Who, What, When, Where, and Why?

A New Story of Journalism, As Told by Nonprofit News Organizations

by

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ABSTRACT:

Communication scholars and professional journalists have used genres in recent years to propose solutions to social and financial crises that continuously plague the field in a digital age. One of these emerging genres is nonprofit journalism, which, with claims of transparency and a dedication to the “public interest” has established a strong following by the public and professionals since 2010. In part, the trust of the public has also been restored through nonprofit news organizations placing them at the forefront of the drama of journalism, as actors and changemakers. As audiences are invited into a new worldview of the field of journalism, its scene, agency, and purpose, this thesis explores exactly what story is being told, and what repercussions it may have for the drama of journalism as a whole. By rethinking the role of journalism from informer to changemaker, professionals in the field may risk crossing a definitional boundary from journalist to activist.

Introduction

A fundamental practice of journalism is telling stories. Reporting by journalists lends itself to crafting dramatic narratives. In other words, the questions of who, what, when, where, why, and how permeate news articles from small, local features to long-form, expository writing from a legacy news organization. Despite the differences in these organizations, scholars have used dramatic elements to tell an overarching story of journalism — one that connects journalism of all genres, publication sizes, and topics. In recent years, as a "financial crisis" and "declining public trust" threaten traditional journalism, a new story of journalism is emerging (Hermans & Drok 2018, Benson 2018, Pew Research Center 2010, Drew 2010).

An emerging form of journalism, in the form of organizations which call themselves nonprofit news, are challenging traditional perceptions of journalism by responding to public and scholarly critiques of the field of journalism. As scholars and professional journalists have offered up new genres (such as civic and solutions journalism), nonprofits have adopted narratives that promote new purposes of journalism — a shift from distribution of information to active education and engagement with audiences. Although their story about journalism has changed drastically, the practices of journalism seem to remain similar to those used by for-profit, traditional news organizations.

This thesis specifically focuses on the genre created by news outlets that are members of the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN), which started in 2009 and now has over 230 members. To qualify as an INN member, an outlet "must be organized as

described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or be fiscally sponsored by a 501(c)(3) (such as INN)" and must be transparent about funding sources and produce "investigative and/or public service reporting" (INN, 2019). The INN was originally known as the Investigative News Network, and, like many of its members, prioritizes "high-impact" stories (2019). Although each of these member organizations focus on in-depth, investigative journalism, the coverage areas vary from regional to global and organizations may cover a wide range of beats or focus on one topic. What makes these organizations most alike, then, is the worldview they share.

Scholars have offered some critical analysis of the role perceptions and potential challenges nonprofits face (Batsell 2010, Almiron-Roig 2011, Walton 2010, Guensburg 2010), but what is missing from the writing about nonprofits is an analysis of how they use language and narrative to isolate themselves from traditional journalism. Burke writes in *A Grammar of Motives* (1945), any complete drama includes: "what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)" (xv). These terms cannot exist individually of one another, neither is any one term more important than the next. They all work concurrently to create a worldview (Burke 1945, 9). Burke's dramatic pentad is not unlike the guiding questions of journalism — who, what, when, where, and why? — and are elements that nonprofits use to tell a story about journalism as a whole, and their role within that drama.

By implementing dramatistic elements which invite audiences into a new view of journalism, nonprofits recast the characters of journalism and the public. This new view of journalism necessarily enforces a new moral hierarchy onto the field — one in which

the actions and purposes of nonprofits are better than for-profit news organizations. "If action, then drama; if drama, then conflict; if conflict, then victimage" (Burke, 1945). How exactly does a nonprofit worldview (and view of journalism) differ from traditional media? What worldview do they invite audiences to see and participate in? How might the implementation of a new hierarchy for the field of journalism affect outlooks on traditional media, and journalism as a whole? These are all questions I look to address in this thesis by examining the drama of journalism as presented by scholars and the drama of journalism as recreated by nonprofits.

