police forums where references to first-hand experiences prevailed, and a great number of posts from one forum which was entirely dedicated to films and TV series.

Media users I encountered in this study were employing definitions of realism identified by Hall. Hall (2003) argued that "[t]ypicality and plausibility tended to be based on personal experience with the world, whereas factuality judgments tended to draw on audiences' understandings of production processes and on knowledge gleaned from other texts" (p. 639). In my sample, factuality tended to be based on personal experience, and typicality and plausibility tended to be based on other fictional police series and crime movies, as well as on "*life*," "*reality*," *and* "*truth*". The foundation for the former correlation is that my data included discussions from police forums, in which users employed personal experience as the main means of factual evaluation.

This study shows that the authenticity of real-life events might be judged against not only fictional, but also factual representations. Users are ready to judge the realism of the series even if their knowledge of the "reality" depicted in the series is fragmented or unfounded. Moreover, they can apply several means of evaluation simultaneously, and their resulting assessments might be contradictory, yet they might not see the contradictions as problematic. Interestingly, not all attempts to judge the realism of the series contained a clear assessment of the series as either realistic or unrealistic. Moreover, some comments contained qualifications of the series as simultaneously realistic and unrealistic. Some users assessed the series as realistic or unrealistic without pointing out at any bases of their evaluation. For this reason, I separate the table on means of evaluation (Table 1) from the table depicting co-occurrence analysis (Table 2). Users would not always draw a distinct line between different means of evaluation. For example, when they referred to issues related to the real-world police, they referred to the fictional series as a source of factual information. Some of them did not discern fictional policing from real-world policing at all. They would condemn the police in general, without clearly saying whether they were talking about the series characters, the real-life police, or both. Some participants made contradictory and paradoxical statements that showed that their expectations of the police, including those based on the series, contradicted their real-life experiences. For instance, one user wrote that they would believe the series if the filmmakers had shown police officers transgressing the law in extreme ways. Then the same media user referred to their personal knowledge of some police officers whom they described as "decent people." These users neither sought to resolve these contradictions, nor did they view them as problematic, if they noticed these contradictions at all. My analysis also shows that opinions about the verisimilitude of the series do not correlate with positive or negative evaluations of the series. In general, the contradictory interpretations of realism I found in the forum threads may point to the fact that simply

posing a question about realism is more important for users than finding a well-founded answer to whether or not something is realistic.

This study adds to scepticism regarding simplistic understandings of media effects (Lam, 2014, pp. 28–29) by showing that when users talk about the series, they do not separate information from the series and information from outside the series, so it becomes impossible to hold constant nontelevisual experiences and to examine the televisual effect separately. For studies of attitudes toward the police, this research implies that users blur reality and fiction in a system where one informs perceptions of the other, and vice versa. Therefore, it is impossible to identify pure culturally induced or pure real-world–induced opinions.

Patterns in Discussions About Real-Life Police

In answering the second question of this study, I found that users indeed discuss real-life police and related issues when they discuss the fictional police. I identified four recurrent motifs in these discussions. All of them resonate very well with broader debates in media and culture about the crisis of police legitimacy in Russia in the 2000s and 2010s. Thus, it is possible to confirm my initial theoretical claim that discussions of a media text's realism also reflect discussions of broader social issues. In many cases, users were unclear as to whether they were talking about the series depicting how things should be, or how they are in practice, but, in any case, they were embedding the series in the national context of the time.

Some users *criticized the existing system of law enforcement*. They referred to the police reform, mostly indirectly, mentioning the old term "militsiia" and the new term "politsiia" together in one sentence, and subtly dismissed the reform as a mere cosmetic measure based on simply renaming the organization. In several cases, users went as far as to condemn the police officers by calling them "criminals." Police forum users criticized the Minister of Internal Affairs for his approval of *Glukhar'* and for his public criticism of some ranks within the police, such as duty officers (which the Minister expressed in public interviews discussed on the forum): "The Minister has no idea about police work."

In other cases, users *justified police corruption and violence*: "I also used to have some moral principles, but later I realized that principles don't put food on the table, and that you can't survive on just your salary . . ."; "Cops are also people. They have to feed their families, they also want to eat good food. <. . . > we ALL steal when we can—and oligarch goes for millions, a tractor driver takes some fuel at the kolkhoz [collective farm]. Now tell me, if you could, would you withhold from stealing?" Some justifications of corruption were made through the redefinition of the concept: "do not mistake signs of gratitude for a bribe."

Many discussions about the realism of the series also included reflections about the influence of the series over its viewers, especially over their morals. Users interpreted this influence as unintentional or intentional, negative or positive. I summarize two arguments users offered to state that the influence was negative as follows.

Some users argued that *the series unintentionally creates a negative image of the police and establishes the immoral norm for the people and members of the police*: "It is because of bastards like Karpov [a *Glukhar"*s protagonist who is brutal and kills people] that people in Russia are afraid of cops more than they are of criminals," "It is after films like this people like Evsiukov [a real police officer who killed civilians and discussed in the beginning of the article] emerge." They also discussed how the series legitimized police brutality and corruption by depicting corrupt officers as nice people.

Other users suspected that there is a conspiracy behind the series and that *the series is an intentional manipulation of public opinion by unknown forces*. Users supposed there could be several possible goals such a campaign could try to accomplish: to make people accept the police in their present imperfect state, to make Evsiukov less popular and thus to reduce the possibility of the repetition of killings by the police, to justify "sadism" of the police, and to "explain" real-life events related to police misbehavior.

Overall, I discovered no significant correlation between means of evaluation and these patterns. Yet, the discussions about social and political contexts of policing in Russia and the discussions about realism of the series were tightly intertwined.

Discussion

Media users' concern with the realism of the police series which this article documents might be a persistent and widespread reaction to any media text or it might be specific to the period of the police's legitimacy crisis, to the moment of intense transformation of generic conventions of police television series, or to broader transformations of the media. What this article shows is that in this particular case, the discussion about *Glukhar"*s realism is also a discussion of the social issues which the text seems to be referring to, no matter what verdict regarding the text's realism media users would give. Fictional and nonfictional motifs are intertwined. Within the present research design and data, it is impossible to establish casual relationships between the realism assessment of fictional images and media users' interest in the interpretation of the social world. We can only conclude that these two practices correlate. Yet it is possible to suppose that media users employ fictional texts as tools to make sense of social reality, and use information about real-life contexts as tools to interpret the fictional text. Fictional media texts used as interpretative tools for social and political issues might be competing with investigative

journalism, explanatory videos, or opinion sections in traditional news media. A similar phenomenon can be found in the history of European and Northern American realist literature and art of the 19th and 20th centuries, when the public saw representations of social conditions as their critique. Today, media users' expectation or inclination to treat fictional texts as explanations of social issues might be strengthened if they know that content consultants participated in the production of those texts. Media producers and distributors could use consultants' participation as a marketing tool. Distributors of *Glukhar'* used the reference to its verisimilitude as a marketing strategy, but without mentioning consultants. Both, producers and media users might reinforce or weaken the demand and supply of realism, which might change the way media texts are produced, or, in Hall's (2009) words, "the ways audiences think about media realism in general" (p. 434). In other words, realism as ideology could be a powerful factor in the production and reading of a text.

Another perspective on the issue of realism could take into account the affordabilities of media platforms which host such discussions. Media users might be keen to assess the realism of any media image, regardless of its topic, its social and political context, or its genre, if they are able to discuss the image on open digital platforms. My analysis allows me to tentatively hypothesize that in mediated communication that is potentially open to anyone, media users are keen to raise the issue of realism of fictional images. A reason for this could be media users' hope that they will receive informed or expert assessments of the realism of an image, or that a large number of people are unlikely to fail in their analysis and the collective voice can be trusted. The openness of this type of communication to any participant could reinforce this hope. Media users might see open collective assessment as a more reliable procedure compared to private assessment. Since new media offer many possibilities to organize this collective work, the issue of realism might be one of the dominant issues in discussions on open media platforms. As examples of Wikipedia or Bellingcat have proven, new media are capable of engaging both experts and the public into procedures of assessing the reliability of media texts. These procedures could be applied not only to factual images, but also to fictional stories that have at least some resemblance to their referents.

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Notes

1. I chose relevant websites from the top 10 websites in search results by *Google* and *Yandex* search engines.
2. I chose relevant websites from the top 10 most visited websites dedicated to television series and cinema from Internet rankings *Liveinternet.ru* and *Top100.rambler.ru*.

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Constructing Lumbersexuality: Marketing an Emergent Masculine Taste Regime

Mark A. Rademacher[1] and Casey R. Kelly[2]

Abstract
This article examines the online retailer Huckberry.com as a singular, centralized authority responsible for marketing "lumbersexuality" as an emergent, gender-normative taste regime. As an evolution of the devalued hipster marketplace myth, analysis reveals Huckberry promotes an adaptable taste regime to its young, educated, urban, White male clientele that unites goods, meanings, and practices across multiple fields of consumption that reconnect indie consumption and taste with a fantasy of "authentic" masculinity. We argue that Huckberry offers men semiotic resources that merge the urban with the outdoors in a way that enables the enactment of a fraught though seemingly durable masculine identity project that weaves the extraordinary and mythological into the quotidian. Implications of this gendered taste regime are discussed in relationship to the ways in which lumbersexuality is mobilized as a more authentically masculine alternative to the ironic stance of hipsterism and the supposed phoniness of mass culture.

Keywords
masculinity, lumbersexual, taste regime, gender, identity

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> He looks like a hardened outdoorsman but his flannel feels soft to the touch. He will open your beer with an omni-present Buck knife. He is a master of the retro Instagram filter. His flannel is coated with a waterproof DWR coating. His laid back [sic] style has been honed with more effort than he would like you to know. (Puzak, 2014, para. 12)

The lumbersexual has emerged as "the next big thing" in masculinity since first appearing on urban streets in the early 2000s, coexisting and, at times, overshadowing previous archetypes such as the metrosexual and hipster as the focus of media coverage. Interest in lumbersexuals, for instance, has generated numerous think pieces (e.g., Brown, 2014; Compton & Bridges, 2015; Nicks, 2014), flippant "listicles" like "13 Reasons You Should Be Dating a Lumbersexual Right Now" (Treacher, 2015), and online dating sites that exist solely to connect lumbersexuals with the women attracted to them (e.g., Lumbermatch.com, Bearddate.com, Bristlr.com). Yet, media coverage of this emergent masculinity is not just a curiosity; it introduces and disseminates the lumbersexual taste regime to a mass audience. As such, lumbersexuality circulates as a taste regime—"a discursively constructed normative system that orchestrates the aesthetics of practice in a culture of consumption" (Arsel & Bean, 2013, p. 900)—that provides men with the semiotic resources they require to perform this emergent gendered identity project.

We conceptualize the rise of the lumbersexual as a gendered evolution of the iconic hipster archetype, which itself has been co-opted and repackaged by the marketplace as a "trivializing stereotype that threatens the value of [consumers'] identity investments in the indie field of consumption" (Arsel & Thompson, 2011, p. 798). In its ideal form, hipsters represent an antiestablishment consumer persona that is "formed around the oppositional consumption practices" (McCracken, 2010, p. 4). For instance, ideal hipsters favor consumption of "authentic product constellations and experiences distributed through small-scale and often localized channels" (Cronin, McCarthy, & Collins, 2014, p. 7), such as independent (indie) and vintage goods as a mode of cultural resistance (Goulding & Saren, 2009). However, as Arsel and Thompson (2011) document, whenever a lifestyle is trivialized by a devalued marketplace myth, members of the lifestyle may engage in demythologization practices to protect their field-dependent cultural capital and identities. Rather than discarding the hipster identity outright, we take the position that lumbersexuality emerges as a response to the devalued marketplace myth, resulting in a more nuanced and gendered enactment of the hipster lifestyle that seeks to reground consumption in practices that signify genuine independence from mass culture (Meamber, 2015).

Unlike the more gender-neutral hipster, lumbersexuality represents an explicitly gendered identity project (Compton & Bridges, 2015). Embraced by a group of mostly White, young, middle- to upper-middle-class, urban-dwelling men, we suggest that lumbersexuals subscribe to a gender-normative taste regime

that harkens back to the trappings of the stereotypical lumberjack of cultural imagination—men who fled the effete and overcivilized nature of urban life at the turn of the 19th century in search of the "authenticity" of the physical labor, daily hardships, violence, and risk that came with life in the wilds of the American frontier (Brown, 2014)—as a means to reclaim an authentic masculinity in an era of demasculization (Jeffords, 1989, 1994). While research abounds that explores masculine identity projects (Belk & Costa, 1998; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013; Hirschman, 2003, 2016; Hirschman & Belk, 2014; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Kimmel, 2011, 2013), extant taste regime scholarship has yet to explore gender-specific taste regimes (but see Modrak, 2015). We propose that such taste regimes not only exist but are increasingly important during periods in which masculinity becomes untethered from its hegemonic form and becomes more fluid, adaptable, and bound to the sociohistoric moment (Butler, 2006; Connell, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2010). The rise of the lumbersexual within this cultural moment provides an opportunity to connect a masculine taste regime to the tendency of some men to seek forms of masculine recuperation as a result of a culture of White male injury (Robinson, 2000) and the emergence of a new economic imperative (Carroll, 2008).

Our context for this examination is Huckberry.com, a popular online retailer dedicated to outfitting men for life in and out of the city. While numerous brands sell the outdoor lifestyle to its consumers (e.g., REI, Patagonia), we argue Huckberry represents one potential source men can turn to learn about and purchase goods reflective of lumbersexuality. While not the only source educating men about lumbersexuality, we argue Huckberry constructs a taste regime for its customers that "propagates a shared understanding of aesthetic order that shapes the ways people use objects and deploy the meanings associated with the material" (Arsel & Bean, 2013, p. 900). Specifically, we argue that Huckberry promotes consumption practices and personal aesthetics that signify nostalgia for the outdoors and the authenticity of preindustrial modes of craft labor. Indeed, as we intend to show, Huckberry capitalizes on a putative crisis of authenticity that is particularly acute with a segment of male consumers and integrates this crisis throughout its narrative as a tool in the construction of its distinct version of the lumbersexual taste regime. In this way, we argue Huckberry constructs and promotes a taste regime that enables the alienated or disenfranchised men of mass culture to live, or at the very least look the part of, a seemingly more authentic lifestyle outside of mass culture (Meamber, 2015). The irony, however, is that Huckberry strategically appropriates archetypical representations of masculine authenticity as a trope that ultimately ensnares its consumers into subtle webs of mass consumption. Ultimately, we contribute to the ongoing discourse regarding the evolution of masculinities by documenting the emergent lumbersexual taste regime articulated by Huckberry

and how it provides one potential means of ameliorating men's underlying anxiety about the contemporary crisis of masculinity.

Prior to presenting our analysis of the Huckberry taste regime, we begin by addressing extant research on taste regimes, masculinity, and consumption. We then further contextualize the rise of the lumbersexual, connecting it to the hipster aesthetic, masculinity, and men's use of consumption as a tool to explore consumer fantasies. This is followed by a discussion of our research site, methodology, and findings. We specifically argue that the lumbersexual taste regime unifies goods, meanings, and practices across numerous fields of consumption in a way that provides men with the symbolic resources necessary to enact this gendered identity project.

Taste Regimes and Masculinity

Introduced by Arsel and Bean (2013), taste regimes are conceptualized as "a discursively constructed normative system that orchestrates the aesthetics of practice in a culture of consumption" (p. 900). Related, yet distinct, from extant theories of taste and its role in social distinction (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998), taste regimes "extend the notion of taste from a boundary-making process to a practice that is discursively constituted and continually performed" within the context of daily life (Arsel & Bean, 2013, p. 912). Specifically, Arsel and Bean illustrate that taste regimes document both how taste is practiced in subtle forms within social classes and the processes used to construct coherent patterns of consumption via the interrelationship between objects, doings, and meanings (p. 912). Recently, scholars have applied Arsel and Bean's concepts to illuminate the hipster taste regime and document how magazines and e-retailers curate, package, and distribute a de facto hipster taste regime, which, in turn, contributes to its evolution into a clichéd aesthetic reproduced across various social contexts to upwardly mobile urbanites (Bean, Khorramian, & O'Donnel, 2017; Gothie, 2015; Modrak, 2015).

Beyond its evolution into a clichéd aesthetic, we suggest that due to hipsters' ubiquity and relative gender neutrality, urban men have turned to the lumbersexual taste regime as a means of reconnecting consumption and taste with authentic masculinity. In contrast to hipster men's attraction to rural "others" and appreciation of kitsch (Gothie, 2015), lumbersexuals are more akin to the men targeted by Best Made Co. via "the appropriation of cultural identities and symbols to construct skewed versions of history that strip actual 'work' of meanings and value and that often perpetuate imperialistic and exaggerated masculine stereotypes" (Modrak, 2015, p. 556). That is, these men wrestle with the contemporary crisis of masculinity and have turned to media and the

marketplace to negotiate masculinity in a world of fluid and, often, contradictory masculinities (Butler, 2006; Connell, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2010).

