CONNECT!ONS Med!aLit moments

In This Issue…

Theme: The Role of Journalism in Society

In a 1910 speech before the Sorbonne, Theodore Roosevelt presented in some detail his views of government, civilization, and virtue. Among other things, Roosevelt commented on the role of journalists and journalism within society. With a press that had not long ago been dominated by the sensationalism of the Hearst and Pulitzer newspapers, Roosevelt was keen to comment on the damage journalists could deal to democratic discourse, and the service to the public interest they could render: "The power of the journalist is great, but he is entitled neither to respect nor admiration because of that power unless it is used aright. He can do, and often does, great good. He can do, and often does, great mischief… Offenses against taste and morals, which are bad enough in a private citizen, are infinitely worse if made into instruments for debauching the community through a newspaper" ("The Man in the Arena," p. 9).

Just over a century later, so much has changed, and so much has remained the same. Perhaps the greatest change is the conception of the journalist as an individual with singular powers to steer the direction of public discourse. In more formal terms, it's the power to set the "news agenda," which determines which topics and issues are included in the news— and those which are omitted. In truth, this gatekeeping function of journalism held sway for a relatively limited period of time, from the publication of Walter Lippman's *Public Opinion* (1922) to the end of the 20th century (Willams and Carpini, *After Broadcast News* p. 62-65). By century's end, "the" journalist was replaced by a wide variety of producers of information, many of them amateurs, others experts in specific fields. They include bloggers, staff and freelancers at social media sites, and sometimes individual citizens with a digital platform and/or personal connections from which to gain the attention of public officials.

It's clear that the fight against moral turpitude in the dissemination of information is still alive and well. For example, public relations firms are beginning to set up non-profit organizations largely financed by corporations with specific agendas—so that "experts" on staff at these organizations can push those agendas in interviews with reporters, and still evade scrutiny about the original source of their messaging. The lack of transparency—their covert agenda--is the organizing principle by which such firms gain profit and power for their clients. Others, like Melanie Sloan, former federal prosecutor, and now executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, investigates the same Beltway firms which have pursued these strategies (Friedhoff, "Be Careful Who You Quote," *Nieman Reports*, Summer 2012, p.25-26).

It's also clear that freedom of the press has declined worldwide, which means that more "mediation" of the news is occurring and that "what is omitted" is increasingly important to citizens ability to evaluate the news that they have access to. The 2015 World Press Freedom Index, developed through Reporters without Borders, presents worrying statistics and surprises in terms of where various countries stand in regards to freedom of the press;

the U.S., for example, ranks #49, according to this Index, while the Nordic countries of Finland, Norway and Denmark are rated as the top three countries, respectively. https://index.rsf.org/#!/

In this issue of *Connections,* we examine the role of journalists and journalism in society and how that role has changed over time. In our MediaLit Moments activity, *Liar, Liar Pants on Fire!* students decipher what's real and what's not in videos gone viral.

Research Highlights

Post-Industrial Journalism

While the words "journalism" and "democracy" are often paired together to suggest the stability that a free press can bring to the governance of industrialized societies, traditional news organizations can no longer exclusively control the pipeline of information, and their institutional sustainability is very much in doubt. These are just two of the arguments posited by Chris Anderson, Clay Shirky and Emily Bell in their 2014 Tow Center for Digital Journalism report, *Post Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present*.

In the recent past, traditional news organizations generally had the power to act as gatekeepers of public information. For many, if not most audiences, they decided which stories qualified as news. In the digital age, this relationship no longer holds. For example, when Occupy Wall Street protestors were ejected from New York's Zuccotti Park in November 2011, the story was broken not by the traditional press, but by the occupiers themselves, who sent word of the police action via SMS, Twitter and Facebook. More pictures and video of the event were generated by the participants than by the traditional media, in part because the overwhelming majority of available cameras were in the pockets of the occupiers, and in part because the police closed the airspace above the park to news helicopters. Reporters on the scene hid their press badges because ordinary citizens had better access to the events in question than credentialed members of the press (Anderson, Shirky, and Bell, "Post-Industrial Ecosystem").

With regard to institutional survival, Anderson and his colleagues recount a litany of unfortunate developments which make the future of large news organizations appear precarious indeed. The most important of these is the decreasing price of advertising. As the authors note, "The essential source of advertiser subsidy is lack of choice." When advertisers can choose as many venues for their ads as they wish, they can command the market—and today consumers seem to be willing to encounter ads anywhere on the web. Moreover, ads that used to appear in papers, from want ads to dating services, are now found on standalone sites such as Craigslist, Monster.com, and OKCupid.