Literature review

What is a journalist?

In order to consider the new story of journalism told by nonprofits, it is necessary to examine the narrative scholars and industry organizations have suggested for the field. The key character in narratives of journalism, of course, tends to be the journalist himself. Scholars have posited that journalists can be grouped based on purpose, creation, and methods (Brethour et al. 2012, Shapiro 2014). Brethour et al. assert that journalists must be defined by their *actions*, and not thoughts or beliefs. Overall, however, traditional descriptions characterize journalists based on their work, citing three definitional elements that make a person a journalist, and isolate them from other fields of digital communication, such as public relations, advertising, or advocacy organizations.

Journalists are “accurate” and “fair,” not meant to value “one side” of an issue over another (Brethour et al. 2012, Shapiro 2014, Camaj 2018). Although these traits are concerned with the credibility of journalism as an “observer” role, distinct from organizations with a particular stint, the concept of “fairness” is closely related to the concept of objectivity — often considered to be a critical value of journalism (Deuze 2005, Shapiro 2010, Rauch, Traeger, & Kim 2003). The actions and roles of journalists are not divorced from many of the public policy and social justice issues that concern activism organizations, and journalism can be considered a political act “within the boundaries and professional journalistic standards” (Olesen 2008) that situates current events “in the context of deep-seated societal norms about justice, freedom and democracy” (Lund 2002). Advocacy and activism groups are dedicated to accurately addressing issues so the public will act on changing them, rather than the objective, distant observer position journalists take in reporting issues of public concern. Journalists, traditionally, take the role of “reporter” quite literally, acting as a “detached observer” (Deuze 2005) who is merely reporting the specifics of what happened. Even when journalists must serve as explainers or interpreters, scholars understand it is taking place through a lens of “objectivity,” not valuing one potential interpretation over another (Shapiro 2010).

Journalism is also “original” (Shapiro 2010). Shapiro writes that this trait of journalistic practice is “so obvious as, usually, to go unnoticed” (2010, 560). Original here is meant literally — journalism does not simply republish or link to existing work, but depends on its own investigation and discovery of new information (Bennett &

Serrin 2005, Knobel 2012, Shapiro 2010). To be clear, journalism does reference and build upon the work of researchers and other journalists, making journalists not only critical players in the stories they tell, but in the story of journalism as a whole. The representation of one journalists affects the perception of any other journalist who references his work. The term “republication” is key for this facet of the definition — “Journalism is not reaggregation” (Shapiro 2014, 560), although publications that publish “news” often reaggregate content from other outlets.

Finally, journalists are necessarily “independent,” so as to be separated from the organizations they report on, as well as advertisements and other sponsored media (Brethour et al. 2012, Shapiro 2014, Dueze 2005, Mermin 1999). Independence gives journalists the ability to fulfill part of their perceived purpose: hold powerful organizations and governmental agencies accountable (Mellado & Van Dalen 2014). Journalists, as a result, tend to avoid (or disclose) potential conflicts of interest related to their reporting (Murphy, Ward, & Donovan 2006). When conflicts of interest or associations with coverage go undisclosed, journalists “may compromise their integrity” (Brown 2011, 245). Independence as a facet of credibility and accuracy separates journalism from fields that are inherently linked to the interests of a specific organization, such as public relations, advertising, and marketing. By representing them as independent, scholars place objectivity only further in the forefront of their construction of journalism — journalists, in a traditional narrative, are beholden to nothing but the truth, a phrase adopted by professional journalism organizations to describe the societal role of journalists (SPJ 2014).