Despite its fluid nature, gender remains central to the "entire realm of consumer behavior" (Schroeder, 2003, p. 1). Yet, current taste regime scholarship (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Bean et al., 2017) appears to only tangentially address gender, although Gothie's (2015) analysis employs postfeminist theory and Modrak's (2015) parodic project critiques lumbersexual masculinity. Hence, to better understand the ways in which a masculine taste regime is discursively constructed, we examine the emergence of Huckberry's lumbersexual masculinity as constructed by the narrative linkages of objects, doings, and meanings across the multiple fields of consumption documented by the website.

From Hipster to Lumber

The sudden ubiquity of the lumbersexual represents the particular evolution of hipsterism's irreverent "community of consumption" that sees itself as in opposition to mainstream consumer sensibilities (Goulding & Saren, 2009, p. 27). We argue that the lumbersexual is an adaptation of the contemporary hipster, a stylized consumer identity formed to counteract market tastes and mass culture norms. Against the much-maligned hipster, lumbersexuality offers a new durable consumer identity that extends into the quotidian experience of the ideal consumer. While typically associated with American youth culture, hipsterism transcends demographics and national borders to constitute a recognizable global consumer community. The contemporary hipster shares a common lineage to Bohemianism, a 19th century countercultural movement that rejected mass society and the culture industry in favor of transgressive lifestyles and avant-garde art, particularly that which irreverently idealized the aesthetics of poverty. As McCracken (2010) explains, the hipster embraces this irreverence, constructing itself as an antiestablishment consumer persona that is "formed around the oppositional consumption practices" (p. 4). Arsel and Thompson (2011) and Geczy and Karaminas (2017) suggest that the hipster is also an extension of the post-War Beat Generation who romanticized personal self-actualization and rejected consumer-driven lifestyles. Hipsters, therefore, like other alternative communities of consumption (Goulding & Saren, 2009), view mass consumption as a site of contestation and favor independent, off-grid vintage and authentic goods and experiences "distributed through small-scale and often localized channels" (Cronin et al., 2014, p. 7; see also Arsel & Thompson, 2011).

Although the hipster community often idealizes the so-called authenticity of independent consumption, Cronin et al. (2014) explain that some increasingly favor ironic appropriation of mass-market trends. While they view the

emergence of ironic consumption as a counter to the individual seclusion of alternative consumption, Hill (2015) suggests that ironic detachment is a strategy of disavowal that enables the "postpostmodern" (p. 45) hipster to remain a part of the consumption community while distinguishing themselves from the increasingly pejorative label. Arsel and Thompson (2011) argue that hipsters tend to eschew the "hipster marketplace myth" (p. 792) because it caricatures their aesthetic tastes and devalues the field-dependent capital engendered through indie consumption. Even for those whose consumption patterns and self-fashioning fit the label, a stance of ironic detachment enables "hipster" to become a floating signifier that always refers to someone else; a pretentious fraud or an inauthentic faker. Hence, new iterations of hipsterism seek to reground consumption practices in that which signifies genuine independence from mass culture.

Indeed, Huckberry capitalizes on a putative crisis of authenticity that is particularly acute with male hipsters. Implicit in this crisis is the assumption that both the salaried office worker and the Bohemian rebel alike have become feminized by mass culture. First, both types of men live an urban existence separated from the core American cultural value of "rugged individualism" (Hirschman, 2003), replete with both the masculine ruggedness and self-reliance of life in the wilderness. Second, both are consumers rather than producers of goods. Robinson (2011) argues that urbanization, corporate culture, and consumerism are often associated with phoniness and feminine passivity. By contrast, the lumbersexual represents a recovery of the masculine individual from mass psychology and consumer culture. His signature beard, beveled axes, utility work clothes, boots, and itinerate lifestyle consummate a fantasy of return. Companies such as Huckberry, therefore, craft a taste regime that enables the alienated men of mass culture the illusion of an escape hatch from the emasculating forces of mass culture (Meamber, 2015).

As this study demonstrates, the Huckberry lumbersexual taste regime is distinguished by its social durability across an entire field of quotidian and extraordinary consumption. According to Belk and Costa (1998), mountain men mythology has inspired the creation of consumption enclaves and rendezvous where consumers exchange their modern everyday lives for the "living condition, possessions, and personalities of men who trapped beaver in the Rocky Mountains of the American West between 1825 and 1840" (p. 218). As forms of serious leisure (Stebbins, 1982), these rendezvous offer an escape from contemporary life but within the confines of consumer culture underwritten by nostalgia for a fantastical life of a frontiersman. While Belk and Costa identified a similar consumer identity project to lumbersexuality, they emphasize the importance of liminality and escape from the consumer's everyday experience. By contrast, the Huckberry taste regime does not oscillate between the catharsis of carnivalesque and the drudgery of quotidian experience. In short, Huckberry offers the semiotic resources, packaged as a taste regime, for men to enact a

durable identity project that transforms the quotidian by merging the urban with the wilderness as opposed to offering a momentary pause within a liminal consumer enclave.

Methodology

This study fits in to current work in consumer culture theory exploring mass-mediated marketplace ideologies in which researchers investigate media entities to document and illuminate the normative messages about consumption embedded within (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In the spirit of Arsel and Bean (2013), we conducted an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) of a single website, Huckberry.com, that we identified as contributing to the construction and dissemination of the lumbersexual taste regime. As we are interested in expanding the application of the theory of taste regimes, a single-case study represents a highly useful tool (Yin, 2014). The selection of Huckberry for this single-case study also fulfills Stake's (1995) requirement that instrumental case studies address a single focal issue and identify a bounded case to illustrate it. While other cases exist that contribute to the larger dissemination of lumbersexuality, Huckberry was selected due to its clear boundaries as a singular website that provides access to multiple forms of data to sample from to illustrate the case (Yin, 2014), including evocative product descriptions, goods from numerous product categories, colorful visuals, and descriptive blog entries describing various lifestyle practices.

Data collection and initial analysis were conducted in a purposeful and iterative fashion between January 2017 and October 2017, with both authors visiting the site frequently, engaging with the content, and discussing emergent insights and theoretical implications. While Huckberry represents a complex case, data collection and analysis focused on content that best illustrates the case (Stake, 1995). Special care was taken to collect data from all types of sources found within the bounds of the case (Yin, 2014) so as to provide a holistic description of the varied objects, doings, and meanings documented by these sources. Data analysis followed the tenets of grounded theory. Originally developed as a "general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273), the method can also be described as an iterative, comparative, interactive, and abductive method (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Consequently, the method dictated that we iteratively tack back and forth between data collection and analysis, between inductive and deductive inquiry, and between emergent and extant theory in an attempt to build on existing theoretical propositions. In the following, we provide a detailed description of Huckberry, with a focus on emergent themes that illustrate the ways in which the site constructs its taste regime, distinguishes lumbersexuality from its hipster origins, and

promotes the integration of “lumber” consumption practices and personal aesthetics into quotidian urban life.

The Huckberry Origin Story

Huckberry is an online retailer that promotes flash sales across digital media channels (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, the brand’s website) targeted to “25-year-old guys who lived in the city but *lived* for the outdoors” (Forch & Greiner, 2016, para. 3, emphasis in original). Founded in 2011 by two San Francisco ex-investment bankers and longtime friends, Andy Forch and Richard Greiner, the site aggregates a wide array of goods, including clothing, footwear, bags, personal accessories, home-goods, and outdoor gear and equipment, creating a curated collection of goods associated with its lumbersexual taste regime. Rather than produce the goods it sells, Huckberry partners with manufacturers directly, offering goods at sale prices for a limited time, processing the orders, and, only then, purchasing the goods from the manufacturer and shipping them to consumers. At its core, then, Huckberry is a business intent on generating profit. As a taste regime, however, we argue Huckberry also links objects, meanings, and practices in a way that educates consumers on how lumbersexuality is practiced in everyday life, a key function of any taste regime (Arsel & Bean, 2013, p. 912).

Huckberry begins this education in its origin story “Bootstrapped, Profitable, & Proud” (Forch & Greiner, 2016). Within this narrative, the founders, two White, educated, and financially successful men, espouse their core values and, by extension, those of Huckberry’s lumbersexual taste regime. Specifically, analysis reveals Huckberry’s origin story expresses a disdain for the monotony of office labor and celebrates risk-taking via the pursuit and monetization of one’s passions. For example, Forch and Grenier’s narrative positions their choice to leave their “safe, lucrative jobs” as investment bankers “cranking out spreadsheets for 90 hours each week for the rest of our lives” (para. 2) in heroic fashion: Instead of wasting away in an office cubical, the two “*go for it*” (para. 1) and pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions. This framing reflects a contemporary manifestation of Holt and Thompson’s (2004) “man-of-action hero” masculinity—men who take risks yet contribute to the larger functioning of the social order—in that Forch and Greiner reject monotony and security and embrace the risks associated with the pursuit of a more authentic and potentially lucrative business endeavor. By merging their self-professed business acumen and passion for the outdoors, Forch and Greiner signal that risk-taking becomes a necessary prerequisite for realizing personally and financially rewarding outcomes.

Such risk-taking, however, takes courage—courage for Forch and Greiner to leave their jobs, to invest their own money, and to trust that they were capable of building a successful business “on our own terms” (para. 7). Risk pervades

Huckberry's origin story. The company ignored traditional venture capital investors, preferring to "bootstrap" the company relying on the founders' investment of "$10,000 each from our savings to form Huckberry LLC, and set out to scratch our own itch" (para. 4). In addition, the pair took risks and eschewed traditional office culture in favor of a team of employees built from friends who shared their passion for the outdoors; they scorned rapid growth—and immediate profits—in favor of sustainable growth; they hired a friend's younger brother rather than a professional to design the original Huckberry site. Risk became fully integrated into Huckberry's business model and, in turn, the Huckberry taste regime. For Forch and Greiner, risk-taking was not only part of building their company; it was part of the adventure. As Forch writes, "I think Rich [Greiner] and I now realize that when we decided to go for *it* that day at Squaw [Valley], that *it* was an adventure. That for us, the action is, and always will be, the juice" (para. 17, emphasis in original).

Ultimately, the inclusion of a highly abstract and emotional retelling of Huckberry's origin story serves two functions within the taste regime. First, it positions Forch and Greiner's within the Huckberry taste regime as lumbersexuals who take risks in pursuit of their two passions: business and the outdoors. Second, it democratizes Forch's and Greiner's unique experience and educates consumers about how to enact lumbersexuality as entrepreneurs. Consequently, the narrative establishes the underlying meaning behind the brand: Huckberry positions itself as being about rejecting convention, pursuing passions, and taking risks in pursuit of financial success and personal life satisfaction. And if someone is unable to "go for *it*" in quite the same way, Huckberry exists as a proxy mode of lifestyle attainment. That is, through frequent interaction with and purchase from the site—a site described as "equal parts store, magazine, and inspiration to help men suck the marrow out of life" (para. 3)—Huckberry offers lumbersexuality to every man, for a price.

Goods, Meanings, and Huckberry

Taste regimes link goods with particular meanings (Arsel & Bean, 2013), and analysis reveals Huckberry connects lumbersexuality to culturally accepted masculine ideals by transferring culturally relevant meanings into the goods it offers (McCracken, 1988) via evocative product descriptions. This process begins by simply offering goods that American men consider masculine: specifically, apparel, tools and equipment, grooming products, weapons (in the form of axes and knives), and, to a lesser extent, alcohol and tobacco, and vehicles (Hirschman & Belk, 2014). To establish the taste regime as distinctive from mainstream masculinity, Huckberry positions itself as an alternative to mainstream offerings. That is, product descriptions connect the goods on Huckberry with idealized masculine traits such as participation in physical labor, a willingness to subject themselves to danger as embodied by iconic masculine

professions (e.g., construction), and perform exceptionally well in both mundane and extreme urban and outdoor environments.

Huckberry's description of its work boots illustrates one manifestation of this strategy. Within the taste regime, boots become a desirable alternative to more mainstream footwear due to their ruggedness and versatility:

> From the North Pole to South Jersey, Vail to Yale, when there's snow to be shoveled, muck to be raked or frozen mountains to climb, we reach for our boots. Worn by everyone from foot soldiers to generals, lumberjacks to ironworkers, boots are a timeless staple of a man's wardrobe for good reason – they're tough, stylish, and they get the job done. . . .So pull on a pair that'll last you a lifetime, and ensure "neither rain, nor snow, nor sleet, nor hail" can stop you from getting out there.

The implicit comparison between boots and mainstream footwear within this description states that while athletic and dress shoes may be acceptable in some instances, when men need "tough, stylish" footwear that enables them to "get the job done" in a wide variety of weather conditions, boots represent the only viable option. In addition, the reference to both wilderness (North Pole, Vail) and urban (South Jersey, Yale) locales invites men to read these "timeless staple[s]" as durable, versatile, and inherently masculine irrespective of the fact that many men will primarily wear them within the context of their urban daily lives, for example, trudging to and from their home and office, where work boots possess minimal utility.

The description of Huckberry's "Everyday Carry" (EDC) shop, which sells "pocket-sized equipment you can use every day" such as wallets, pens, survival goods, and knives, communicates similar themes:

> They're not random. You don't just toss them in your pocket. Oh no, your Everyday Carry (EDC) items are the deliberate result of concentrated streamlining and maximization of portability and preparedness. . . .Just as your carry is a reflection of your personal approach to preparedness, our EDC shop is a reflection of our emphasis on useful, quality products that are reliable in every situation. . . . It's enough to get you through your routine and a zombie apocalypse. Prepare with the best, because when you use it, you don't want second rate.

Within this description, Huckberry invites men to take the time to prepare by purchasing and, when necessary, using its "useful, quality" EDC items. By doing so, Huckberry claims lumbersexuals demonstrate their preparedness and self-reliance. The assertion is that lumbersexuals must be prepared for every situation, whether it's a routine situation or an extreme situation like a "zombie apocalypse." EDC goods become essential tools for addressing the unpredictability of the contemporary world regardless of whether it is experienced in the

daily context of office life or while out in the wilderness. Regardless of the context, those who are unprepared for this unpredictability, those, according to Huckberry, who carry mundane, "second rate" versions of EDC items, or, worse, those who carry no EDC items at all, fail to live up to the masculine ideal embedded in lumbersexuality.

Product descriptions also emphasize the refined characteristics and durability of craft labor as a means of differentiating goods reflective of lumbersexuality from brands reflective of mainstream masculinity like Sears' Craftsman, John Deere, and Nike (Hirschman & Belk, 2014). Within the taste regime, masculine brands are those produced by small-scale, American-sourced manufacturers crafted in a way that illustrates a commitment to creating aesthetically appealing and durable goods. For example, the Original Chippewa brand is described thusly:

> The "Original Chippewa" collection reflects the authenticity and heritage of American craftsmanship, while creating timeless silhouettes for a modern American style.
>
> Built with American pride and handmade state-side with premium components, these boots have classic styling for everyday wear with features like Vibram outsoles, full leather welts and comfort insert insoles.

Descriptions of niche brands across a variety of product categories such as The James Brand, Taylor Stitch, Relwen, and Myles Apparel emphasize similar themes. While relatively unknown to the majority of American men, within Huckberry's lumbersexuality brands committed to "the authenticity and heritage of American craftsmanship" are presented as desirable alternatives to trendy, mass-produced, and aggressively marketed mainstream signifiers of masculinity.

Additional distinctions are made within Huckberry between the durability of American craftsmanship and the disposability of mainstream brands. Denim may represent ubiquitous and ordinary product in American life despite its iconic status (Miller, 2015), but Huckberry's descriptions emphasize the superior construction, durability, toughness, and classic good looks that result from the authenticity of its denim offerings. The Saint brand, for instance (retail price $350), is described as being produced via craft labor and, therefore, as durable and authentic, but in a way that connects these attributes with the rebelliousness of bikers and gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson:

> Saint designs clothes for those of us who know the feeling Hunter S. Thompson was writing about when he penned the words " . . . the fear becomes exhilaration and vibrates along your arms." The Unbreakable Slim Jean is one of the toughest, if not *the* toughest, pairs of jeans in the world. Made of Saint's ultra-durable and

> unrippable Unbreakable Denim, the Unbreakable Slim Jeans will last you a lifetime and then some.

Within the Huckberry taste regime, Saint's branding, in partnership with similar descriptions of other brands, establishes and reinforces linkages between durability, authenticity, rebelliousness, and lumbersexuality. Hence, men who wear Saint denim embody "that rebellious, unbreakable spirit" in their masculine identity performances. Moreover, reference to Thompson establishes a link between the possession of refined cultural capital and lumbersexuality. In other words, while Huckberry invites anyone with the requisite economic capital to purchase the jeans, it invites those with the requisite cultural capital to read deeper into the cultural meaning embedded in the denim as a means of creating and enacting class-based distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984) that further distinguishes lumbersexuality from mainstream masculinity.