The value of wire service stories decreases as fair use rules make it possible for online publishers to redistribute them across the web. And, where media companies were once paid a premium for their ownership of the means of broadcast or publication, much of that infrastructure is now in the hands of consumers: ". . . now we pay Dell for computers, Canon for printers, and Verizon for delivery, rather than paying Conde Nast, Hearst or Tribune Co. for all those services in a bundle" ("The Internet Wrecks Advertising Subsidy"). Whither journalism in a post-industrial age? The authors assert "There Are Many Opportunities for Doing Good Work in New Ways," and urge journalists to embrace the future: "Even as the old monopolies vanish, there is an increase in the amount of journalistically useful work to be achieved through collaboration with amateurs, crowds and machines. Commodities traders, for example, do not need a reporter to stand by a wheat

field and interview a farmer. Satellites can take real-time images of the crops and interpret the visual data, turning it into useful data in the blink of an eye" ("Section 1: Journalists"). And, for audiences, reading news isn't necessarily a matter of understanding political issues and events. Information literacy skills, including interpretation of data, become crucial to understanding news as well.

For an example of the value of amateur reporting, we turn to the 'accidental' coverage of the killing of Osama bin Laden. The first public report came from Sohaib Athar (Twitter name @reallyvirtual). Athar was not a journalist (at the time he was an IT consultant in Abbottabad, Pakistan, where the raid took place), but as Steve Myers at the Poynter Institute said, "He acted like a journalist." Athar tweeted about hearing a helicopter and a blast, then responded to inquiries, added information when he thought he had it, followed the thread of the story and created context for it. Athar became a resource for journalists who were reconstructing a timeline of the events—a part of the verification system that could be compared in real time against the official version.

Though Athar may have taken the "scoop" for this story, professional journalists have not been replaced but displaced, moved higher up the editorial chain from the production of initial observations to a role that emphasizes verification and interpretation, bringing sense to the streams of text, audio, photos and video produced by the public ("What Social Media Does Better"). When amateur journalists such as Athar clarify the processes used for verification, they can help audiences judge the credibility of information as well.

At CML, we often direct attention to the conceptual model of text, producer and audience. The authors of the *Post-Industrial News* report build a conceptual model of the "news ecosystem," which is constituted by those aspects of news production which are not under the control of a single institution. Instead of a singular producer, production is distributed across a wide network of players. Anderson and his colleagues don't just suggest that this model represents the reality of current production practices, but advocate for this model as well: "News organizations should do a better job of making their work systematically available to other organizations for reuse, whether by sharing data or by sharing tools and techniques. There will always be a tension between competitive and cooperative logic in the news ecosystem, but in the current environment, the cost of not undertaking shared effort has gone up, the cost of lightweight collaboration has gone down considerably, and the value of working alone has fallen." ("Recommendation: Figure Out How to Use Work Systematized by Others"). What's most exciting about this news ecosystem model is that it apparently adopts the collaborative ethos of media production in an age of media makers, and other models of 21st century education as well.

This report is both intellectually and practically oriented, and treats a wide variety of salient topics in depth. Access the report http://towcenter.org/research/post-industrial-journalism-adapting-to-the-present-2/.

Journalism and Public Participation in Democratic Discourse

Before CNN and the 24 hour news cycle, before the proliferation of political talk shows on the right and left, just a few large organizations dominated the news. In *After Broadcast News: Media Regimes, Democracy and the New Information Environment*, Bruce Williams and Michael Delli Carpini make the large broadcast news organizations a focal point of their historical analysis of American journalism, and use that analysis to ground their recommendations for democratic participation in our current media culture.

Williams and Delli Carpini see one virtue in the institutions that characterized the era of broadcast news: with mass audiences tuning in daily to evening news broadcasts, many took in the full broadcast hour as a matter of civic duty. A national audience was created, and with it a common understanding of political affairs for most citizens.

This system did have its downsides, however. In a practice media theoreticians call "indexing," large organizations authorized to advance a news agenda often took their direction from political elites, and relied on those elite actors as sources of information (Williams and Delli Carpini, Chapter 3). Media literacy had little room to thrive in such a media environment. Ordinary citizens were most often treated as passive receptacles of information provided by the networks. Citizens could react to the news, but had fewer means and venues for democratic deliberation of the issues.