Scholars agree that one of the primary acts of journalistic practice is the distribution and dissemination of "news" (Schudson 2002, Splichal & Sparks 1994, Stephens 2011, Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch 2009). Across writings, scholars use the term news to represent current events, public affairs, events, and issues. What "news" constitutes is intentionally left ambiguous, so as not to exclude topics of special interest which would not fit neatly into traditional coverage beats, but are nonetheless of importance to facets of the public. Scholars also acknowledge that news is difficult to strictly define, because it is not a static value; "Rather, journalism changed, sometimes dramatically, because the nation changed" (Schudson 2002, 29). As economics, demographics, and politics change, so too do audience perceptions of importance. Therefore, although scholars and journalists would prefer to consider their work to be "independent," isolated from the perceptions of the public, considering the purpose of news indicates that informing the public serves as the primary purpose for distributing news.

Although a story of journalism as an adapting field emerges from these definitions, scholars seem hesitant to assign values of "good" and "bad" to different practices of journalism. Rather than assigning a greater moral value to one beat over another, scholars tend to be concerned with whether or not someone is or is not a journalist. Someone who is inaccurate, biased, or aggregates content is not a "bad" journalist, but is not a journalist at all. Only when "the public" is introduced not only as a supporting actor, but a motivator in the narrative of journalism, is a more complex moral hierarchy assigned to field.

Representations of "the public" in the drama of journalism

Journalism's role in a democractic scene

Scholars define journalism within a democratic society in part by its social responsibility, with scholars calling it a "service" and a "forum of public criticism and compromise" (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2007, Zelizer and Allan 2010). Situated in the scene of a democracy, journalists are not simply reporting the news, but are elevated to the responsibility of engaging citizens in the democratic process. This democratic role transforms citizens not only into an audience for journalistic work, but also an agency for journalists. In other words, journalists act (in the form of reporting and publishing news stories) only with consideration for what the audience needs and how individuals will react. The actions, needs, and concerns of citizens are inseparable from the act of journalism within the scene of democracy. Citizen expectations of equality contribute to traditional expectations of journalism, which journalists tend to view as their most important professional values: objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and credibility (Deuze 2005, Mindich 1998, Shapiro 2010). When journalists are motivated by the public *and* are situated within a democratic society, a good journalist becomes one who considers all members of its audience equally and aims to communicate with them through journalism. Good journalism, then, not only spreads information and is accurate, but is geared toward informing citizens about news.

It is worth noting here, however, that the democratic responsibility of journalism exceeds a simple purpose of engaging citizens. Scholars and journalists hold a general

notion that they provide the service of information to individuals — "citizens" and "voters" (Peters & Witschge 2015, Schudson 2000, Zaller 2003). The rise in digital journalism, and an emphasis on audience engagement and participation as a facet of democracy, leads to a paradigm shift from participation to mass communication as the primary democratic responsibility of journalism (Peters & Witschge 2015, Lewis 2012). To achieve better trust and engagement with its audience, "the industry promotes this change in its rhetoric of purpose to audiences, emphasising a different set of practices for digital journalism and its consumption, and connecting the implementation of digital tools now available to the empowerment of audiences in the news production process" (Peters & Witschge 2015, 24). As a result, emphasizing the role of participation from the audience may result in "a less meaningful role for journalism than was envisioned under the familiar grand narratives in the era of the mass press" (Peters & Witschge 2015, 24). Journalism, then, is typically expected to serve the greater *public interest*, rather than simply engaging members of the public in participating in news production.

"The public interest" as journalistic purpose

Although the most basic, definitional acts of journalism are motivated by their work, the role of the public in motivating journalistic work is often considered by scholars to be foundational to the field. Nonprofits in particular bring the concept of public interest to the forefront in their own perception of journalism by including the term in their taglines and descriptions of their work (ProPublica 2017, Oklahoma Watch

2013, Texas Tribune 2018), emphasizing a story of journalism that actively involves the public. This narrative of a public-involved creation of journalism, however, raises some concerns about the purpose of journalistic work. What is the "public interest" which motivates the actions of journalists?