When considering how Huckberry connects goods to particular meanings reflective of its version of masculinity, analysis reveals Huckberry builds upon the generalized, mainstream masculine consumption constellation identified by Hirschman and Belk (2014) and tailors it to meet the demands of its consumers. Analysis further reveals that Huckberry promotes American-made niche brands as superior by engaging in explicit references to masculine attributes such as ruggedness, utility, and craft labor and implicit references to the deficiencies of trendy, mass-produced, and mass-marketed mainstream goods. Yet, while access to economic capital represents one barrier to embodying Huckberry's lumbersexuality, another is access to the requisite levels of cultural capital needed to interpret the connections between objects and refined cultural meanings the site promotes, for example, the rebelliousness of Hunter S. Thompson. Men capable of making this connection, we argue, represent Huckberry's ideal lumbersexual: men capable of mobilizing the symbolic meanings embedded in niche goods to express an authentic, durable, and refined masculinity that differs in meaningful ways from competing masculinities circulating within society (e.g., hipster, mainstream masculinity).

Lumbersexuality as Multifaceted Practice

In addition to linking goods and meanings, taste regimes also integrate practices into a coherent expression of the regime (Arsel & Bean, 2013). While current taste regime research has explored the promotion of products geared to the urban woodsman through lifestyle branding (e.g., Meamber, 2015; Modrak, 2015), the following analysis attempts to add to this important work by illustrating how Huckberry's Journal posts create coherent linkages between goods, doings, and meanings across diverse environments (e.g., urban, outdoor) and consumption fields (e.g., fashion, food, home décor, popular culture, outdoor adventuring). Analysis reveals that within the Journal, adventuring is employed

as a multifaceted interpretive strategy for expressing linkages between the goods, doings, and meanings reflective of Huckberry's lumbersexuality.

Similar to how Huckberry constructs lumbersexual goods in relationship to mainstream masculine goods, lumbersexual practices are compared relationally to masculine ideals such as an adventurous spirit, risk-taking, displays of physical prowess, and personal autonomy (Holt & Thompson, 2004, p. 426; Hirschman 2003, 2016). As seen in repeated Journal posts, Huckberry celebrates adventuring practices that require men to exhibit such masculine ideals while encountering the challenges of the wild outdoors. As a post written by Anna Ehrgott (2016) illustrates, for instance, surfing the Kamchatka Peninsula of Siberia represents a complete break from the confines of urban life, providing opportunities to explore exotic environs, camp alongside rebellious nonconformists like "a large group of salmon caviar poachers who were armed with shotguns, a pack of unfriendly 'bear dogs', and a fleet of zodiacs" (para. 9) and, consequently, test themselves physically. As Ehrgott explains,

> It was really taxing out there. Trying to surf while feeling unsafe and physically drained from lack of food, warmth, sun, and all other luxuries we get spoiled within California. You feel invincible once you get through something like that, but in the moment you're questioning everything about why on earth you'd put yourself in a situation like that. I've never felt so vulnerable in my life. (para. 11)

While the post is written by a woman and includes pictures of Ehrgott surfing and camping, the narrative itself is written in a gender-neutral tone, allowing Huckberry's male readers to read themselves into the text. As a whole, the themes expressed in the Journal clearly celebrate risk-taking in extreme outdoor environs that tax men physically and mentally in the pursuit of personal passions and self-defining experiences and position these practices as representative of an iconic lumbersexuality. Yet, even mundane elements of Ehrgott's surf trip are framed using the adventuring lens: "My nerves were on edge as we flew over the new landscape. I'd never been to Asia, so everything looked unfamiliar" (para. 4). Since Huckberry targets "men who live in the city but *live* for the outdoors," we read Journal entries like this as communicating both an aspirational masculine fantasy unavailable to the majority of Huckberry readers and instructions for interpreting quotidian practices as opportunities for enacting lumbersexual ideals.

The Journal applies adventuring's more quotidian usage when it profiles men who, like Forch and Grenier, abandon what they describe as unfulfilling yet financially lucrative white-collar careers to pursue their true passions. Typically, profiles highlight men embarking on labor-intensive careers full of self-reliance and personal fulfillment, such as filmmaker and photographer Thomas Woodson whose decision to go on an artistic journey across the country with his girlfriend and dog in a 2015 Dodge Ram Promaster van (Hiemstra, 2016)

marks him as "a rare breed, the type that can see the larger picture in life much easier than the rest of us" (para. 1). In other instances, the Journal celebrates men engaged in more urban and less extreme pursuits, such as baker Kyle Kuehner (Huckberry Staff, 2016) who rejected a life as a "desk jockey" to become an "artisan baker" because "I fell in love with the process and the craft. Wanted to work with my hands" (para. 3). Similar to Woodson's narrative, the post describes Kuehner's transition as a repudiation of the constraints of office labor and the realization of a long-time dream, which, as Huckberry declares, makes him "a man after our own hearts" (para. 1). These profiles and the numerous others like them in the Journal demonstrate the synergies between outdoor adventures and entrepreneurial practices (e.g., overcoming deficiencies in knowledge or experience, enduring physical hardships) when viewed through the adventuring lens. In the end, the flexible use of adventuring found in the Journal creates parallels between the concept as it applies to both extreme outdoor adventures and more mundane entrepreneurial practices that justify each as an equally valid expression of lumbersexuality.

Huckberry recognizes that not all men are able to realize the personal autonomy and other benefits of engaging in ideal lumbersexual practices, whether due to the demands of daily life, such as family obligations, or limited vacation days. Rather than alienate these potential consumers, Huckberry employs the adventuring lens to cultivate an inclusive taste regime that promotes practices for "weekend warriors"—men who, as posts such as "Choose Your Own Adventure(Mobile)" (Morton, 2016) acknowledge, "can't spend every waking moment on the open road," experiencing the "promise of freedom, independence, and excitement" road trips and other lumbersexual practices offer—as legitimate articulations of lumbersexuality. These practices are often less time and labor intensive and can be completed without straying far from the city. For example, "Escape from New York" (Oaks, 2016) acknowledges:

> Now, to be fair, for many the daily grind of life on the merciless and fast-paced island of Manhattan is adventuresome enough. Dodging potholes, pedestrians, and sprinting from one subway to the next with hot coffee in hand is equally as strenuous as summiting Mt. Whitney or climbing El Capitan. Not to mention getting a table – any table – on a Sunday morning for brunch.
>
> When you really think about it, no one could blame you for wanting to indulge in boozy brunches and artisan doughnuts over the weekend. But what if we told you there was some truly spectacular natural beauty and adventure just beyond the city limits? And no, I know what you're thinking, it's not just New Jersey . . . but that's definitely a good place to start. (para. 3-4)

By constructing parallels between the perils of urban living and those experienced in the wilderness, this post depicts the mental tests and physical challenges

of urban life as "adventuresome enough" to make an authentic claim to lumbersexuality. Despite its ultimate endorsement of engaging with nature (if only in New Jersey), posts like this invite men unable to live the idealized practices of extreme adventurers and entrepreneurs to identify with lumbersexuality within the confines of their quotidian urban lives.

The inclusive nature of Huckberry's lumbersexuality is furthered by the Journal's application of the adventuring lens to cultural practices that are often associated with nonwilderness environs, such as food preparation, mixology, architecture, and home décor. Journal posts, for instance, explore baking traditional Australian crusty bread (Hawken, 2016), restoring Elvis Presley's classic BMW 507 (Geiger, 2017), and consulting with a florist on a floral bouquet for Valentine's Day (Wilder, 2016). A post documenting the history and evolution of a Chilean libation, the Pisco Sour can Rica Rica (Trimble, 2016), for example, illustrates how eating and drinking represent a form of cultural exploration: "Traveling and eating go hand in hand, as exploring new cultures often means exploring new foods, spices, and drinks" (para. 1). As the post continues, it explores the drink's connection to Chilean culture, its people, and the labor-intensive process of sourcing and mixing the ingredients, providing consumers with easily digestible cultural instructions and knowledge about how to enact lumbersexuality irrespective of their first-hand experiences with global travel, cuisine, or libations.

As a taste regime, Huckberry presents a valuable resource that instructs and empowers men to acquire and mobilize lumbersexual masculinity within the context of their daily lives without the investment in the more time- and resource-dependent ideal embodied by professional adventurers and entrepreneurs. Huckberry's ongoing utilization of the adventuring lens effectively integrates a wide array of consumption practices into a coherent lumbersexuality that appeals to men identifying with its wild and urban, rugged and refined manifestations. In aggregate, the breadth of the Huckberry taste regime spans across the masculine and feminine, and high-, middle-, and lowbrow to articulate a coherent linkage across a wide array of goods, doings, and meanings. But instead of bestowing status solely upon men who embody the ideal lumbersexual archetype, Huckberry depicts and legitimates various lumbersexualities including the extreme adventurer, the urban entrepreneur, and the weekend warrior in a way that creates a democratized taste regime distinctly tailored to the varied needs of the (White) urban men it has been constructed for.

Conclusion

In this article we highlight an emergent gendered taste regime that constructs and promotes lumbersexuality. Whether men live lives as extreme adventurers or weekend warriors, Huckberry's taste regime provides them with the goods, doings, and meanings to express their independence from the supposed

phoniness and femininity of mass culture. Specifically, we argue that Huckberry provides men with cultural instructions on how to mobilize a contemporary version of the idealized masculinities found in early 19th-century archetypes like the lumberjack, cowboy, and mountain man across multiple fields of consumption and cultural contexts. Consequently, we propose that Huckberry represents a multifaceted marketplace resource tailored to the needs of (mostly White) middle- to upper-middle-class urban men who are seeking emergent masculinities attuned to their perceived economic vulnerability and the ennui of the mass culture subject.

Further analysis suggests Huckberry offers a salve for both the intensification of economic precarity and the so-called feminization of men in a primarily service economy by inviting them to vicariously incorporate the experiences and identities of others into their own consumption practices. That is, Huckberry promotes lumbersexuality as a conduit to the authenticity and virility of the lumberjack/adventurer, for whom labor, in its myriad forms (e.g., work, leisure, consumption), is quintessentially masculine. In this way, as Compton and Bridges (2015) suggest, lumbersexuality represents a hybrid masculinity that allows men to negotiate, compensate, and attempt to control the meanings attached to their masculine identity projects, distance themselves from any potential "stigma of privilege" (para. 4) and construct a more meaningful masculinity. Analysis reveals three interrelated strategies used to achieve this association. First, Huckberry positions its founders' journey from office workers to successful outdoor-lifestyle entrepreneurs as reflective of the dominant mode of American masculinity, heroic masculinity (Holt & Thompson, 2004). That is, by taking risks while building a successful e-commerce business, Forch and Grenier become man-of-action heroes who successfully merge the socially desirable of aspects of rebel and breadwinner masculinity while avoiding the negative associations with each. Second, Huckberry positions itself as inherently masculine by co-opting a consumption constellation reflective of mainstream masculinity (Hirschman, 2016; Hirschman & Belk, 2014) and tweaking it to promote niche brands produced by craft labor. This tweak positions the Huckberry regime as more masculine, authentic, and durable than the mainstream, disposable, mass-produced alternatives. Third, Huckberry's inclusion of multiple product categories and consumption practices spanning urban and outdoor environs creates an adaptable masculinity that empowers men to employ the adventuring lens, replete with its guarantees of freedom, authentic experience, and mental and physical challenges, to interpret both quotidian and extraordinary experiences. Lumbersexuals, therefore, stand in contrast to modern mountain men and other masculinities that exist within liminal spaces of fantastical consumer escape. Huckberry proposes lumbersexuality can be found squarely within and outside of modern society. Rather than providing symbolic resources necessary to construct an identity of "men who don't fit in," Huckberry provides

men with the symbolic resources necessary to construct themselves as superior to the emasculated men they encounter in the course of daily life.

In aggregate, Huckberry's taste regime invites men to engage in "active and continuous participation in the taste regime as a form of leisure entertainment while furnishing its participants with the knowledge and doings needed to practice taste" (Arsel & Bean, 2013, p. 913) across disparate fields of consumption and cultural contexts. Hence, it serves as a resource through which men gain cultural capital and status through marketplace interaction (Arsel & Bean, 2013). And as Schroeder and Zwick (2004) also note, Huckberry, like many other marketplace resources, represents a gendered space in which "advertising imagery helps provide consumer solutions to gender tensions and struggles over representing idealized masculine consumers, in particular the crisis of masculinity" (p. 23). Through this process, Huckberry not only promotes goods, doings, and practices emblematic of lumbersexuality but also legitimates the market as a central tool in men's attempts to accommodate their life under late capitalism. Similar to Nerlich's (1988) ideology of adventuring, Huckberry extends adventuring, including the systematic glorification and superiority of the adventurer, to less heroic and risky practices that allows entrepreneurs and weekend warriors, including emasculated office workers, to be celebrated and endowed with the same characteristics as extreme adventurers. While this is not to imply lumbersexuality represents compensatory consumption per se, we do argue that the Huckberry regime successfully nurtures a dependence on consumption, a self-serving, privileged act not necessarily authentic or adventurous, as an outlet to construct their gendered identity projects and address feelings of alienation and disempowerment that might otherwise drive men to rethink capitalism altogether.

Our analysis also raises some interesting parallels between the decline of hipsterism and the rise of lumbersexuality. We argue Huckberry represents a potential solution for men seeking to distance themselves from the devalued hipster marketplace myth (Arsel & Thompson, 2011). Although we recognize that lumbersexuality can be viewed in a similar negative light, it differentiates itself from hipsterism and conformity through its romanticizing the past and distancing itself from the modern. Unlike the hipster whose ironic consumption serves as a critique of mass culture (Michael, 2015; Schiermer, 2014), Huckberry instructs lumbersexuals to consume craft goods with earnestness, linking toughness and durability as oppositional to the disposability of mass production. Huckberry's taste regime, therefore, instructs men to express a masculinity signified by the authentic tools of unalienated male labor. Yet, rather than simply viewing this mode of consumption as reflective of "ornamental culture," where male utility is replaced by male aesthetics (Faludi, 2000, p. 34), our analysis suggests Huckberry's linkage of goods, doings, and meanings represents a fusion of ornamental culture with older versions of utility-based manhood. Within Huckberry's taste regime, goods must be both aesthetically pleasing and

useful, allowing men to display both their refined cultural capital and masculine productivity. In addition, Huckberry's lumbersexuality differentiates itself from the gender-neutral hipster taste regime through its gendered articulation. Women, in fact, are conspicuously absent from Huckberry. Although they make appearances as company employees and authors of Journal posts, products remain exclusively targeted to men with the exception of seasonal gifts. In fact, one of Huckberry's founders has even acknowledged that "in the long term, I believe a Huckberry for women will be amazing, but we have no immediate plans to do anything" targeting women (Kaplan, 2017, para. 19). Evacuated of both the presence of women and the feminine phoniness of mass consumerism, the site presents the world as a playground for the upwardly mobile man-of-action.

Although beyond the scope of the current study, it is appropriate to acknowledge that successful enactment of lumbersexuality, however, requires copious amounts of economic and cultural capital in contrast to the reality of turn of the century lumberjacks, who had little of either. While capital is typically reproduced across generations (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990), new forms of cultural capital emerge in response to social change and upend existing hierarchies of status (Chaney, 2002). Despite Huckberry's ability to democratize lumbersexuality through its dissemination and legitimation of goods, doings, and meanings, there exists an internal hierarchy of lumbersexuals. Status may be disproportionately assigned to extreme adventurers, for example, rather than to weekend warriors. Although our textual analysis cannot capture the distinct strategies consumers utilize to interpret Huckberry's content (e.g., Hirschman & Thompson, 1997; Scott, 1994), we acknowledge that men's ability to choose among a variety of hybrid masculinities is disproportionately available to the most privileged men, both economically and culturally. This reality, however, is blurred within Huckberry's democratized lumbersexual taste regime. Through its effort to promote a universal and accessible lumbersexuality, Huckberry obscures the very economic and cultural conditions of inequality that account for the underlying desire to escape the present that draws men to the lifestyle.

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Building Theory From Media Ideology: Coding for Power in Journalistic Discourse

Chelsea Reynolds[1]

Abstract

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an increasingly important approach for critical-qualitative communication scholarship. This essay has three purposes: (1) to explain the history and applications of CDA, (2) to provide an empirical snapshot of how CDA has been used in journalism studies research, and (3) to provide a methodological intervention for improving CDA research in our field. An exploratory analysis of 17 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication journal articles reveals that CDA research on journalism topics has focused on race and ethnicity, analyzed mainstream print news outlets, and applied CDA as a method in its own right. Authors have neither adequately defined discourse for readers nor have they sufficiently explained their coding procedures. Journalism scholars must improve the transparency of our coding methods, and we must examine ideological formations beyond dominant-hegemonic discourses. By analyzing mainstream journalism, alternative media, and online media side-by-side, CDA researchers can build stronger theory about ideology's role in journalistic contexts.

Keywords

critical discourse analysis, cultural studies, ideology, journalism, qualitative research methods

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Ideological analysis is a pressing concern for journalism scholars. As President Trump leads a crusade against "fake news," and as accusations of sexual assault rock communications professions, researchers must tackle questions regarding the uses and abuses of power in media. Rarely has the need for critical-qualitative mass communication research been so apparent. Nevertheless, critical analysis is sometimes perceived today as it was an era ago—as "substantially opposed on questions of the methodology and objectives of social science, about what constitutes knowledge in the social sciences" (Ray, 1979, p. 149). Ideological research has been critiqued for lacking rigorous, empirical methods. Many humanistic mass communication scholars continue to view their work as belonging to a separate research paradigm (Jensen, 2013), drawing attention to the perceived disjoint in reliability and validity between qualitative and quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003). This is a problem within our field.