In their second chapter, the authors sketch the beginnings of American journalism with two primary sources, the *Philadelphia Aurora* and the *Gazette of the United States*, to illustrate the pitched rhetorical battle between Federalist and anti-Federalist papers of the Republican Era. Williams and Carpini write, "What is immediately evident to the modern reader is the near absence of any distinction between fact and opinion in the pages of the *Aurora* and its competitors. In its place were countervailing interpretations of current events, in which facts (or allegations) served as evidence to drive ideological and/or partisan arguments" (p.37). While this form of political participation was robust, the contest between the two papers was not unlike the political contests in our current media environment, in which over-heated controversy and leaps in logic are not uncommon.

Towards the end of this chapter, Williams and Delli Carpini turn their attention to journalism in the Progressive Era, and comment on the focus of Progressive journalists on "just the facts." Fact and opinion, news and editorial content were strictly separated. Partisan controversy was eschewed. Rather, a cadre of educated professionals would be relied upon to exercise their own independent judgment. Thus, Progressive Era journalists set the stage for the agenda-setting function of broadcast news media in the following decades of the 20th century.

Sandwiched in between the analysis of the partisan early press and the efficiencies of the Progressive Era, Williams and Delli Carpini make a novel move towards an integrated perspective on news. They draw from the Realist movement of the late nineteenth century, a

movement not confined to journalism, but pursued in multiple media and genres: "Using novels, newspapers, photography, poetry and painting, [Realists] raised many profound questions about the connection between verifiable facts, artistic creativity, and media representation, on the one hand, and the underlying truth they sought to portray" (p. 49).

More to the point, while Realists sought out ways to get at the "the truth" embodied in external reality, "they did not advocate facts as against values, objectivity as opposed to subjectivity, news as opposed to entertainment, or any of the other distinctions so familiar to us today" (p.50). The Realist approach, as interpreted by the authors, has much in common with a media literacy approach to news media. If subjectivity is sanctioned, so are multiple perspectives and responses. Audiences can and do respond to the same media texts in different ways.

We conclude this article with a brief case study of this Realist version of participation in our media culture. In 1997, as part of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, HBO aired *Rachel's Daughters* (referring to Rachel Carson, who died of breast cancer shortly after the publication of *Silent Spring*). In this documentary, a group of women with breast cancer set out as 'detectives' to find out whether toxic substances or other environmental hazards might have caused their cancer.

The women profiled in the show consulted a wide variety of interview sources, some more activist and less scientifically respectable, as well as more mainstream researchers from Duke, Harvard, Berkeley and the National Cancer Institute, all of whom were given time to introduce themselves and their research at some length. The women profiled in the show sought out a wide variety of print sources as well.

Sandra Steingraber, a Cornell University professor well-known as an environmental writer, biologist, poet, and cancer survivor, was called in to help frame the complex connections among research, political issues and personal motivations of the women profiled in the show. Among other things, the documentary connected issues of race, class, gender, disease, and where and how public research dollars were being allocated.

In writing about *Rachel's Daughters*, Williams and Delli Carpini take note of the hostile review from Gina Kolata, a *New York Times* science reporter at that time. Kolata writes, "The women on the show are far removed from the universe of scientists and others who make distinctions between hypotheses and evidence, who believe that speculation is not proof, and that when evidence fails to support a hypothesis, the hypothesis should be abandoned… Their universe is emotional and scary, filled with corporate bogeymen and toxic wastes and young women dying of a dreaded disease. Its appeal is insidious, and that is its danger" (238).

Progressive Era sensibilities are reflected in Kolata's review, in at least a few ways. It draws a distinction between hard science and emotional evasion of the facts. It appeals to the

wisdom of a group of professionals who should be entrusted to make decisions on behalf of an ill-informed public. Most poignantly, it avoids any discussion of politics. From a media literacy point of view, the question once again is, where can democratic participation in our media culture thrive?

Yet *Rachel's Daughters* isn't just an emotional response to traumatic life events, though it certainly entails that. The show's subjects are given time to investigate whether they have any grounds to suspect that environmental hazards contributed to their disease. Their participation in this search does reflect the possibilities open to ordinary citizens in a democratic media environment.   And, in true Realist form, the show's producers pursue a variety of strategies to illuminate breast cancer as a scientific, social and individually experienced phenomenon.