In academic writings, any precise and useful definition of public interest is elusive. Even in practice, few organizations have created any "rigorous definition" of public interest, but instead use it as a broad concept, referring specifically only to legal and ethical areas in which it may be relevant, rather than news subjects that may fall within public interest (Morton & Aroney 2016, Morrison & Svennevig 2007). Brock (2013) provides not a definition of public interest, but three requirements for any definition to uphold. His requirements are "1. The interests of a collective identity, a community small or large, beyond a single individual; 2. The advancing of some benefit or prevention of harm; 3. A presumption in favour of disclosure and free flow of information and a reluctance to limit communication" (192).

A lack of scholarly definition of public interest has fostered criticism in recent years. Morton and Aroney (2016) are especially critical, writing that "given how central the public interest is to journalists' self-understanding, it is striking how little they are inclined to reflect on what they mean by it" (20), because most journalists and journalism organizations do not have a written, working definition for public interest. Without a definition of "public interest" that is viable across journalistic organizations, audiences may view journalism as a reflection of their own interests, rather than as an interpreter of what they need to know. Morton and Aroney's concern is that without a

clear definition, journalists could misuse or misunderstand the concept of public interest. Others have argued that regardless of the term being effectively defined, individual journalists rarely work solely within the public interest, but use the term and other ethical obligations to justify their reporting and interests, whether or not they align with a general "public good" (Apostol 2014, Olesen 2008). A good journalist, then, according to scholars, is not required to adhere to a strict definition of "public interest," but rather should consider their audience in all aspects of their work. Additionally, journalists should be motivated by knowledge about their communities and what they need, rather than by a definition of public interest, because audiences and their interests change with demographics, location, and culture.

Professional, organizational documents indicate thoughtfulness on the part of the journalistic community as to what the public interest, or public good, entails. In ethical codes, journalists seem to adopt the narrative some scholars (Apostol 2014, Oleson 2008) present about a changing public interest and the justification of coverage. Independent journalism ethics organizations — the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) in the U.S., the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) in the U.K., and the Editor's Guild of India, to name a few — reference "the public's right to know" as either a means of defining public interest, or as a stand-in for the spirit of the concept (IPSO 2015, SPJ 2014, Editor's Guild of India 2007, German Press Council 2006). Although the "right to know" is a far more general definition than Brock's (2013), it is useful to examine because as journalists adopt these codes, they also adopt the codes' understandings of ethical behavior and public interest.

Although public interest is seen not only as a critical news value, but a defining element of journalistic work, ethical codes see the public interest as a balancing act. For instance, the SPJ code advises journalists to "*Balance* a subject's right to a fair trial with the public's right to know" and to "*Balance* the public's need for information against potential harm or discomfort" (2014). IPSO expects editors to "*justify* intrusions into any individual's private life without consent" and does not ban deceit to gain information altogether, but write that subterfuge "can generally be *justified* only in the public interest and then only when the material cannot be obtained by other means" (2015). These statements highlight that the public interest, as understood by journalists, is often directly at odds with other rights of the public. Furthermore, statements like these indicate that each of these organizations agrees that acting within the public interest excuses some unethical behavior, such as the right to privacy, or a fair trial. The SPJ code also requires journalists to consider the difference between "need to know" and "want to know," and advises them to avoid "pandering to lurid curiosity" (2014). Rather than having a fully defined concept of public interest, journalists use the concept to think deeply about how their work affects their audience. Scholars have also adapted a "balancing act" understanding of the public interest and its relationship with the rights of the public. Coleman and Dann argue that "the public interest is a limit to the right of privacy, *mediating* between the rights of expression and freedom and the flow of information" (2016, 58). These professional understandings of the public interest invite audiences to see journalism as a balancing act between the greater good and an individual good. Unlike in the definitions of journalism established by scholars,

journalists become more than "detached observers," but actors, with motivations. The concept of public interest, as it is described in ethical codes and scholarly discussions, is meant to demonstrate to those affected by journalism that journalists work in the "best interest" of a larger group, not for personal glory or success.