Some journalism scholars have intervened by adopting a robust qualitative research framework known as critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is an interdisciplinary approach of tacit theories and methods that grew out of traditions in rhetoric and cognitive science, sociolinguistics, and anthropology (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Researchers who use CDA conceptualize language as "an integral element of the material social process" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 122), meaning they view communicative objects as outcomes and constituents of social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). CDA is a helpful approach for scholars interested in examining mass media's roles in the social construction of reality. Its attention to power analysis, historicity, and cultural context also make it unique among qualitative analysis tools. However, CDA's analytical strategies are as diverse as the fields it emerged from, and its foremost scholars do not always agree on its goals or outcomes. Critics of CDA have argued researchers' methodological commitments have been poorly documented (Carvalho, 2008), and there are disagreements regarding whether CDA is a theory, method, or worldview. These concerns merit a revived discussion about CDA in communication disciplines.

In this essay, I review the primary tenets of CDA for an audience of journalism scholars, and I offer methodological interventions for CDA in our field. To begin, I highlight active scholarly debates about CDA as a conceptual roadmap for reading this essay. Then, I present an exploratory review of 17 CDA studies about journalistic discourse that were published in Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) division and interest group journals. Through thematic analysis, I illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of CDA as it has been applied within journals in our discipline. Finally, in response to concerns that critical-qualitative findings lack generalizability, rely on negligible data, are based on subjective interpretation, and analyze limited discursive contexts (Sandelowski, 1986), I introduce a rigorous, comparative method for CDA coding. This method builds theory through

ideological critique and helps journalism scholars empirically visualize oppression across ideologically diverse media.

Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis

Like other "emergent" and "iterative" approaches to qualitative journalism research, CDA lacks conceptual clarity. There is no single agreed-upon way of "doing" CDA. And discourse itself itself has seemingly infinite definitions. Discourse may refer to an instance of text or talk in its social context (van Dijk, 1989) or to a sociological phenomenon—the ideological process of constructing knowledge about a topic (Foucault, 1978). The term may also be "used abstractly to mean statements in general or to refer to a particular group or type of statements" (Philo, 2007, p. 176). Some scholars cite specific formal theories of discourse (see Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001 for examples), while others use broad definitions, arguing that "discourse means anything from a historical monument, a *lieu de mémoire*, a policy, a political strategy, narratives in a restricted or broad sense of the term, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations, to language per se" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 2–3). In journalism studies, we analyze discourse on many levels, including headlines, graphic elements, and story framing (Philo, 2007; van Dijk, 1998). We must also be attentive to processes of production, asking ourselves "who has preferential access to journalists, who will be interviewed, quoted, and described in news reports, and whose opinions will thus be able to influence the public?" (van Dijk, 2013b, p. 68). In order to crystallize what our field means by "discourse," journalism scholars must choose conceptual definitions that articulate our interests in media ideology as an outcome of newsroom dynamics and social processes. I appreciate Anabela Carvalho's (2008) definition from her essay *Media(ted) Discourse and Society*. She writes that journalistic discourse is "media representation of social issues," but also "the discursive construction of events, problems and positions by social actors" and "the discursive strategies that they employ" (p. 161). Journalism discourse is time-sensitive, mass disseminated social surveillance. It is imbued with power relations based on reportorial practices, interview sources, and production methods (Tuchman, 1978; van Dijk, 2013b).

Journalism CDA researchers should be politically aligned with the anticapitalist, antiimperialist logics that have historically guided critical theory and similar research perspectives in cultural studies. CDA traces its roots to Marxist thinkers and structuralists such as Ferdinand de Saussure. The political critiques made by Louis Althusser (1971) and Antonio Gramsci (1971) provide what Carvalho (2008) calls "an important backdrop" for the development of research on discourse, popularized by the Frankfurt School and the Birmingham Center for Cultural Studies. Today, Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak are the most recognizable CDA scholars in the sprawling field of

discourse analysis. Each conceives discourse as being "linked to power and social interests" (Philo, 2007, p. 176). But their perspectives conflict in notable ways. Fairclough and Wodak's approach to CDA examines the "semantic and grammatical features of texts," while van Dijk has championed a binary thematic analysis tool called the ideological square (Philo, 2007, p. 178). Importantly, Fairclough considers CDA to be a method, whereas van Dijk considers CDA to be a worldview or a theoretical perspective for undertaking research. According to Wodak and her research partner Michael Meyer (2009), "proponents of CDA use discourse analysis to challenge what they regard as undesirable social and political practices" (p. 2), meaning CDA is necessarily linked with scholarly activism.

For Fairclough and Wodak (1997), discourses are grounded within contextual interactions between identity, production, cultural values, social relations, consciousness, and semiology, and they are always historically contingent. Discourse then is analogous to the circuit of culture (Du Gay et al., 1997), a metaphor popularized in Stuart Hall's (1997) *Representation*. Fairclough and Wodak's approach is unique among CDA research because it focuses primarily on communication in action—on discourse as a social process. In the third edition of his seminal text, *Language and Power*, Fairclough (2014) clarifies CDA's goals, including that CDA is a "normative critique" (p. 49) of discourse, that CDA's allegiances are transdisciplinary, that capitalism is the primary subject of critique, that discourse is socially motivated and interactive, that CDA's outcome is social activism, and that analyses should be interdiscursive, thematic, and grammatical. Importantly, Fairclough provides what he calls "a guide and not a blueprint" (p. 129) for textual analysis in CDA, which focuses on a discourse's vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures. However, critics have argued social action cannot be interpreted from text and talk without also observing media production and reception (Philo, 2007).

While Fairclough and Wodak represent the linguistic tradition in CDA research, van Dijk's work has focused on elements of racism reproduced in news content, and unlike Fairclough and Wodak, van Dijk considers CDA to be a theoretical perspective rather than a research approach or a method proper. van Dijk (2013a) points out that CDA may draw on diverse methods that are "grammatical (phonological, morphological, syntactic), semantic, pragmatic, interactional, rhetorical, stylistic, narrative or genre analyses, among others, on the one hand, and through experiments, ethnography, interviewing, life stories, focus groups, participant observation, and so on, on the other hand". Scholars who are new to CDA tend to mistake CDA as a method in its own right (van Dijk, 2013a). Instead, CDA should be understood as a descriptive and argumentative process adherent to an underlying critical-theoretical lens—one which takes into account the historical and institutional processes that allow for discourse about a subject to develop. The CDA scholar should "do critical discourse analysis by formulating critical goals, and then explain by what

specific explicit methods you want to realize it" (van Dijk, 2013a) . In journalism studies, we need to chart our coding methods for analyzing power in media discourse rather than merely citing CDA in our methods sections.

van Dijk offers one method for analysis that he labels the ideological square. The ideological square identifies discursive formations of Othering, for example, us-versus-them discourses. According to van Dijk (1998), ideological formations will: "1. Emphasise our good properties/actions, 2. Emphasise their bad properties/actions, 3. Mitigate our bad properties/actions, 4. Mitigate their good properties/actions" (p. 33). The ideological square is a helpful tool for visualizing Orientalism and other forms of racism, but its closed coding approach may prevent more nuanced ideological critiques. For example, the ideological square ignores "the time plane in discourse analysis of journalistic texts" (Carvalho, 2008, p. 163), and it may overlook how Othering develops in media longitudinally. The closed coding approach also limits the identification of ideology in media. While the ideological square would appropriately describe and explain Yellow Peril, for instance, would it identify a model minority stereotype? We should keep in mind news discourses are "always-already" ideological (Althusser, 1971), even if they do not explicitly condemn a specific social group.

In the following section, I tighten this essay's focus to paint a picture of how CDA has been used in contemporary journalism scholarship. Leading academics disagree about whether CDA is a method, theory, or worldview, and they have different ways they approach data and analyze discourse. This is well documented in the CDA literature, but to date little research has systematically examined how CDA has been applied within the mass communication discipline, nor within journalism studies specifically. After outlining how CDA research has been articulated in AEJMC division and interest group journals, I will offer two models for a CDA coding method that journalism studies researchers can apply to their own data sets (see Figures 1 and 2).

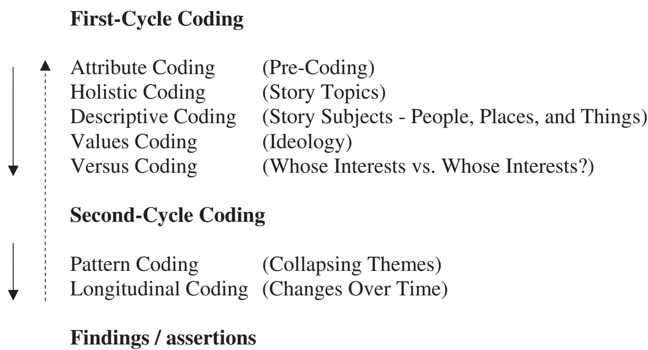

Figure 1. Critical discourse analysis coding for media discourse.

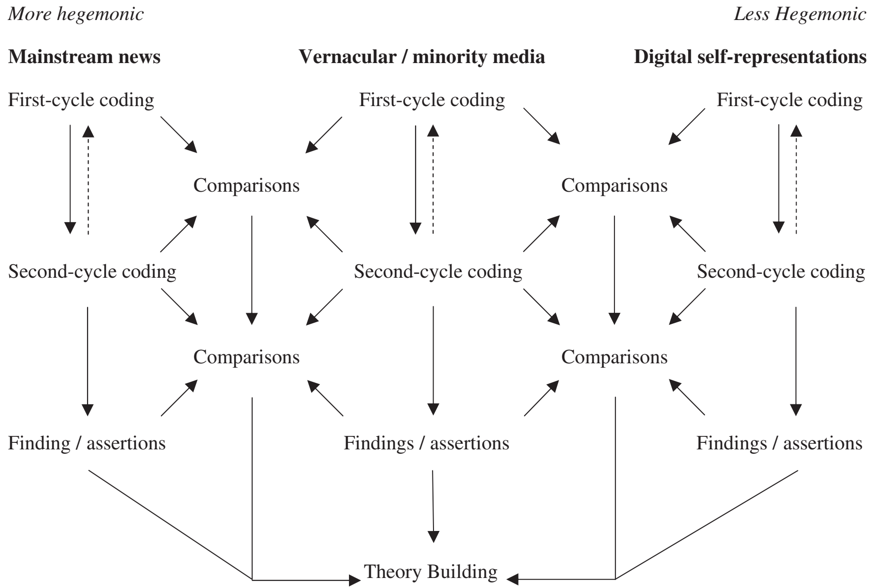

Figure 2. Transideological coding for critical discourse analysis.

CDA in AEJMC Journals

CDA is emerging as an important area for journalism studies research. In this section, I present the results of an exploratory review of 17 journalism-focused CDA studies published in AEJMC division and interest group journals during the last two decades. I build evidence showing that journalism scholars have cited CDA when they use ideological coding, but that our methods do not always line up with CDA as defined by its leading practitioners. I outline trends in the topics of analysis, objects of analysis, and the ideological positioning of the studies' research objects. I also describe the researchers' theoretical and methodological perspectives. This review shows that CDA research about journalistic discourse accepted to AEJMC journals tends to focus on race and ethnicity, analyze mainstream print news outlets, and cite CDA as a method in its own right. Authors using CDA in journalism research do not often define discourse for readers, nor do they adequately explain their coding procedures. I offer this exploratory review in order to capture CDA as a sometimes-misunderstood, but extremely valuable approach for mass communication scholarship.

Sampling

In order to conduct the exploratory review, I evaluated each of the AEJMC division and interest group journals for articles matching keyword searches for

"critical discourse analysis." A full list of citations to the articles can be found in the Appendix section. I selected a census of studies whose objects of analysis included journalistic discourse. In total, 17 studies published between 1996 and 2016 matched the selection criteria. My search parameters returned no examples of journalism-specific CDA research published in AEJMC journals before 1996—six years after Teun van Dijk (1990) launched his flagship journal, *Discourse & Society*.

CDA appears to be an increasingly popular lens for journalism research. Four (24%) CDA studies in the sample were published between 1996 and 2006, and the remaining 13 (76%) ran between 2007 and 2016. However, there is a dearth of CDA research in journalism compared with more popular text-based research methods such as quantitative content analysis.[1] Despite CDA's increasing traction, it remains a marginalized research approach in our field, as does qualitative work more generally. Of the 17 articles, 7 (41%) were published in the *Journal of Communication Inquiry* and 4 (24%) were published in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, pointing to the critical-theoretical orientation of CDA scholarship and its fit within theoretically rigorous journals. Two studies (12%) were published in *Mass Communication & Society*, and one study each (6%) was published in *Electronic News*, the *Journal of Magazine Media*, the *Journal of Media and Religion*, and *Visual Communication Quarterly*.

This essay explores how CDA has been implemented in analyses of journalistic discourse within our field. No CDA studies that met the selection criteria were published in *Journal of Advertising Education*, *Communication Methods & Measures*, *International Communication Research Journal*, *Communication Law & Policy*, *Journal of Media Ethics*, *Journal of Public Relations*, *Journal of Public Relations Education*, *Community Journalism*, or *Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication*. Although some of those journals included CDAs, they did not focus on journalism specifically.

Coding

I coded the sample using first- and second-cycle coding—a grounded, open coding approach outlined by Johnny Saldaña (2015) in his book *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. I began by precoding each article for its descriptive elements: The journal it was published in, author names, and the year it was published. As I precoded the sample, I started the first cycle of analysis (Saldaña, 2015), during which I read each study in full and began taking notes on initial themes I observed, called *holistic codes*. While conducting first-cycle coding, I analyzed each of the selected articles for eight elements: (1) the study's topic(s) of analysis, (2) the study's object(s) of analysis, (3) the study's geographic focus, (4) the ideological positioning of the research objects (mainstream news or alternative media), (5) whether the researchers considered

CDA a theory or method, (6) whether the researchers used CDA alone or mixed it with additional methods, (7) whether and how the researchers defined discourse, and (8) whether and how the researchers explained their coding procedures. I then conducted the second cycle of coding, focused on "classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory-building" (Saldaña, 2015). During the second cycle, I collapsed the initial codes into themes and reflected on what those themes mean in their research context.

Research topics. Journalism CDA research published in AEJMC journals focused on race and ethnicity as well as other representational problems involving marginalized groups. Eight (47%) of the 17 articles focused on racial issues. Studies with titles such as "'Fatwa on the Bunny:' News Language and the Creation of Meaning About the Middle East" and "Evolution of News Frames During the 2011 Egyptian Revolution: Critical Discourse Analysis of Fox News's and CNN's Framing of Protesters, Mubarak, and the Muslim Brotherhood" analyzed Orientalist discourses related to Islam, terrorism, and the Arab Spring. Others, such as "'More Trouble than the Good Lord Ever Intended': Representations of Interracial Marriage in U.S. News-Oriented Magazines" and "Teaching Journalism for a Better Community: A Deweyan Approach" addressed issues of blackness and racial representation in domestic media. It seems that our field understands CDA to be a useful tool for analyzing depictions of race and ethnicity in news coverage, as did van Dijk in his application of the ideological square.

However, hegemony was also analyzed in news coverage from linguistic rather than representational perspectives. Three studies (18%) focused on linguistic patterns of social domination—the "semantic and grammatical features of texts" used in Fairclough and Wodak's approach to CDA (Philo, 2007). These analyses examined the supremacy of monolingual ideology in the U.S. press (Demont-Heinrich, 2007) and rhetorical strategies used in journalistic discourse. "Looking Back at Obama's Campaign in 2008: 'True Blue Populist' and Social Production of Empty Signifiers in Political Reporting" examined the use of populist rhetoric in U.S. newspapers during Obama's presidency, and "Journalistic Authority: Textual Strategies of Legitimation" analyzed adverb use as a type of reportorial bias.

The remaining six studies (35%) were a grab bag of representational analyses, analyzing topics including gender, military occupation, health care, religion, hate speech, and crime. Like Wodak and Meyer (2009) found in their analyses, our field uses "notions such as racist discourse, gendered discourse, discourses on un/employment, media discourse, populist discourse, discourses of the past, and many more" (p. 3). Like other CDA researchers, journalism scholars need to be transparent about our objects of analysis in our research projects.

Objects of analysis. In 11 of the manuscripts (65%), discourse was not explicitly defined, with the implied meaning being that discourse was the object of analysis (e.g., news content) in any given study. In these cases, CDA was listed as the method or research approach, but the meaning of discourse itself was not situated within a specific theoretical paradigm. For instance, in Robinson's 2017 article on "Teaching Journalism for a Better Community," the author's unit of analysis is interview transcripts with journalists, but she does not situate discourse as a social process or a historical phenomenon. Rather, the reader is left to assume the discourse analyzed is conversational dialogue—not a more specific manifestation of power. Another example comes from Lipari's (1996) study in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, in which the author explains that news is one of many "forms of discourse" (p. 824), but does not explain how her unit of analysis—stance adverbs in news coverage—fits within broader theoretical approaches to discourse.