CML News

Global Media Literacy in a Digital Age: Teaching Beyond Borders

Global Media Literacy in a Digital Age: Teaching Beyond Borders is a new book edited by Belinha W. De Abreu and Melda N. Yildiz; CML's Tessa Jolls wrote the Foreword for the book.
http://peterlang.com/index.cfm…

Media Literacy Workshop for Nonprofits
Media Literacy Strategies for Children, Youth and Family Nonprofits. Tuesday, February 23, 4pm, at Tarzana Providence Medical Center. Free.

Nonprofits serving children, youth and families can increase public support and understanding for their clients by helping their own staffs as well as community members to become better consumers of media, mass and social, and to use media more effectively for information and advocacy. This workshop is another activity of the Valley Nonprofit Resources Children, Youth and Family Nonprofit Initiative - co-sponsored by the Child Development Institute and the CSUN Institute for Community Health and Wellbeing. CML's Tessa Jolls will lead the workshop. For more information and to register please call, 818-677-2774 or email valleynonprofitresources@csun.edu.

CONSORTIUM for MEDIA LITERACY

Uniting for Development

About Us…
The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

Four Models of Journalism and Democracy

It's easy to criticize the media, but it isn't always easy to imagine the alternatives. In his "In Search of a Standard: Four Models of Democracy and Their Normative Implications for Journalism," Jesper Strömbäck points out that specific models of democracy are needed to determine what kind of information is required in each.

The four models of democracy which Strömbäck submits for consideration? Competitive, participatory, deliberative, and procedural.

One can say that procedural democracy is the basic model. Citizens and politicians respect the rules and procedures of a democracy. The right to vote, freedom of expression and the press and other basic requirements must always be protected and respected. As long as this is the case, it is of less importance whether people use their right to vote or not. Procedural democracy does not put any demands on citizens to vote, consume news, participate in public life, or stay well-informed. How people choose to spend their time and energy is up to themselves, as long as they do not violate basic democratic rights and freedoms. To demand that people spend their life keeping up with the news, getting informed, and participating in public life, is to demand too much (p. 334).

The expectations for journalism? "A media system in which maximum freedom resides…will probably provide all kinds of content if asked for by enough people. A free marketplace of ideas as well as of media outlets will grant not only that freedom itself is protected, but also that the truth—if there is such a thing—in the end will crystallize. Therefore, there is no need for specific demands upon media or news standards for journalism. Of course, if there are events, issues or information that all people truly should know about, journalism should provide it" (p. 338). In many ways, this model is most representative of our current media system. If truth is to "crystallize," it's going to take the time and dedication of media literacy educators to make that happen.

In a competitive democracy, elections are the main focus, and political candidates or parties compete for the support of the electorate. "As in the market place for goods, political alternatives offer their services and products (platforms, candidates, images) to voters who are then supposed to act as customers and (through their votes) buy the product that pleases them the most. Without clear political choices, the process would be undermined" (ibid).

What are the expectations for journalism in a competitive democracy? "First, news should provide information that people can trust and act upon. The line between fact and fiction must not be blurred. Thus it is important to draw a clear line of demarcation between different kinds of media content such as advertisements, entertainment and journalism; and that media content presented as journalism lives up to standards concerning checking the

facts, being critical of news sources, and being impartial" (p.339).

In the competitive democracy model, journalists should also focus attention on the words and actions of candidates and incumbents, and monitor political elites, both in what they have done, what they promise to do, and whether they have done what they promised when elected. It is especially important that media and journalism tell people about the record of office-holders, and that journalism should set the agenda rather than let political actors do this (ibid). From a media literacy standpoint, it's good to have professional news organizations which can provide reliable information, but it's still important for individual citizens to have the knowledge and skills needed to evaluate its credibility.

In a participatory model, democracy thrives when people engage in public life and different types of political action, when they bond through their activities, and when they develop democratically sound attitudes. "Democracy must be sustained by the actions of a large number of people, and requires a large reservoir of social capital among people, including norms of reciprocity, civic engagement and trust" (335-336).

The expectations for journalism? As with all models, it is important that news corresponds to the reality it is referring to, "since otherwise people's actions and opinions risk being built on false premises" (339). News should provide information about important societal problems and about how society and the decision-making processes work. News should allow ordinary people to speak for themselves, and even set the agenda for their coverage. Furthermore, journalists should frame politics as issues open for citizen participation, not as a strategic game played by those already engaged. From a media literacy standpoint, norms of transparency and trust are essential to a democratic media culture, as the work of Melanie Sloan and the Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington so ably demonstrates.