Despite criticism the field has received for a lack of definition, the issue of defining (or, more precisely, *not* defining) public interest is closely related to the issue of defining journalism itself. Existing definitions of journalism avoid implementing a moral hierarchy that assesses beats and topics within the field, but rather identify the field as separate from others. Elements of journalistic practice unique to journalism are highlighted, but creating too narrow a definition could exclude innovation and emerging forms of journalism. What journalism *is* may be ever-expanding and adapting to new stories and forms of media, but the definitions of journalism function as a boundary, preventing the field from ever expanding into the closely related fields of public relations, advocacy media, and advertising. Scholars and ethical organizations have created similar boundaries for the public interest. Brock's (2013) guiding principles are not a definition, but a container in which all scholarly and professional perceptions of public interest are held. Stories that serve to benefit an individual or single organization do not fit into any perceivable definition of working with the public interest, nor does work that would limit public access to information. Just as not all journalism organizations cover the same topics and subscribe to coverage of specific beats, not all audiences have the same interests, with differences based on location, culture, and community values. Boundaries of public interest and ethical considerations of the

concept tell a story of journalism that, although bounded, is adaptable for various audiences. Good journalism, furthermore, will adapt to its audiences' needs.

These containers which define the field and its motivations invite audiences to see a world in which journalists, not the public, serve as interpreters and creators of the public interest. The public interest, therefore, must be guided by the topics considered (subjectively) important by editors and reporters. In this story of journalism, again, journalists are not detached bystanders, but active agents in the stories they tell. Journalists may tell one story over another, if they decide it is more important. A good journalist chooses stories that fit best within the boundaries of "public interest," rather than what is most interesting or what readers "want to know." Regardless of the decision journalists make in regards to which stories are published, their combined roles as a decision-maker and disseminator give them power in influencing and creating the public sphere (Gamson 1989, Chong 2019).

Scholars attribute commercial pressures overwhelming attention to the public interest, as a cause for an increasing lack of trust from the public (Fink 2019, Rosenstiel & Mitchell 2004, Newman & Fletcher 2017). The strategies journalists use not to merely tell stories, but create a "shared reality," in which journalists and the public are experiencing a similar perception of the story of journalism, are rendered ineffective without the public's trust that they are being told the truth (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2014, Fink 2019). Several new forms of journalism have been proposed that respond to failures in the field and invite audiences to a new understanding of the drama of journalism. For the most part, these genres — watchdog journalism, civic journalism,

and constructive journalism — are not recent rethinkings of journalism. They each have existed in some form for many years, but have been reimplemented by nonprofits in an effort to set themselves apart from traditional journalism. These "new" genres expand on traditional expectations of journalism to better function in an increasingly digital media climate, while rethinking hierarchies of "good journalism" and "bad journalism." Rather than adopting the specific practices of various genres, nonprofits use the solutions suggested by the genres to enforce their own understanding of "good journalism," as described in their literature.

Watchdog journalism

Traditionally, watchdog journalists rely on a worldview that journalists have a democratic responsibility to hold those in power accountable (Mellado 2014, Mellado & Van Dalen 2014). Watchdog journalism's understanding of a good journalist as "original" departs from the mere conducting of one's own interviews and gathering of information, as understood in a traditional narrative of journalism, to a concept of originality that requires writing entirely new stories. The act of "true" watchdog journalism not only uncovers new information, but investigates and evaluates the work of the government (Knobel 2012). As opposed to the daily, often seemingly insignificant event reporting of journalism, watchdog reporting depends on lengthy processes of investigation, building relationships with sources, and filing public record requests. Typical traits of journalists who adhere to a watchdog perception are "accusing," "questioning," and "criticism," which indicate an adversarial relationship to those in