In the six journal manuscripts (35%) that situated "discourse" within specific worldviews, definitions varied between discourse as a social process: "a way for those who use language to build social realities and to choose among aspects of reality to be included" (Vultee, 2006, p.327); discourse as an apparatus of power: "a language of ideology with its own rules and conventions" (Kalyango, Myssayeva, & Mohammed, 2015, p. 153); and discourse as communication itself: "language, that is, discourse," (Erjavic & Volcic, 2006, p. 303). It seems that many journalism scholars published in AEJMC journals understand discourse as a synonym for text, talk, or journalism, rather than as a complex cultural process.

Editorial focus. The majority of CDA studies published in AEJMC journals focused on mainstream print media published in the United States. Of the 17 studies coded, 13 (76%) analyzed U.S. media, such as leading national newspapers and magazines, or news published through English-language wires such as the Associated Press, United Press International, and Reuters. Four articles (24%)—"Mapping the Notion of 'Terrorism' in Serbian and Croatian Newspapers," "Social Control in an American Pacific Island," "'You Don't Understand, This is a New War!' Analysis of Hate Speech in News Web Sites' Comments," and "Jews in the News: Representations of Judaism and the Jewish Minority in the Norwegian Contemporary Press"—analyzed news content published in international news outlets. Like the journalism industry itself, journalism CDA research may be nationalist and statist, focusing on official news documents rather than citizen journalism or community-level discourse.

Only four studies (24%) integrated alternative media or counterhegemonic media into their analyses, but 13 (76%) focused on mainstream media at the international, national, or local level. Mainstream media included high-circulation newspapers such as *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*,

and the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as high-circulation consumer magazines such as *Forbes* and *Ladies' Home Journal*. Other analyses of dominant-hegemonic media examined local professionalized outlets such as the *Pacific News Daily*—Guam's only newspaper—or European national dailies. The four articles that examined "oppositional" media analyzed news content in feminist magazines, ethnic minority magazines, and online comments on newspaper websites.

Further demonstrating the AEJMC journals' predilection toward dominant-hegemonic media, print was the medium of choice, as 11 studies (65%) focused on newspaper and magazine content, and one study (6%) examined news wires' photovisual content. Two articles (12%) analyzed television content, and two more (12%) analyzed digital news. The remaining article—an outlier—coded interviews with news producers. Journalism researchers should be reminded that CDA is a critical-theoretical perspective that can be applied to any journalistic context, not only mainstream textual representations.

Research methods cited. Despite debates regarding whether CDA is a theory, method, or worldview, journalism studies scholars published in AEJMC journals typically treated CDA as a method writ large. Of the 17 sampled studies, 3 manuscripts (18%) described CDA as a theoretical perspective or worldview, while the remaining 14 manuscripts (82%) described CDA as a method or discussed CDA in their methods sections. Typically, manuscripts used a single analytical strategy—CDA if it was cited as the method or textual analysis-plus-coding for studies that described CDA as a theory or worldview. However, six manuscripts (35%) partnered CDA with another method. These mixed-methods approaches used CDA alongside quantitative content analysis, interviews, Google Trends data, questionnaires, semiology, and curriculum development, demonstrating the diversity of CDA approaches in mass communication.

CDA was typically explained as a tool for ideological critique, with thematic analysis guiding most of the studies in the sample. Two studies (12%; Lipschultz & Hilt, 2011; Luther & Rightler-McDaniels, 2013) included time-based analyses of themes in coverage. One study (6%) examined how journalists use stance adverbs to legitimize certain subjects in news sources (Lipari, 1996). It was the only article in the sample to focus specifically on grammar. Coding procedures were explicated in seven (41%) of the studies, providing readers with a structure for understanding how language or imagery was categorized into themes. Seven of the manuscripts (41%) pointed to vague coding methods such as thematic analysis and pattern identification, and the final three manuscripts (18%) failed to provide a method for coding at all.

Directions for CDA Research in Journalism Studies

CDA studies about news discourse published in AEJMC journals tended to focus on race and ethnicity in domestic mainstream media, and they tended to analyze content at the thematic level, rather than analyzing longitudinal and grammatical trends in discourse. In order to increase the perceived rigor of CDA research in mass communication, our field should intervene by: (1) producing more studies that examine discourse across the ideological media spectrum, not only within dominant-hegemonic mainstream media; (2) examining mediated oppression and stigmas beyond racism and Islamophobia, which might include representations of gender, sexuality, health, social and economic class, ability status, or religion, and so on; (3) sampling media from countries outside of the United States; (4) identifying the historical contexts that allow certain discourses to proliferate or disappear, and (5) comparing journalistic discourse with other types of mediated discourse to determine the ideological consistency of certain mediated messages. Crucially, we must also begin explicating our coding methods—not just by referencing Fairclough, Wodak, or van Dijk, but by outlining the specific procedures we use to identify ideological themes in content. In the following text, I provide guidelines for improving CDA research on journalism topics. In Figures 1 and 2, I offer complementary coding models that will help researchers conduct their analyses.

Sampling

Wodak and Meyer (2009) have asserted that "most of the approaches to CDA do not explicitly explain or recommend data-gathering procedures" (p. 28). I recommend that journalism scholars begin by proposing a research question and then identifying mainstream news sources, alternative media, and self-representational spaces in which that discourse is located (see Figure 2). After identifying research questions and relevant media, the researcher should begin with what Carvalho (2008) calls an "open-ended reading" to "help identify significant debates, controversies, and silences, and possibly suggest specifications and amendments to initial research goals and questions" (p. 166). After reading broadly on their research topic, the author should "characterize relevant genres" and "choose typical texts" (Wodak, 2010, p. 25) for their analysis, discarding media that do not especially exemplify their research problem. Because CDA should incorporate longitudinal analysis across ideologically diverse media, scholars will need to whittle down their corpus of data. Critical discourse analysts do not typically collect representative samples. Rather we purposively select stories in order to describe "critical discourse moments" (Carvalho, 2008; Richardson, 2006)—time periods during which knowledge about a specific topic appears to be growing or changing.

Ideological coding

Many methods for qualitative analysis rely on a loose web of iterative, ideologically invested tools. In order for CDA to be conducted in a systematic, empirical manner, and in order for critical discourse scholars in journalism to build a more comprehensive methodology, it is crucial to chart the coding methods we employ. It is neither enough to articulate *that* we code our data using frameworks such as Fairclough's (2015) or Carvalho's (2008) historical-diachronic approach, nor is it enough to describe *what aspects* of texts we code. We need to describe precisely *how* we do it. Previous CDA research in mass communication has fallen somewhat short of this charge. While interpretive approaches allow for flexibility, their lack of precision creates confusion among readers hoping to replicate coding methods in their own research.

Although CDA is often cited by journalism studies scholars as a method, coding is actually the process used to thematically analyze textual data in both qualitative and quantitative traditions. In *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Research*, Johnny Saldaña (2015) wrote: "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). Coding is the method of applying those "essence-capturing" words and phrases to discourse in order to capture the meaningful qualities of the message. Coding is used primarily to develop theory (and is sometimes confused with the methods of grounded theory), though it is virtually impossible not to code data when using qualitative methods (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). In CDA, coding may include textual analysis of media representations or topics, identities and social relations, and message cohesion or coherence, and codes may also be quantified to illustrate trends in discourse (Richardson, 2006). In a 2013 essay, van Dijk implored researchers to "explain by what specific explicit methods" we use in our analyses. In the following section, I will describe methods for sampling and coding journalistic discourse using a comparative approach to CDA.

Coding procedures

Many qualitative scholars use diverse, multistep, iterative coding methods without articulating our research within a particular coding language. Saldaña offers a solution to the problem of describing qualitative coding methods. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* is an encyclopedic review of hundreds of coding strategies Saldaña compiled from external sources. It is a useful companion text for all qualitative researchers and not only those working on CDA in journalism studies. Saldaña's (2015) approach asks scholars to begin with open coding, develop categories from those codes, further refine categories into themes, and eventually build theory after considering the relationships between

codes, categories, and themes. This procedure is similar to open coding and axial coding in grounded theory.

This essay builds a coding procedure for CDA based on Saldaña's recommendations for qualitative coding. I have added ideological and longitudinal analysis to Saldaña's (2015) "generic" coding methods (p. 48), and I have introduced transideological analysis as a primary intervention for CDA in journalism studies. Figure 1 provides an outline of the coding procedures a researcher should follow for coding a single data set of journalistic discourse, for example, stories published in mainstream media. Figure 2 demonstrates how first-and-second-cycle coding can be used to compare ideological formations in mainstream media, alternative media, and self-representational media, building theory about discourse across the ideological media spectrum. In comparative research, coding for each data set should follow an identical first- and second-cycle coding procedure, examining the same types of codes in each sample, then comparing their presence and prevalence across multiple data sets.

First-cycle coding methods. The CDA research project should begin with first-cycle coding, the initial interpretative process involved in codebook development. As outlined in Figure 1, journalism scholars should conduct first-cycle coding in this order: (1) attribute coding, (2) holistic coding, (3) descriptive coding, (4) values coding, and (5) versus coding. Precoding should begin in a codesheet such as Excel or Google Sheets, and more nuanced coding methods should continue in a qualitative analysis software such as NVivo. CDA research demands multiple passes over qualitative data. The researcher should conduct an initial coding run using Steps 1 through 5, returning to the data to confirm, alter, or reject codes as needed.

Attribute coding. Attribute coding is also known as precoding. Descriptive attributes of the data are systematically noted in the codesheet. Notation includes "basic descriptive information such as: the fieldwork setting, participant characteristics or demographics, data format, time frame, and other variables of interest" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 70) After an "open-ended reading" of a news sample (Carvalho, 2008), the researcher should code the descriptive attributes of each story, such as publication title, publication date, article headline, and author name, while selecting relevant articles for analysis. It is especially helpful to organize the codesheet chronologically (with sampled articles organized based on publication date), as this will help with second-cycle longitudinal coding during the next phase of research.

Holistic coding. Holistic coding identifies a story (or discourse unit's) theme. It is similar to framing analysis in mass communication research. Holistic coding "applies a single code to each large unit of data in the corpus to capture a sense of the overall contents and the possible categories that may develop" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 118). After precoding the sample for basic attributes, code each story for the presence of one or two dominant themes—the holistic codes. Using more than one holistic code is called "simultaneous" coding (Saldaña, 2015), which is

common practice in CDA. Attribute codes and holistic codes should be logged alongside each story's title in the researcher's codesheet.

Descriptive coding. Descriptive coding describes "what is talked or written about" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 119). It is often the first step in getting intimate with the problems of a study, and it is also essential for longitudinal analysis as the researcher analyzes topical changes over time (Saldaña, 2015). Although attribute coding and holistic coding are logged in the scholar's codesheet, they will want to switch to a qualitative analysis software such as NVivo to track descriptive codes. Descriptive coding can be used to identify subjects of discourse, such as topics discussed, individuals referenced, sources cited, specific themes in news coverage, and events described. Most qualitative researchers naturally conduct descriptive coding as they get to know their data.

Values coding. Values coding accounts for "perspectives or worldview" (Saldaña, 2015) present in discourse. All CDAs therefore engage in values coding. The researcher may want to ask themselves: "Whose perspectives are being validated by this story?" Values coding will illustrate biases in media, such as misogyny, feminism, normativity, racism, and other forms of power embedded in representations. CDA scholars can conduct values coding to provide more nuanced insights into the construction of ideology surrounding news sources and news subjects described in media content. Values coding should also be conducted in a qualitative analysis software after descriptive coding.

Versus coding. Versus coding is dichotomous coding used to identify "individuals, groups, social systems, organizations, phenomena, processes, concepts, and so on, in direct conflict with one another" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 115). As the first cycle of coding nears its end phases, the researcher should reread each story to determine whether certain groups are pitted against one another in an us-versus-them storyline. This is especially useful for stories in which police, legislators, politicians, clergy, and other moral authorities surveil or condemn social "outsiders." Versus coding can thus be used to identify the people and policies that produce certain ideologies in media discourse. This approach is particularly suited to "critical discourse analysis, and qualitative data sets that suggest strong conflicts or competing goals within, among, and between participants" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 115). As the reader may recall from the first section of this essay, van Dijk's ideological square uses a type of versus coding.

Importantly, first-cycle coding may require "careful reading and rereading of your data as your subconscious, not just your coding system, develops connections that lead to flashes of insight (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002)" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 47). The CDA researcher will likely proceed from first-cycle coding to second-cycle coding, then return to first-cycle coding to finesse coding categories (see Figure 1). After all, coding is an iterative method.

Second-cycle coding methods. After the scholar is initially satisfied with the first-cycle codes they have developed, they should begin looking for patterns and trends across stories in the sample. For this reason, second-cycle coding is also

known as code synthesis, or collapsing codes. Second-cycle methods "develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization" from those earlier developed codes (Saldaña, 2015, p. 149). Although Saldaña's "generic" coding method asks researchers to synthesize patterns from first-cycle codes, CDA scholars must take their analyses one step farther, contextualizing patterns and themes within the broader lieu de mémoire. After all, "one important characteristic arises from the assumption of CDA that all discourses are historical and can therefore only be understood with reference to their context" (Meyer, 2001, p. 15). The researcher may find it helpful to conduct pattern coding in a qualitative analysis software, then return to her codesheet's chronological attribute codes and holistic codes to determine how patterns have changed over time.

Pattern coding. Pattern coding corresponds with axial coding in grounded theory. Scholars look for meanings within and across their samples that cohere into metalevel patterns. Pattern codes "pull together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis" (Saldaña, 2015). This requires significant critical thinking. During this phase of second-cycle coding, the researcher synthesizes first-cycle codes under larger umbrella codes, which represent the dominant discursive formations of the stories examined. The scholar should ask herself how the first-cycle codes cohere into more parsimonious units of meaning.

Longitudinal coding. Longitudinal coding is a primary tool that separates CDA from other ideologically invested qualitative research approaches. While pattern coding will help surface trends in a body of discourse as a whole, longitudinal coding can evidence changes in discourse over time. Longitudinal coding corresponds with Carvalho's (2008) historical-diachronic strategy for CDA. Journalism scholars should look for changes in the distribution of first-cycle codes and pattern codes in their news timeline. This constructivist approach acknowledges the instability of discourse. Longitudinal coding can also help identify paradigm shifts and essential discourse moments, which make compelling junctures around which to structure research findings.

After reading and rereading the data set to ensure codes are saturated, collapsed into parsimonious patterns, and organized along a meaningful timeline, the scholar should draft a rudimentary findings section. Qualitative findings should be explicated in their discursive contexts, paying careful attention to the roles of ideology, power abuse, and social dominance within and between news articles, journalists, news sources, and news subjects. CDA research should always be attentive to the "social processes of power, hierarchy building, exclusion and subordination," according to Meyer (2001, p. 30), because "in the tradition of critical theory, CDA aims to make transparent the discursive aspects of societal disparities and inequalities." When writing initial findings, journalism scholars should be attentive to the social construction of power through news discourse, and to its relationship with larger social processes.

Transideological Critique: A Comparative Approach

I have shown that journalism CDA research published in AEJMC journals has tended to reproduce nationalist perspectives, relying on mainstream media analysis to investigate topics related primarily to race and ethnicity during limited time periods. This confirms findings published decades ago, which found that discourse analyses of journalistic messages focused largely on mainstream media representations (Chen, 1989). It is crucial that journalism scholars understand that "through access to the mass media, dominant groups also may have access to, and hence partial control over the public at large" (van Dijk, 2013b, p. 86). If our field hopes to advance research about media ideology, CDA in journalism studies must embrace a methodological intervention. Our responsibilities are threefold: We must investigate ideological factors beyond race and ethnicity, incorporate longitudinal coding (described in the previous section), and move toward transideological analysis. Because mainstream media ideology is theorized as being equal to and exemplary of oppression (Ono & Pham, 2009), we must identify messages produced in order to challenge discourse found in mainstream journalism.

The comparative method proposed in Figure 2 helps researchers code for counterhegemonic as well as dominant-hegemonic discourses. If a primary goal of CDA is to visualize ideology and hegemony in discourse, we must establish the stability (or instability) of discursive formations among ideologically diverse media. CDA scholars in journalism should examine hegemony and counterhegemony in two situations: First, we should analyze discourse formations during paradigm shifts, during which outgroups bring a new discourse into the forefront through community solidarity over time (Hamilton, 1997); and second, we must examine discourses in vernacular media, which are media produced by and for local communities or marginalized groups (Ono & Pham, 2009). Paradigm shifts will become evident during longitudinal coding of a given data set. Vernacular media, however, must be analyzed alongside mainstream media in order to paint a fuller picture of ideological media formations. Vernacular media may include community newspapers and magazines such as the black press or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning–alt weeklies. They can also include self-representational media such as online forums, where the regulatory function of mass dissemination does not limit the representations presented. On one hand, analyzing vernacular media helps scholars visualize the marginalized imaginary. On the other hand, vernacular media are subject to many of the same limitations of production, distribution, and regulation that burden the mainstream press (for an overview, see Tuchman, 1978 and Schudson, 2003). These narratives can be, and often are more complex, but they do not always carry a counterhegemonic function (Ono & Pham, 2009).