Finally, and somewhat controversially, journalists in a participatory democracy should be attached to, rather than detached from, the democracy within which they work. In this role, journalists are "fair-minded participants." This proviso is a nod to the "public journalism" movement of the late 1990s and early years of the 21st century, in which journalists didn't just "fill" news consumers with facts, but acted as facilitators of discussion about important issues (p. 340).

In a deliberative democracy, political decisions are preceded by discussions in the public sphere as well as in smaller settings. Discussions are committed to the values of rationality, impartiality, intellectual honesty, and equality among participants. Furthermore, deliberative discussions are seen both as ends in themselves as well as a means of producing agreement (or at least a better understanding of the values underlying conflicts). The core idea: "when citizens or their representatives disagree morally, they should continue to reason together to reach mutually acceptable decisions" (ibid).

The expectations of media and journalism? Media should provide an arena for everyone with strong arguments and direct attention to those who can contribute to a furthering of the discussion. And, instead of framing politics as a strategic game where the only motivation of politicians is to win elections, journalists should frame politics as a continuous process of finding solutions to common problems. As with the participatory model, they should also help organize discussion of issues, and once again act as "fair-minded participants." Factual information and the watchdog function of the press are still prized. And, as with all other models, basic information about how society and political processes work is required (p.341). From a media literacy standpoint, this model offers a model for both information literacy and empowerment.

Further implications for each model are clearly laid out in this article—but it may be best to simply ask, what kind of media and what kind of democracy do you prefer, and why?

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Recommended Resources:
Nieman Foundation for Journalism (nieman.harvard.edu)
In addition to publishing *Nieman Reports*, the foundation hosts Nieman Lab, a website reporting on digital media innovation, and Nieman Storyboard, a website exploring the art and craft of non-fiction storytelling.

Pro Publica (propublica.org)
Not only is Pro Publica an organization dedicated to public interest journalism. It also has pioneered the sharing of structured data sets to help investigative journalists ply their trade. Their Dollars for Docs site, which details payments made from major pharmaceutical companies to prescribing physicians, is a great example, and easily accessed by individual users:https://projects.propublica.org/docdollars/

Institute for Nonprofit News (inn.org)
INN doesn't just publish news in the public interest. They embody the kind of collaboration and support envisaged by the authors of the Tow Center post-industrial journalism report. In addition to collaborating on stories, INN supports organizations and individuals with business services, education, fiscal sponsorship, insurance assistance, and an innovation fund.

Poynter Institute (poynter.org)
The emphasis of Poynter Institute is on education, whether for middle and high school students, working journalists, or managers at news organizations. A CML staff member recently attended a webinar on following presidential campaigns away from the Beltway, and came away with valuable insights on campaign reporting.

The Tow Center Report on "Post-Industrial Journalism" mentions a couple dozen sites and organizations that are worth checking out, from Map Light, which trains a spotlight on political contributions, to Poligraft, a utility created by the Sunlight Foundation which allows users to uncover levels of influence in federal and state politics and news coverage of it.

Liar, Liar Pants on Fire!

In September 2013, a video of what appeared to be a young woman "twerking" upside down on her door, falling down on her living room table and catching fire from nearby candles provoked a sensation on social media. In addition, local news channels around the country carried the video for the opportunity to comment (tongue-in-cheek) about the dangers of twerking. In all, the video attracted nine million views. The video turned out to be an elaborate fake staged by the *Jimmy Kimmel Show.*

Ask students what they think might be suspect about a viral video.

AHA!: Just because this video looks like it was produced at home doesn't mean that it wasn't professionally staged or altered.

Grade Level: 8-12

Key Question #2: What creative techniques attracted my attention?
Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules

Materials: Screen, LCD projector, computer with high-speed Internet connection

Activity: The video can be easily found on YouTube, using search words such as "twerking girl catches fire." It's about 37 seconds long. Make sure not to load any videos bearing the Jimmy Kimmel logo. If you like, you can ever-so-slightly misdirect students by asking students to share their thoughts about videos on social media that might fall under the heading of "do not attempt at home." (The woman in the video is a trained stunt woman,by the way).

Storyful (storyful.com), which curates, licenses and verifies a wide variety of social media and news content, promotes its services with a number of brief case studies. Among them is a study debunking the 'twerking girl on fire' video. The study includes a number of questions posed by staff, as well as a short narrative on the processes used to document the video as a 'certfiable fake.' Make use of these materials as you wish to help students act as detectives searching out the truth about the production of this video. Once you're satisfied with student work and discussion, play the full version in which Jimmy Kimmel appears on screen to extinguish the fire on the woman's yoga pants.