power, who they are responsible for holding accountable (Mellado 2014, Mellado & Van Dalen 2014). The genre of watchdog journalism invites audiences to see a world in which the government is engaged in secrecy, typically at the cost of its citizens. The purpose of journalism, in this world, is to bring governmental actions and wrongdoings to public attention. Watchdog journalism, when functioning alone, does little to rethink or reconsider a traditional narrative of journalists' democratic responsibility, and is more concerned with the act of providing information than with how the public engages with that information. The story of watchdog journalism rarely includes the public as a character, but instead emphasizes journalist's relationship to those in positions of *de facto* power (Mellado & Van Dalen 2014, Bennet & Serrin 2005, Knobel 2012). The long-form work produced by nonprofits is investigative and enterprising, but the described goals of this work do not fit entirely within the role of watchdog journalism. Watchdog journalists are deeply concerned with the actions of officials, but less concerned with the public response to the exposure of these actions.

In the worldview created by the genre of watchdog journalism, a good journalist (1) "uncovers" or "exposes" new information, usually through investigation (Knobel 2012, Maniou & Photiou 2017) and (2) is "critical" of those in power in order to "hold them accountable" (Knobel 2012, Maniou & Photiou 2017, Pinto 2009, Mellado & Van Dalen 2017). Furthermore, journalism that is not watchdog journalism can be understood as pandering to *de facto* power by letting them act without accountability, within the worldview of a watchdog journalist. Accountability for those in power is a critical facet of journalism's democratic role, so journalists who work outside of the

responsibilities assumed by watchdog journalists are failing at a facet of their democratic responsibility to serve as the "fourth estate" (Mellado & Van Dalen 2017, 246). Financial stressors do play a significant role in the presence of watchdog journalism — watchdogs become more present "when the media generate more income and ... less when their economic situation becomes worse" (Mellado & Van Dalen 2017, 249). Nonprofits highlight this relationship between financial security and the ability to perform a role as watchdog, writing that accountability and political reporting has "declined" and "missed stories" as resources have decreased in traditional media (ProPublica 2019, CT Mirror 2014, Maryland Matters 2018, Captiol News Illinois 2019). Nonprofits, in adapting a watchdog worldview, tell audiences a story in which by failing to hold powerful people accountable, journalists are culpable for the results of governmental (or any *de facto* power) wrongdoings. In other words, journalists who do not report as a watchdog have failed to "protect" the innocent and democracy (CIR 2015). The absence of watchdog journalism, according to nonprofits, has in turn led to a less informed public, which they aim to remedy by reintroducing the public to a worldview that values watchdog reporting, which will result in "more educated," "more engaged citizens" (ProPublica 2018, Texas Tribune 2015, Oklahoma Watch 2013, CT Mirror 2014, Charlottesville Tomorrow 2019).

Civic Journalism

Civic journalism rose to popularity in the late 1980s, out of criticism from journalists and scholars that journalism was failing to meet the democratic

responsibility of engaging citizens (Tully et al. 2017, Haas 2012, Rosen 1999). In response to critiques of audience engagement in journalism, civic journalism creates a narrative in which the purpose of journalism is to (1) connect with the covered community, (2) engage individuals as citizens in democratic deliberation and debate, and (3) to encourage public deliberation in search of solutions (Nip 2007, Tully et al. 2017). Although research has indicated civic journalism's falling from grace in the digital age, as fostering public deliberation is difficult online, nonprofits have shaped much of their projected worldview of journalism around the role of civic journalism, particularly its purpose of audience engagement (Nip 2007, Tully et al. 2017). Civic journalism relies on a worldview that considers the citizen as an individual, particularly the "ordinary citizen" (Mellado & Van Dalen 2014). Ordinary citizens participate in democracy traditionally — through voting, watching debates, and following coverage about political candidates. Civic journalism is a story about journalists who distribute news in order to help their audiences fulfill their democratic duties. Whereas watchdog journalism was concerned about the actions of those in power, civic journalism's worldview is shaped by how those actions shape the lives of citizens, which informs journalist's response to engage the public in conversations about how their lives have been affected.