Ideological analysis. The coding model provided in Figure 2 directs CDA researchers to sample media across the ideological media spectrum, starting with a systematic analysis of discourse in mainstream newspapers or mass media (see Figure 1). The researcher should then follow up their mainstream media analysis by coding messages published about the same topics in alternative and online media, making direct comparisons between codes present in mainstream journalism, alternative media, and self-representational discourse. Based on the models provided in Figures 1 and 2, the scholar will eventually produce a number of pattern codes and longitudinal codes that describe discourse across their data sets. The final stage of analysis will describe similarities and differences in discourse observed across the ideological media spectrum. Codes should evidence the prevalence and distribution of power in ideologically diverse media. Similarities between codes across the samples may indicate the presence of hegemonic logics in "counter-hegemonic" media (see Ono & Pham, 2009). Differences between codes across the samples may demonstrate the outcomes of meta- and microlevel sociological influences on content (see Tuchman, 1978). Findings should make links between power structures, journalistic production, and representations in media content, both thematically and over time. Theoretical conclusions should examine the roles mass media, alternative media, and self-representational media play in maintaining and challenging ideological formations.

Conclusions

This essay's three purposes were to explain CDA to journalism scholars, demonstrate trends in CDA research in journalism studies, and provide a conceptual roadmap for coding mass communication discourse in the CDA tradition. In the first half of the essay, I offered a brief background on the foundations of CDA research, then I outlined themes in each of the 17 CDA articles published in AEJMC division and interest group journals since 1996. Those articles tended to focus on representations of race and ethnicity in mainstream domestic media, tended not to explicitly describe their objects of analysis or coding methods, and tended to focus on thematic analyses rather than linguistic analyses of discourse. The exploratory analysis of AEJMC articles points to the need for comparative, transideological research in journalism studies, and for transparency and rigor in coding.

The second half of this essay followed by making an argument for a systematic coding method for CDA in journalism studies and for the implementation of a transideological, multimedia approach to our research problems. In Figure 1, I bridge gaps in journalistic research by offering an empirical coding method CDA scholars can cite and apply to their own data sets. Journalism research should follow Saldaña's guidelines for qualitative analysis, focusing specifically on the first-cycle method of coding for attribute, holistic, descriptive,

values, and versus codes, and progressing into the second-cycle method of coding for longitudinal and pattern codes. CDA researchers may cite this method and coding model in their own work, increasing transparency about how we code our data.

The method in Figure 2 helps scholars identify and interrogate counterhegemonic discourses, which have been primarily articulated as an outcome of alternative media and online media (see Althusser, 1971; Ono & Pham, 2009). Although alternative media and online media may sometimes challenge normative discourse, this is not always the case. The method proposed in this essay will help future researchers question whether alternative media are necessarily oppositional and whether the techno-utopian discourse prevalent in the past decade is warranted. This essay contributes a method to help build knowledge about ideology in communicative technologies, contributing to theories based on the ideological consistency of discourse across media contexts.

The comparative approach outlined in this essay demands sampling discourse across multiple types of media. Therefore, it is essential to advance research questions about topics that create controversy in ideologically diverse contexts, and thus drive coverage in alternative media and online forums as well as mainstream newspapers and magazines. CDA "focuses on social problems, and especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination" and provides a voice for the oppressed (van Dijk, 2001, p. 96). However, oppression is not merely race-based, and journalism researchers should address gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, religion, health and mental health, and other intersectional aspects of identity. Comparative CDA should develop theory from comparisons of representations over time and across the ideological media spectrum, paying careful attention to how marginalized groups represent themselves. As Wodak and Meyer (2009, p. 2) remind us:

> The objects under investigation do not have to be related to negative or exceptionally "serious" social or political experiences or events; this is a frequent misunderstanding of the aims and goals of CDA and of the term "critical," which, of course, does not mean "negative" as in common-sense usage.

Because CDA demands that researchers sample vast data over time and media, it is not an "easy" method for qualitative scholars to tackle. It demands intense critical thinking and a rigorous method for winnowing data. Carvalho (2008) recommends that we focus on discourse shifts, or what she calls "critical discourse moments." Because our data sets may be so large, "the analysis of those 'moments' allows for the identification of discursive turns and/or continued lines of argumentation at particularly important times in the social construction of an issue" (Carvalho, 2008). CDA is not a method for scholars on tight deadlines. CDA projects require significant investment, both in terms of data sampling and

time committed to analysis. Researchers would do well by investing in an NVivo subscription, given the scope of codes developed in this version of CDA.

Limitations and Future Research

This essay offered recommendations for conducting CDA scholarship in journalism studies. The exploratory analysis outlined in the first half of this article paints a picture of how journalism-focused CDA research has been articulated in AEJMC division and interest group journals. Based on the professional orientation of *Journal of Communication Inquiry*'s audience, I did not sample journalism CDA research published in International Communication Association or National Communication Association journals. It is possible that the critiques I articulated are limited to studies selected for publication by AEJMC editors and peer reviewers. Further, because I selected studies that matched a keyword search for "critical discourse analysis," it is possible I missed articles that approached research from a CDA orientation, but that did not label their theoretical or methodological commitments as "critical discourse analysis." Future research should examine a larger data set of journalism-focused CDA research published across disciplinary boundaries.

As a mass communication scholar trained in qualitative research traditions, and as a professional journalist-turned academic, I am not fluent in CDA approaches used across communication disciplines. The methodological interventions proposed in this essay will prove helpful for academics working on problems of representation at the intersections of journalism studies and cultural studies, but may not be appropriate for scholars building theory in the linguistic tradition, or working with other forms of mass media (e.g., strategic communication, computer-mediated communication, etc.). Politically motivated activist-scholars in diverse communications subfields should consider building methodologies for CDA appropriate to their areas of inquiry. At the time of publication, I was preparing to host a Blue Sky Workshop on CDA methods at the meeting of the International Communication Association in Prague, May 2018, to begin advancing methodological inquiry concerning CDA across the broader communication research profession. I look forward to reporting the outcomes of the workshop in future research.

Appendix: CDA Articles Sampled from AEJMC Journals

Dalisay, F. (2009). Social control in an American Pacific Island: Guam's local newspaper reports on liberation. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *33*(3), 239–257.

DeFoster, R. (2015). Orientalism for a new millennium: Cable news and the specter of the "Ground Zero Mosque." *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *39*(1), 63–81.

Demont-Heinrich, C. (2007). Globalization, language, and the tongue-tied American: A textual analysis of American discourses on the global hegemony of English. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *31*(2), 98–117.

Døving, C. A. (2016). Jews in the news—Representations of Judaism and the Jewish minority in the Norwegian contemporary press. *Journal of Media and Religion*, *15*(1), 1–14.

Erjavec, K., & Kovačič, M. P. (2012). "You don't understand, this is a new war!" Analysis of hate speech in news web sites' comments. *Mass Communication and Society*, *15*(6), 899–920.

Erjavec, K., & Volcic, Z. (2006). Mapping the notion of "terrorism" in Serbian and Croatian newspapers. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *30*(4), 298–318.

Guzman, A. L. (2016). Evolution of news frames during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution: Critical discourse analysis of Fox News's and CNN's framing of protesters, Mubarak, and the Muslim brotherhood. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *93*(1), 80–98.

Izadi, F., & Saghaye-Biria, H. (2007). A discourse analysis of elite American newspaper editorials: The case of Iran's nuclear program. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *31*(2), 140–165.

Jenkins, J. M., & Johnson, E. K. (2017). Body politics: Coverage of health topics and policy in U.S. feminist magazines. *Mass Communication and Society*, *20*(2), 260–280.

Kalyango Jr., Y., Myssayeva, K. N., & Mohammed, A. (2015). Visual representation of Shiite Muslim mourning rituals. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, *22*(3), 146–159.

Kumar, A. (2014). Looking back at Obama's campaign in 2008:"True Blue Populist" and social production of empty signifiers in political reporting. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *38*(1), 5–24.

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Marcellus, J. (2006). Woman as machine: Representation of secretaries in interwar magazines. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *83*(1), 101–115.

Robinson, S. (2017). Teaching journalism for better community: A Deweyan approach. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *94*(1), 303–317.

Vultee, F. (2006). "Fatwa on the bunny:" News language and the creation of meaning about the Middle East. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *30*(4), 319–336.

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Note

1. A review of 2,500+ articles published in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* (*JMCQ*) and *Communication Monographs* found nearly one quarter of articles published in 1985 to 2010 were quantitative content analyses (Lovejoy, Watson, Lacy, & Riffe, 2014). A recent *JMCQ* special issue on advancing methods focused on "methodological issues in content analysis; methodological issues in surveys, interviews, and focus groups; and measurement and scale development" (Neijens, 2017, p. 12), but it did not address qualitative research.

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Letting the Fascists Speak for Themselves: The Enabling of Authoritarians and the Need for a Partisan Press

Andrew A. Fitzgerald[1]

Abstract

This article analyzes the historical media practices and conditions during the rise of the worst authoritarian movements—namely, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. It then compares these to contemporary media practice during and since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, considering the impact of sociotechnical systems that increasingly penetrate and govern media discourse. It argues the press should not double down on journalistic objectivity but rather embrace a "little-p partisan" press—interested and invested in political outcomes. The press must engage in vociferous criticism and earnest argumentation, and such journalistic practice must not be perceived as a deviation from the false ideals of "normal times." The perception of such deviation, and strategies to avoid these conventions like irony or satire, only leave the press more vulnerable to accusations of bias and weakened against liberal society's greatest threats.

Keywords

media and democracy, normative communication theory, media history, journalism, fascism

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Following the 2016 U.S. presidential election, everyone is a media critic. Whether for "fake news," false equivalencies, or the free coverage that networks and legacy newspapers bestowed upon Donald Trump's campaign with each new outrage, the dead horse of American electoral politics has taken beating after beating for failing to predict (or facilitating) the outcome. While "blaming the media" is a tad cliché, a go-to for the uninformed voter, the scandalized politico, and the would-be autocrat alike, such criticism is valid. Given the parallels between Trump's campaign, rhetoric, and promises, the broader global rise of a xenophobic far right and the past rise and repression of authoritarian leaders *within* Western liberal democracies, media criticism, and normative theorization are a historical necessity and a moral imperative.

How should the American press cover budding authoritarians and movements that support them? And what can history tell us about the failure of democratic presses in the face of the worst authoritarian movements—the fascist movements of Italy and Nazi Germany? My solution is not, as many media critics and journalists might argue, to eschew partisanship, but to embrace what I call a "little-p partisan" press. The press should engage in vociferous criticism and proper naming of charlatans, demagogues, and protofascists. Moreover, such journalistic practice must not be perceived as a deviation from false ideals of objectivity or impartiality in "normal times." The perception of such deviation, or deployment of strategies to subvert these conventions via irony or satirization, only leaves the press more vulnerable to accusations of bias and lies, and weakened against liberal societies' greatest threats.

Reductio ad Hitlerum and the Justification of Historical Comparisons

We have Leo Strauss (1953) to thank for *reductio ad Hitlerum*, the rhetorical fallacy of comparing a political opponent's positions to Hitler or the Nazi movement (pp. 42–43). Like the newer web-based "Godwin's law," holding that irrespective of the topic of an online debate a Hitler comparison will be invoked, such comparisons are often prima facie disparaged; in the context of political criticism of an (even potential) presidential administration, they are "crying wolf." Yet, it is incumbent on intellectuals and journalists to note relevant historical parallels and to account for horrifying potentialities, however remote.

While contemporary America is not post-WWI Germany or recently unified interwar Italy, many obvious comparisons between these regimes and Trump's rhetoric and policy proposals demand consideration, and some of the deeper similarities in political cultural development and journalistic practice need to be elucidated. At the level of policy and rhetoric, the similarities are clear: an appeal to a mythical past greatness, hypermasculine heteronormativity,

brutality toward dissent and political opponents at mass rallies, and of course the xenophobic scapegoating of groups such as Mexican immigrants and Muslims. This includes talk of forced mass deportations, national registries, actual policies of family separation, and multiple attempts to institute a ban on immigrants, refugees, and even visitors based on religious identity, now approved by the United States Supreme Court. While many would disregard this as *ad Hitlerum*, when we take a closer look at fascist and Nazi cultural politics and how they exploited the weaknesses of liberal modernity and its democratic institutions, the more frightening, legitimate, and necessary the comparisons become.

The Political Culture of Fascist Italy

In *Making the Fascist Self*, Mabel Berezin describes how Mussolini's fascist movement transformed Italian citizens of various political proclivities into active participants in the fascist project. Berezin (1997) highlights the floating signifiers of fascist ideology and rhetoric. "Italian fascism," she writes, "rejected discursive prose or linearity. It repudiated the word and the text. Argumentation, explanation, the scientific method were all aspects of modernity and rational discourse that fascism replaced with the primacy of feeling and emotion" (p. 29). This was not pure irrationality, but a strategic use of spectacle in a "celebration of the non-rational . . . since fascist feelings aimed to communicate belonging and solidarity" (p. 29). Italian fascists believed "in action and style—ideas that specify means and not ends and that make the ends of fascist action extremely malleable" (p. 30).

Hollow phrases and vague aggressively affective argumentation, a rejection of fact, and a shunning of rational oratory—the question of how to cover a political figure and, indeed, a successful movement deploying such rhetoric is central to the crisis of confidence facing the American press.

Berezin (1997) also highlights the use of spectacle and "communities of feeling" in mass rallies to collapse the liberal distinction between the public and private sphere/self. Through mass rallies and marches held in the piazzas—the heart of the Italian bourgeois liberal public sphere—the regime created "bonds of solidarity" and feelings that lasted "long after participants left the piazza" (p. 30). Berezin focuses on the construction of meaning in these rituals, arguing that "meaning is embedded not in the representation of action but in the experience of and continued exposure to ritual representations and the repetition of ritual action" (p. 33). She describes this as a process of internal colonization: through the repetition of these actions in the public sphere, participants became part of "a new political community that they would internalize when they left the piazza and stopped marching" (p. 41).

Compare this to the contemporary relationship between the public sphere and private life. The distinction between a "private self" and a "public self" has

blurred or become interpenetrated with the advent of ubiquitous computing. Mark Andrejevic (2007) argues that as spatiotemporal divisions between work and leisure, domestic and civic life, and production and consumption dedifferentiate, we embrace a "digital enclosure" (p. 107). This intensifies with ubiquitous mobile media evermore seamlessly integrated into areas of our lives that most would consider "private," yet are externally oriented and threaded within "public" discourses. Writing in 2007, the process Andrejevic describes has intensified since mass adoption of pseudo- or sub-public-facing personal profiles on social media, and the emergence of mobile news apps, push notifications, and 360 degree "virtual reality news coverage" in our pockets.

Donald Trump and his supporting movement use Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and other platforms to disseminate protofascistic slogans, incongruent and factually flawed arguments and statements, and bizarre near-conspiracy theory accusations or reconstructions of history—all feeling-based ritual actions in a space of already-blurred public and private self. Given these similarities, discussing the darker potentialities feels less like *reductio ad Hitlerum* and more like the duty of a moral citizenry who recognize that history can happen to us, too. And when we look at how frequently both print and broadcast press amplify these messages, even while fact-checking, we see the importance of critiquing journalistic practice.

The Failure of the "Nonpartisan" Democratic Press in Interwar Germany

The newspaper was the most important medium for political culture in Weimar Germany, where more newspapers were published than any similarly developed country at the time (Hale, 2015). The Weimar press and its practices were far from monolithic, however, and in aggregate, the press was highly decentralized, well developed, and prolific. As Oron James Hale notes, "each metropolitan center had several dailies . . . provincial centers generally supported two or three dailies, while there was scarcely a town that lacked a locally-owned paper" (p. 2).

The Weimar press contained three segments. One I call the "capital-P partisan" press, including the official party presses or publications owned and operated by party officials; these published party news, positions, and polemics as well as republished news agency reports or pieces from larger journals. The readers "were mainly faithful party members." Another component making up roughly 52% of total circulation figures included self-described "nonparty, neutral or independent press" (Hale, 2015, p. 3). This broader category included two distinct subgenres: the commercialized elite publications with large metropolitan readerships, or *Generalanzeiger*, and the locally owned press.

The *Generalanzeiger*, the urban mass circulation press oriented toward the Weimar political and cultural elite, was a response to a demand for popular reading material such as news and entertainment. Hale (2015) describes it as "politically colorless," adding "these papers sought to please everyone and offend no one" (p. 3). He further notes that as Hitler's movement gained power, most of these publications expected things to remain roughly the same, maintaining "their basically non-partisan standing during 1932—Germany's year of decisions" (p. 5).