Nonprofits adopt the civic worldview that values education and engagement, while attempting to maintain an objective bystander role, as told by the story of traditional journalism. So, within a worldview that understands the role of journalist not only as an informer, but as motivated by the responsibility of engaging with citizens, the Texas Tribune hosts public forums and events with officials that seek to "engage

[attendees] in thoughtful discussion" (Texas Tribune 2015). The Marshall Project's events, which include film screenings and panel discussions, aim to "educate and enlarge" their audience (2014). A good journalist does not simply give information to its audience, but must follow-up with audiences to make sure they understand the information being distributed.

Constructive (Solutions) journalism

Constructive (or solutions) journalism offers a new narrative of journalism that focuses on positive news. The genre seeks to correct the belief that journalists hold a "if it bleeds, it leads" mentality and focus too much on negative news (From & Kristensen 2018, Hermans & Drok 2018, Aitamurto & Varma 2018). Two primary shifts from traditional definitions and practices of journalism define the narrative of constructive journalism: (1) a rethinking of the citizen from an actor in democratic functions to a social and issue-based actor, and (2) a change in the focus of stories from conflict to solutions. The democratic responsibilities of American journalism create a perception of the audience as citizens (Edgerly & Vraga 2019, Schudson 1998). The narrative of constructive journalism, rather than relying on the collective audience of citizenship, seeks to address individual concerns of negativity by understanding the audience not only as citizens, but as partly consumers and clients, as well (From & Kristensen 2018, Eide & Knight 1999). Democratic citizens may have their votes counted, but their impact is largely dependent on the beliefs of the people as a whole; consumers and clients maximize their individuality and participation by choosing what products and services

to invest and engage with. The unspoken suggestion that underlies this rethinking of the audience is that while traditional journalism owes citizens the service of information, consumers and clients purchase services they value — a perception that would clearly have positive financial and reputational repercussions for a solutions journalism organization.

The narrative of solutions journalism does not abandon the perception of audience as citizens, but was adapted as the public's own perception of citizenship evolved. Rather than perceive citizen responsibilities as voting and government participation, "actualized citizens" emphasize participation in social causes and activism (Shehata, Ekstrom, & Olsson 2016, Ward & de Vreese 2011). Whereas the "ordinary citizens" associated with civic journalism are concerned with democracy through political candidates, "actualized citizens" are more concerned with the issues those candidates stand for. In narrative terms, ordinary citizens are a motivation for the purpose of journalism to inform and engage, while actualized citizens are viewed as actors in themselves, with their own actions and motivations, situated in the context of their setting. Less emphasis on mere government participation creates citizens who seek information attached to values, which fosters a lack of trust in news media that only reports "bad" news, because it does not align with community values (Bennet 2008, From & Kristensen 2018) Although it is a genre born of critiques of negativity in news media, constructive journalism does not avoid conflict-laden topics of political and social issues, but seeks to suggest various solutions to these conflicts and examine the positive and negative results that may come of each solution (From & Kristensen 2018,

Benesch 1998). A good journalist, in the world presented by civic journalism, gives attention to the reactions of his audience because he acts in a world in which good journalism is that work which results in action or change. Nonprofits adopt the worldview of civic journalism, particularly the role of "actualized citizens" in the reaction and impact of reporting. Whereas a watchdog worldview understands the role of journalists to hold those in power accountable, and a civic worldview understands their role as educating citizens, a constructive/solutions journalism worldview considers the role of journalists as motivating citizens to action. Good journalism is not only the spreading of information, but the selection of specific information that can be best acted upon.