Modris Eksteins (1975) describes *Generalanzeiger* journalists as liberals "in a venerable rationalist sense; they were journalists in the spirit of the French *philosophes* [believing] in truth . . . and human understanding [which] led to mastery" (p. 306). Mosse (1977) adds, "the impressive circulation figures together with the quality readership of their elitist organs led to a widespread overestimation of the political influence of their publishers"—a tragic result, claims Fulda, of the fragmented media landscape of the Weimar Republic.

Fulda (2009) argues that "the fragmentation of the press into competing and often mutually hostile communication networks was a key feature of Weimar political culture" (p. 9). Describing the local press, Fulda writes, "even in self-professed 'unpolitical' newspapers catering to local audiences, ideological news coverage was the norm." This often meant supporting a particular candidate or parties, which Fulda disregards as ineffectual, with the exception of media spheres wherein no "alternative sources of information" (p. 12) existed. While Fulda concurs that

> the majority of regional newspapers would normally try to avoid overtly partisan positions to appeal to as large and politically heterogeneous a readership as possible . . . provincial papers like the *Generalanzeiger* press more generally, were often conceived as "unpolitical" . . . [in] a crass oversimplification. (p. 109)

This "nonpartisan press," at least at the local level, should therefore be seen not as nonpolitical, but "as backing an implicit rejection of party-based parliamentary politics *tout court*." This entailed "promoting a new kind of protestant, nationalist, and anti-socialist *Sammlungspolitik*, an explicitly nonparty political alliance that was based on the concept of heroic leadership," an orientation activated first in the election of Hindenburg and then Hitler. Fulda sees the practices of the Weimar press as critical to the decline of the Weimar Republic.

According to Fulda (2009), "economic crisis as such" was an insufficient mobilizer of votes for the Nazi NSDAP. Rather, "press presentation of increasing Communist violence and the perceived threat of civil war, together with the media image of an indecisive government, turned the Nazis into an attractive choice for voters desperate for decisive action" and "led to a political climate favorable to all anti-system parties" (p. 12). The pretense of a nonpartisan press masked its role in politics and the perpetuation of stereotypes that served to

"reinforce pre-existing notions of antagonism between the metropolis (and political and cultural elites) and the provinces" (p. 118). This resonates with Hale's (2015) diagnosis that "the press mirrored the mood and condition of the country—confusion, uncertainty, and fear, and the clash of irreconcilable parties and ideologies" (p. 13).

J. Herbert Altschull (1975), concurring with much of the above, also argues that the major liberal Weimar newspapers failed by not actively opposing the totalitarian Nazi movement. Instead, the liberal press chose to defer to commercially and politically expedient traditional coverage, thus opening the space for the separate Nazi press to supersede and then eliminate the democratic press. German newspapers in the late 19th century "sought to be actively apolitical and to acquire large circulations and extensive advertising" (p. 232). And in the desperate state of post-WWI Germany, exacerbated by a string of political assassinations and the sanctioning of left-wing party presses, this apolitical pretense became more pronounced under a public climate that then turned antipolitical as "the public chafed 'under the rule of unwanted politicians'" (p. 233).

Critically, Altschull (1975) argues,

> The liberal press concerned itself more and more in the mid-Weimar period with non-political questions, and when it did [inevitably] enter the political arena, its weapons were the rapier of irony and the well-turned phrase, devices of limited utility in competition with the violent diatribes of the Nazi press and the terror in the streets. (p. 233)

Despite eschewing the "third rail" of political journalism, two potential yet divergent hypotheses suggest why the public impact of such coverage was ineffective. One, which Altschull (1975) notes but qualifies as potentially erroneous, is that the public did not take the liberal press seriously. The other is that they did in fact take it seriously but that "they did not view it as a viable alternative to the radical forces, since it had not shown the will to battle those forces" (p. 235), a position shared by Fulda. Either way, the speed with which the liberal Weimar press dug its own grave (along with millions of others) through weak-kneed "wait and see" moderatism or outright sympathy for the nascent fascist politico-cultural apparatus is telling.

American Journalistic Practice: Similar Weak Spots?

There are many explanations for how objectivity as an abstract belief about the nature of the world transformed into proper American journalistic practice. Often, they suggest a defensive hegemony by a (not necessarily explicit) covering up of power relations related to the structural conditions of commercial journalism in a "market democracy." One explanation Michael Schudson (1978) notes is Gaye Tuchman's view that objectivity serves as a "journalistic ritual .

. . which journalists use to defend themselves against mistakes and criticisms" (p. 186). This ritual becomes even more important when there is a broader cultural milieu that is a-political or antipolitical and where even a hint of partiality is criticized for political bias or capital-P partisanship. I would argue, however, that this strategy is not only insufficient but self-defeating when the facts should be paramount—when budding authoritarians and demagogues renounce factuality and neutralize more energetic fact-checking and contentious coverage by depicting it as personally or politically motivated. See President Trump's October 11, 2017 tweet: "Network news has become so partisan, distorted and fake that licenses must be challenged and, if appropriate, revoked. Not fair to public!" (Trump, 2017)—a systematic analysis of Trump's antimedia rhetoric (especially on Twitter) and strategic a-factuality, nonrationality, and outright lying, while beyond our scope here, is a critical area for future research.

Objectivity and fairness as impartiality remain the gold standard of much American journalism. That said, some journalists do try to loosen the journalistic "straightjacket" of objectivity, to use Schudson's description of Tuchman's approach. As James Ettema and Theodore Glasser (1994) have argued, "the rapier of irony" used by the nonpolitical Weimar Press is often deployed in contemporary American contexts. In investigative reporting, which "seeks to evoke indignation and compel action," the devices of irony are used "to elevate the illegal, the unethical, and even the merely improper to the outrageous and yet retain the same formal features of objective reporting." Ettema and Glasser build from and beyond Thomas Rosteck's analysis of Edward R. Murrow's use of irony against Joseph McCarthy by saturating meaning in "the objective discourse of journalism" while simultaneously disguising it. They contend further that this process "transfigures" objective journalistic conventions into "a moralistic vocabulary for condemnation" (p. 7).

Yet, there is a danger within ironic journalism. While "for journalists, irony seems to threaten neither their own final vocabularies with debilitating skepticism nor their public discourse with corrosive cynicism," Ettema and Glasser (1994) see a potential danger of "a public rhetoric of unrelenting irony" that undermines "any public discussion of what is true and good" (pp. 8–9).

One of the darkest portions of their argument is also a prescient description of the present predicament facing journalism, and in keeping with the broader theme of my argument, the clearest link between the failure of irony (and, therefore, objectivity) as a tool of journalistic political critique in pre-Hitler Germany and the current state of affairs. When applied properly, Ettema and Glasser (1994) write that journalistic irony:

> intends to speak in terms of "particular" irony that corrects legitimate, but naive, expectations by rivaling a "true state of affairs." And it intends to speak in terms of "stable" irony that effectively undermines one position—i.e. hypocrisy and pretense—while unequivocally supporting another—i.e., fairness and honesty.

> Irony-as-corrective can work, however, only when there is a stable and clearly articulated moral position to which to appeal, and more generally, a moral vocabulary shared by writer and reader. Thus, journalistic irony, as a force for civic reform, depends on such key terms in the vocabulary of democratic ideals as "fairness in public policy" and honesty in public service. (p. 24)

Like Andrejevic's (2007) description of the digital enclosure, Ettema and Glasser, equally prescient in 1994, note a shifting "audience of evolving postmodernists" that does not "readily distinguish between the moralistic ironies of investigative journalism and all the other mass-mediated ironies that they encounter from music videos and comic monologues on late-night television to corporate earnings reports and presidential press statements in the morning paper." They also foretell the perils of our current moment:

> "When irony can summon no indignation but only derision, reversal, and parody, then the masses will have fallen fully silent and, in the role of the citizen, will have completely disappeared. Then, the audience will merely watch and, from the vantage point of the spectator, will witness the finale of its own annihilation as a public," while finally, the possibility of journalism as a "moral force" is foreclosed. (Ettema & Glasser, 1994, p. 27)

It is difficult not to recall sitting at a 2016 election debate watch party and laughing at the absurdity and spectacle, the false statements in the face of recorded fact, and booing and hissing at the traded barbs as if it were the reality show many of us ironically called it. It is also difficult not to think of the dominance of pseudojournalistic pop-culture political critique: *The Daily Show*, South Park, Stephen Colbert, and John Oliver "eviscerations" that emphasize ironic turns of phrase and presentation of factuality, satirization, or sarcasm while purporting not to violate any journalistic ethos of objectivity (and therefore also reifying it further) due to being "comedy." Or take the newer phenomenon of "quoted re-tweets," where journalists whose formal reporting conforms to standards of objectivity use a metacontext to present disagreeable political positions in an ironic light, an objective reporting of fact coupled with value-laden smugness and derision.

These features are indicative of how much more "hybrid" our current media system is compared to the Weimar Press (Chadwick, 2013). Some might argue that the intermingling of the journalistic "press" and "media" is so significant that the two are becoming indistinguishable. I have found it clarifying to think of "the press" as practices of "journalism" as opposed to "not-journalism" rather than wholly distinct entities. As the categories of media and press grow increasingly isomorphic, we should additionally capture instances of journalistic practice by citizen or activist journalists and acts of journalism by nonprofessional journalists. Even on the above-maligned late-night "media," such as the

reported segments of John Oliver's *Last Week Tonight*, or Jimmy Kimmel's viral monologues on health care and gun violence, we see examples of reporting and editorial that gain potency not from ironic criticism but from earnestness and interestedness.

Some argue that instead of conceding objectivity in journalism, we must double down on the value of facts, and more broadly, truthfulness. But to counter distrust or cynicism by appealing to the prevailing standard of objective reporting as simple presentation of the facts, or as, in its most interested form, the fact-check, takes for granted the assumption that people will recognize the importance of the "truth about the facts" when the facts are laid out for them. Just rigorously describe what is going on and people will know, the argument goes; this, in many ways, hinges on an overly optimistic appeal to "common sense" that Glasser and Ettema, following Lewis, argue is also "culturally defined" and "assumes knowledge that is shared by the community" (as cited in Glasser & Ettema, 2008, p. 514).

Doubling down on facts has, at least in the context of the 2016 election cycle, proven woefully insufficient. Sociologist Nathan Jurgenson, writing on his website on election night, articulated this approach as "factiness": a more left-wing version of Stephen Colbert's satirical "truthiness" that is "the taste for the feel and aesthetic of 'facts,' often at the expense of missing the truth." Jurgenson (2016) says:

> Factiness appeals to the ideas of the objective, empirical, and the disinterested apprehension of reality. When philosopher Jean Baudrillard spoke of "simulations," he wasn't talking as much about places like Disneyland as much as how Disneyland obscures the fact that everything else is a simulation. And throughout the campaign, what's called the mainstream media has been desperate to pretend everything outside Trumpland is real politics.

Of course, for the then-budding Trump movement and the many reactionaries, White Nationalists, and neo-Nazis that support it, facts were irrelevant in the face of the ritual action of rallies and social media rhetoric. Most media—from left-leaning adversarial outlets like *The Nation* or *Mother Jones* to cable news outlets to reporters for legacy newspapers—managed to amplify the new political cultural space annexed, expanded, and transformed by Trump's campaign by focusing on its factual inaccuracy or ironic outrageousness. When the press finally took the electoral threat of the movement seriously and adopted a more partisan tone through endorsements and even antiendorsements, it proved ineffective.

Despite this failure, and the fact that even more partisan publications like *Mother Jones* engage in practices that play into normalization of the worst of Trump's constituency (see their articles on Richard Spencer, "dapper White Nationalist"), the best way for journalism to combat the worst potentialities

of the present crisis is to embrace a partisanship that makes its values and stances neither a mystery nor an impediment to its duties.

A Return to Partisanship

This is partisanship not in the Democrat versus Republican sense, but in an invested and interested, energized and combative sense. It would embrace and emphasize an expanded notion of the ritual of democratic political participation for both the press and the public, beyond the reductive liberal democratic focus on electoral politics. Our present notions of "partisanship" within contemporary liberal democratic discourse are too attenuated and focused on elections and (Democrat vs. Republican) partisanship, with "partisan journalism" taking the form of the revolving door through which Corey Lewandowski or Donna Brazile move from the Party machine to cable news.

Many democratic theorists have made an argument for a more contestatory understanding of politics—particularly agonists like Chantal Mouffe or Hannah Arendt. My reconceptualization of partisanship draws on a similarly expansive definition of what "politics"—namely, a democratic politics—should look like, building on the works of John Dryzek and Jacques Rancière.

Critiquing Habermas's conception of deliberation in the public sphere, Dryzek (2002) discusses how Habermas's theory hesitates to extend the power of democratization through discursive engagement to other aspects of our social world such as the administrative state, or the economy—ignoring "extraconstitutional" (p. 26) or nonelectoral dimensions to politics. For his part, Rancière (1995) is also a critic of this delimiting of politics proper, or "depoliticization," writing that "politics is the art of suppressing the political." This operates through "the distribution of the sensible," a demarcation of what may be questioned or challenged as "a partition of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows or does not allow some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them" (Rancière, 2004).

The key points are (1) politics is more than elections or political-administrative and legal institutions and (2) to be "partisan" is simply to recognize the ever-present nature of power and politics and our struggle to live in the world together. For Rancière, a *democratic* politics is a "collective struggle from the presupposition of equality" against subordinating power relations. While I believe a properly democratic press would engage in these struggles as well, at minimum, our notion of proper press performance should acknowledge that all subjects—even journalists—have a position, an interest, and a stake in the world. Allowing for and encouraging this little-p partisanship can substitute earnestness for irony and a positive reconstructive critique for the circular firing squads of contemporary American political discourse.

Ideological Entrenchment and Positive Counterexamples

Since Trump's inauguration, some political journalists at mainstream papers of record like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times* have reported more aggressively, in line with just such a notion of little-p partisanship. Many White House reporters, like CNN's Jim Acosta, have regularly sparred with Trump and administration spokespeople, with Trump once dismissing Acosta and CNN as "fake news" ("Trump Trades Barbs With CNN Star Acosta Over 'Fake News,'" 2017). Irrespective of whether exchanges like Acosta's make it into print or broadcast (they often do), the interviews themselves are usually remediated via social media platforms and taken up in journalistic discourse, if not by these publications than by other sites. *The Washington Post* conspicuously changed their slogan to "Democracy Dies in Darkness," although the paper hedged on this being a deliberate riposte to Trump (Farhi, 2017), or his comments that the media are "dishonest" or "the enemy of the people" (Johnson & Gold, 2017).

During the campaign, *The New York Times* rightfully called Trump's revisionism regarding his "Birtherism" (questioning Obama's citizenship) a lie—following the lead of other publications like *The Huffington Post* (Huffington, 2015)—even doing so outside of its editorial pages, in its news section. *The Times*' now eliminated public editor defended the decision, though she advocated that the term be used sparingly. This prompted significant criticism and debate from *The Times*' readership among others. In the words of one reader, "there was a time when . . . Editorials had their own page . . . putting [opinion] on the front page lessens the Times credibility as an objective, fact-based messenger of the news" [sic] (Spayd, 2016). Roughly half a year into the administration, *The Times* published a list of Trump's lies, which they updated a year in as the lies continued to accumulate and added a follow-up comparison to Obama's (Leonhardt, Philbrick, & Thompson, 2017; Leonhardt & Thompson, 2017). These pieces were located, however, in their opinion pages, where the practice of separating "opinion" from "news" sections invoked by the above reader affords some shielding from accusations of abandoning objectivity.

Executive editor Dean Baquet has discussed several times, how "Trump has changed us"—with specific reference to the "lie" label—and the way *The Times* approaches its mission ("Full Video: Times Journalists Discuss the Challenges of Covering Trump's White House," 2017; "NY Times Editor: Trump Has Damaged the Press," n.d.; "NYT Editor Dean Baquet: "Trump Has Changed Us" - BBC Newsnight," 2016). And yet, Baquet still doubles down on the notion that the paper should focus on "reporting the facts" like they always have. He has asserted that their job is "not to be the opposition to Trump" (Simonson, 2018) and described at a TimesTalks panel the need "to take that part of me [that wants to push back against Trump's criticisms] and just cover him . . . aggressively but with fairness as the President of the United States." This

view was shared by chief White House Correspondent Peter Baker, who added "I think the best defense of our journalism is getting the story and getting the story right," and Maggie Haberman, who echoed this sentiment. Haberman agreed with one of Trump's criticisms, saying of the election coverage: "There was a lot of telling and not showing, and I think that it's really important that we just sort of show and people can make up their minds for themselves" ("Full Video: Times Journalists Discuss the Challenges of Covering Trump's White House," 2017).

The way Baker and Haberman recite peans to journalistic impartiality and objectivity on the stage contradicts the idea that it is no longer a dominant ideology for journalists at major outlets, even in this fragmented, audience-centric digital age. Both claim that they deliberately do not read the paper's editorial or opinion coverage. Baker, who says he stopped voting after taking up the White House beat and "stopped doing anything that could be perceived as taking a personal position . . . even in the privacy of my own home," counter-poses "ideological opinions" from "journalistic opinions" and having a stand-point from journalistic professionalism. Haberman agrees "completely" but adds she would "distinguish that we need to show—tone free—the ways in which this is different than other presidencies." This sentiment is not exclusive to *The Times*. Following the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, the coeditor in chief of the student paper stated, "journalism is a form of activism." *National Journal*'s Politics Editor, Josh Kraushaar (2018), tweeted in response "journalism isn't activism; it's presenting the facts, honestly and objectively. It's this mentality that's killing trust in our profession."

Baquet also defended the expansion of *The New York Times*' editorial board's stable of right-wing columnists as a counterweight to its "far left" bent (Simonson, 2018). In what seems like an attempt at "balance" in response to postelection criticism of liberal coastal "echo chambers," the paper has published a-tonal voter ethnographies of Trump supporters (Kristof, 2017; Stolberg, 2016; Walsh, 2016), as have *The Associated Press* (Galofaro, 2017) and *The Washington Post* (Johnson, 2017), and a profile of an American neo-Nazi (Fausset, 2017). The latter was widely criticized for overemphasizing every day, humanizing elements of its subject, downplaying the gravity and potential implications of their beliefs and aims, or a resurgent far right globally.

This clash between engaged and invested reporting taking a standpoint on the current administration and broader right-wing movements and appeals to traditional journalistic impartiality suggests that the debate is still open at national outlets covering national politics and movements. Further, we see that even journalists at legacy outlets with the greatest financial stability and institutional momentum are decentered in the current moment, and many are inclined to double down on long-standing journalistic ideology. To counter this, critical analysis and engagement must continue from scholars, journalists, and the public.

As an intervention in this debate, I would like to highlight in more depth several positive examples of media practice that move toward the type of partisanship I am envisioning. The first two examples, from national outlets, demonstrate what a little-p partisan press can focus on to systematically undermine the most destructive aims of the Trump administration and affiliated movements. The third is a local example that captures a confluence of factors: fascistic and Trumpian rhetoric, a systematic and deliberate distortion of media discourse through coordinated disinformation playing on racial and Islamophobic insecurities, and its successful undermining through aggressive—and earnest—partisan journalism.

Local news tends to garner a little more trust than national and is therefore better situated to counter narratives grounded in disinformation (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). Because they are also ultimately speaking to a community bounded both by sociocultural proximity and geopolitical lines, it is easier to capture and understand a given news event and the impact of little-p partisan reporting. For this reason, when considering national examples in greater depth, I focus on those engaging less in a specific rebuttal of disinformation campaigns than those that critique the structural, political-economic, and social relationships that would make possible the most fascistic components of Trump and the American far right's agendas. The resonance of aforementioned ironic offender Jimmy Kimmel's monologues on health care and gun violence suggests significant traction for earnest, impassioned, yet partisan statements even from the late-night crowd. There are segments of the population with whom these reports and their calls to alarm will not resonate—those already dyed in the wool of American fascist and White Supremacist movements, and far-right sympathizers lured in by rallies in their digital *piazzas*, certainly—but, critically, they could mobilize the well-meaning liberal democrats so easily lured into complacency by the convenience and nobility of staying the course and trusting "it will all work out in the end."

The Intercept

The first example is from *The Intercept*, an openly "adversarial" publication. In February and March of 2017, *The Intercept* ran stories on the tech company Palantir and the data analysis and database work they have done for two powerful and controversial arms of the U.S. Government, the National Security Agency (Biddle, 2017) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Woodman, 2017). These two agencies are also potentially useful for an authoritarian or protofascist movement staking its claim on ethnonationalism: mass surveillance, and mass detention and deportation.

The latter story describes how Palantir built a massive database system to aid Immigration and Customs Enforcement in "both discovering targets and then creating and administering cases against them." The piece notes how this would

allow for the mass deportations demanded by President Trump's base during the election. The article, headlined "Palantir Provides the Engine for Donald Trump's Deportation Machine," leaves little ambiguity about how the publication views the findings of its investigation and illustrates how little worry they have about sounding the alarm on what some might claim is a remote possibility. The article's reporter uses funding documents for the construction of the system and quotes from civil liberties and immigration rights experts to show how this "sprawling immigrant surveillance apparatus" would "assist [Trump] in carrying out his promise to rapidly deport millions of immigrants." He also does not hesitate to extend the blame across the aisle, also taking aim at the Obama administration for "not only presid[ing] over an unprecedented number of deportations . . . [but] also overs[eeing] the pronounced expansion of intelligence systems aimed at the country's immigrants."

While the piece is factual, adhering to certain journalistic conventions (e.g., soliciting comment from the reported-on agencies, which declined), *The Intercept* makes it clear that they stand against mass deportation and on the side of immigrants. They also lay blame irrespective of party ID (a key step in building trust), without falling into a trap of false equivalencies, and critically refuse to resign themselves to merely reporting that which has already happened; they do not shirk from a sense of common responsibility with respect to the collective future of their country (clearly expansively defined), warning of potentially severe state action.

BuzzFeed and Bannon's White Nationalist "Killing Machine"

In October 2017, *BuzzFeed News* exposed the intimate relationship between Trump's inner circle, segments of the "alt-right" that have sought to distance themselves from neo-Nazi or neoreactionary association, and those very extremist groups and the media ecosystems and distributed fascist pseudo-sub publics they construct. Joseph Bernstein's report meticulously uses leaked e-mails circulating story and event ideas as well as drafts between former Breitbart editor Milo Yiannopoulos, Breitbart chairman and intermittent White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon, and heads of various neo-Nazi and neoreactionary sites including *The Daily Stormer* and *The American Renaissance* (Bernstein, 2017).

The piece, like *The Intercept*'s, offers space for comment by the reported-on parties but does not overcorrect in search of objectivity or evenhandedness, instead making a forceful argument for how dangerous Bannon, Milo, Breitbart, and other actors and media groups under the umbrella term "alt-right" can be. The top of the piece shows a GIF from a video of Milo singing "America the Beautiful," while several onlookers, including Richard Spencer, throw up Nazi salutes. A top headline reads "Alt-White: How the Breitbart Machine Laundered Racist Hate," and subsequent headlines and subheads,

respectively, read "Here's How Breitbart and Milo Smuggled Nazi and White Nationalist Ideas into The Mainstream" and " . . . The Truth About Steven Bannon's Alt-Right 'Killing Machine'" (his own term).

This violent metaphor is a consistent theme in the piece, as it uses the interlocutor's own words to make explicit that this is in fact how Bannon (presumed architect of many of President Trump's early polices, like the Muslim Travel Ban), and those he has groomed and mentored at Breitbart, view the world and their role in contemporary politics: war.

It is worth quoting two passages at length. One reads:

> These new emails and documents . . . clearly show that Breitbart does more than tolerate the most hate-filled, racist voices of the alt-right. It thrives on them, fueling and being fueled by some of the most toxic beliefs on the political spectrum—and clearing the way for them to enter the American mainstream.

The second connects the Trump administration, via Bannon and Yiannopoulos, to "extremists striving to create a white ethnostate," as Bannon's "killing machine . . . dredges up the resentments of people around the world, sifts through these grievances for ideas and content, and propels them from the unsavory parts of the internet up to TrumpWorld, collecting advertisers' checks all along the way."

The piece includes many other examples of earnest alarm and leaves little doubt that the world envisioned by these groups, and Trump's inner circle is not the type of world this reporter and their editors want to live in.

Twin Falls: A Local Newspaper Battles Far-Right "Fake News"

A final example from local news highlights a successful instance of journalists engaged as partisans against the type of racist, anti-immigrant, and neo-Nazi or protofascist discourse highlighted above. In June 2016, a story about alleged underage sexual assault in the small city of Twin Falls, Idaho, was hijacked by an antirefugee movement and picked up by media sites peddling total falsifications about the case, ranging from Breitbart to Facebook accounts linked to Russian government agencies. The confidentiality of the case, because it dealt with minors, created space for false claims that the alleged assailants were Syrian refugees—the accused boys were Iraqi and Sudanese—and that their fathers threw them parties to celebrate their sexual victory over the White female victim. This combined with already substantial and often-sexualized anti-Muslim, antirefugee, and anti-immigrant rhetorics that had saturated the nearly completed 2016 GOP primary, driven by then-presumptive nominee Trump. The disinformation campaign intensified criticism of a local refugee resettlement program and—relying on the personalized and fragmented "digital

enclosure"—attempted to mobilize rallies and prompted threats of political violence against local officials and their families.

This left the local paper, *The Times-News*, in the position of combatting a seemingly insurmountable tide of political disinformation. A feature about the incident in *The New York Times Magazine* paraphrases the local paper's editor, Matt Christensen, "part of the reason a fear of Islam has persisted in Twin Falls is because the local [political] leadership refused to defuse it" (Dickerson, 2017). *The Times Magazine* adds that Christensen, and reporter Nathan Brown, were a two-person counter-propaganda team, with Brown penning "articles that sorted out the truth about the [sexual assault case and conspiracy of governmental cover-up]," while Christensen's editorials "castigated the people who were spreading falsehoods." Christensen often cross-cited to Brown's reporting in his editorials. For example, one of the most impassioned and forceful editorials, "Our View: Twin Falls Must Make Hate Unwelcome" (2016), notes the inundation of hateful and threatening calls and e-mails targeting local officials as well as the paper, citing Brown's piece "City Deluged With Angry, Some Threatening, Emails" (Brown, 2016a). The paper produced over a dozen pieces on the story, the international propaganda campaign, the local antirefugee campaign, and the threats.

The reported pieces from Brown and another journalist, Alex Riggins, avoid the straightforward and combative tone of the editorials, but do not simply present two sides of an argument, and contextualize the situation. One of the first pieces noting the politics of the incident and numerous calls at a city council meeting for "vetting" or eliminating refugee programs altogether connects the event to the national political context, which "echo[es] statements" by Trump, who "continues to call for a ban on noncitizen Muslims entering the United States and profiling of American mosques" (Brown, 2016b). The pieces also repeatedly countered falsities through what limited official information was available.

The repetition warrants emphasizing. Following a first contentious city council meeting on June 20, 2016, the prosecutor in the case, Grant Loebs, denied the budding false narrative. Brown, Riggins, and a third reporter Julie Wootton, open their piece "Prosecutor Says Anti-refugee Movement Spreading False Claims About Syrian Child Rape" with the lede: "Authorities are denying reports that Syrians gang-raped a child at knife-point . . . saying the false claims are being spread to incite anti-refugee sentiments." It describes how these statements "largely refute several differing accounts about the incident circulating on anti-refugee resettlement and conspiracy websites and anti-Muslim blogs" (Riggins, Brown, & Wootton, 2016).

Similar lines are repeated in multiple follow-up stories. One reads,

> Several anti-Muslim and anti-refugee resettlement bloggers wrote about the case, with some incorrectly saying the boys were Syrian or containing details authorities

> have denied, including saying the assault was a gang-rape and that the boys held the girl at knife-point.

Again, they note attempts by these sites to paint the response of officials and local media as part of a cover-up (Brown, 2016c). Another story, "Mayor calls for calm over assault," reiterates the case is sealed because it deals with minors and that the Police Chief and prosecutor released "some details to refute incorrect reporting on anti-refugee and anti-Muslim blogs . . . such as claims that the boys were Syrian refugees, that they held the girl at knife-point or that it was a gang rape." Again, the piece notes the accusation of a cover-up adding "city offices and officials have been deluged with emails and phone calls about it, some of them threatening" (Brown, 2016d).

Pieces from Christensen and the editorial board do not hold back, and while they mount scathing critique, they also articulate a positive vision for the city and region in the face of effervescent Islamophobic hate and antirefugee sentiment. An early editorial "Refugee opponents reach new low" argues the girl in the case "was victimized, first by the boys and next by opportunistic racists." The groups opposed to refugee resettlement "reached a new and almost unimaginably deplorable low" when they spun "a web of lies around the incident to fit their agenda . . . stoking renewed calls for an end to refugee resettlement and a fresh round of anti-Muslim maligning" ("Our View: Refugee Opponents Reach New Low," 2016). In a follow-up piece bylined by Christensen (2016), he responds to a reader's question, "isn't this case proof that Muslims are destroying our community?":

> My answer? Absolutely not. Authorities have said there is no evidence whatsoever this case was motivated by religious beliefs or customs; police and prosecutors aren't even sure if the boys are Muslims. Does that matter? Contrary to online reports, the families of the boys did not condone the attack or celebrate it afterward. It could just as well have been three white Christian children involved. (2016)

The most forceful editorial, "Twin Falls Must Make Hate Unwelcome" came close to a month after the incident went viral. "Want to Stare Hate in the Face?" the piece opens,

> No need to seek it out in the evening news. Why look to Nice, France, or San Bernardino, Calif., or Bangladesh or Iraq or Louisiana or Minnesota or any number of places where unspeakable acts of hatred have rocked the world in recent months? It's right here at home.

After describing some of the threats—"One writer said the council deserved bullets in their heads. Others talked about raping the wives and children of

council members"—the piece also mounts a forceful argument for community action.

> We're committed to calling out hatred whenever and wherever we see it. Anything less, and the hate will only continue to fester, to spread in our community like a cancer. Now is the time for the community to make clear that such hatred has no place in Twin Falls and the Magic Valley.

Everyone, they write, "has a responsibility to help shape our ethos and our culture," but action "has yet to happen in any collective sense . . . so hatred has largely filled the vacuum."

They also take aim at shirking responsibility due to respectability politics, citing "the kind of quiet conversations with friends and relatives that make us cringe but not enough to speak up and counter their ignorance" as fertile ground for racist or Islamophobic subjectivization if unchallenged. "Perhaps you feel too polite. Maybe as a business owner you're worried taking a stand could jeopardize your company. Maybe as an elected official you're concerned standing up to hate will hurt your chances for re-election. Maybe," they write in their strongest call-to-action,

> But now is not the time for silence. Now is the time for courage. Now is the time to redefine our region's story, to overpower the hatred by lauding all that makes the Magic Valley such a special place to live. ("Our View: Twin Falls Must Make Hate Unwelcome," 2016)

The little-p partisan nature of *The Times-News* is clear in contrast to prevailing big-P partisan politics. *The New York Times Magazine* notes, Christensen "had closed-door meetings with city officials" to try to convince them to also write editorials slamming purveyors of disinformation, but they declined for fear of being challenged and beaten from the right on issues of refugee resettlement and crime. Christensen states:

> Behind closed doors, they would all tell you they were pro-refugee, and we wanted them to step forward and make that declaration in a public arena and it just never really happened. That was frustrating especially at the beginning because it really felt like the newspaper was out there all alone. There were days where we felt like, Goddammit, what are we doing here? We write a story and it's going to reach 50,000 people. Breitbart writes a story and it's going to reach 2, 3, 4, 5, 10 million people. What kind of a voice do we have in this debate? (Dickerson, 2017)

Ultimately, their voice drowned out a campaign leveraging a local media ecosystem polluted by "alt-right" and antirefugee social media-driven disinformation in a broader national and global one. After the *Times Magazine* piece titled

"How Fake News Turned a Small Town Upside Down" ran, *The Times-News* ran their own editorial reflecting on the incident. It noted that "the College of Southern Idaho never wavered in its support for the Refugee Resettlement Center," adding that "donations and offers for volunteers flooded in" for the center. To the testament of the paper and the community, they write,

> if anything, the refugee center came out of the crisis for the better, with a heightened community awareness of the plight of refugees, and a better understanding about how they're vetted, the limited benefits they receive and how the vast majority of refugees strive to assimilate and become productive members of our community.

A laudable outcome, problematic discourses on vetting, assimilation, and "productivity" aside.

Conclusion

While *The Times-News* editorial may not seem particularly partisan in its championing of journalism's "long-established set of rules built on commitments" to ideals like truth and fairness, they also add to these two *responsibility*. This very responsibility, which obligated the paper to stand as a bulwark against disinformation and the political intent behind it—they name names: "Russians, racists and xenophobes"—combined with their championing of their "trained journalists with a stake in their community," places it rather close to my notion of partisanship. They did not amplify both sides without comment or context irrespective of their tripartite regulative ideals. They did not merely "let the facts" (really the reader's interpretation) speak for themselves, a symptom of the new so-called "free speech debate," with neofascist digital shock jocks and open neo-Nazis claiming larger and larger platforms.

As *The Intercept*, *BuzzFeed*, and *The Times-News* examples show, being partisan or interested is not mutually exclusive from reporting facts—it just jettisons the triangulation between "both sides" due to the mantra of objectivity, and obsession specifically with facts. But I would also add that this partisanship must also be coupled with a broader systemic or structural critique of journalism, its notions of engagement and participation in the emerging political economy, as well as more expansive social and political projects aimed at these concepts in the broader sociocultural and political context of both the discursive and the material world. It is a daunting task, but if it turns out that America and other Western liberal democracies are indeed on a fascistic precipice—as I try to suggest is far from an alarmist fantasy—to not take up the fight to forestall a descent into fascism, whether now or in the not-too-distant future, could very well historically resign us to the sordid pile of the naïve but well meaning who paved the way to humanity's greatest sins.

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