Where nonprofits and their worldview came from

Nonprofits were originally hailed as a solution for a financial crisis in the field of journalism. As advertising revenues dropped drastically, funding for nonprofits climbed by millions of dollars through crowd-funding audiences and grants (Benson 2018, Mellado & Van Dalen 2017, Carvajal, García-Avilés & González 2012, Pew Research Center 2010, Drew 2010). The increase in donations came shortly after the 2016 election, "likely indicating dissatisfaction with commercial media performance during the campaign" (Benson 2018, 1060). Nonprofits benefitted not only from a new business model, but from a "fundamental reflection on the changing role of journalism" (Hermans & Drok 2018, 679), which scholars have said is lacking in considerations of how to "solve" journalistic crises (Peters & Broersma 2013, Benson 2016). In response to

this increased funding from audiences, nonprofits emphasized their separation from for-profit media and their role in reviving "public interest journalism" in the form of long-form, investigative content, which other newsrooms were struggling to produce with smaller staffs and budgets (Benson 2018, Mellado & Van Dalen 2017). Because they are are free to take limited resources and focus them on only a few projects they care to report on, nonprofits can sink time and money into enterprising projects and stories, typically valuing those "hard-hitting," "important" stories that involve an exposé or are related to social justice movements (Carvajal, García-Avilés & González 2012, ProPublica 2018, Texas Tribune 2018, Oklahoma Watch 2013, CT Mirror 2014, Charlottesville Tomorrow 2019, Mother Jones 2018, Mississippi Today 2018). By investing money and time in investigations and long-term projects, nonprofits set themselves apart from traditional newsrooms and the daily, often seemingly inconsequential event-driven stories long associated with journalism. The nonprofits' interest-based investigative stories on a free digital platform brought in readers legacy sites were losing to "negative news" and paywalls (Benson 2018, Hermans & Drok 2018).

Nonprofits have not emerged without their share of criticism from media scholars. Relying on donations, primarily from wealthy families, and grants, primarily from foundations with vested interests in the reporting of the nonprofits in question has raised concerns of editorial independence (Batsell 2010, Almiron-Roig 2011, Walton 2010, Guensburg 2010). Carol Guensburg writes in the *American Journalism Review* that "Done right, the journalism-funder relationship benefits both parties as well as the

public they aim to serve … done wrong, the association raises concerns about editorial objectivity and whether it has been compromised by a funder's agenda" (28). Rather than addressing scholarly criticism of their own practices, nonprofits center their literature around public criticism of traditional journalism. Nonprofits invite audiences to see their investigative work as critical to democracy, creating "more" education and engagement than what traditional newsrooms have been able to instill in citizens (ProPublica 2018, Texas Tribune 2015, Oklahoma Watch 2013, CT Mirror 2014, Charlottesville Tomorrow 2019). However, rather than explicitly competing with legacy news sources, these nonprofits invite audiences to see their work as filling a coverage gap that traditional newsrooms created (Oklahoma Watch 2018, Texas Tribune 2015, ProPublica 2018, Mississippi Today 2019, Capitol News Illinois 2019).

The following analysis of a nonprofit worldview will show that many stories emerge from the literature of nonprofits, which are demonstrated in narrative elements as well as metaphors and moral hierarchies. The narratives adopted by each nonprofit may seem different from one another because they are situated in different settings, focus on different characters, and maintain different purposes for their work. The overall trend I will demonstrate in my analysis, however, is not that these organizations share an identical worldview, but that in each narrative their motivation is based on the perceived failures of traditional, legacy, and for-profit media organizations.

Analysis

For this analysis, I examined literature from American nonprofits that are members of the INN. I studied the worldview of these organizations, as created by mission statements, annual reports, taglines, frequently asked questions, and donation/fundraising materials of sixteen organizations in fourteen states. The studied nonprofits are: Capitol News Illinois; Charlottesville Tomorrow, located in Virginia; the CT Mirror, located in Connecticut; the Groundtruth Project, located in Massachusetts; High Country News, located in Colorado; the Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting (KyCIR); The Marshall Project, located in New York; Maryland Matters; Mississippi Today; Mother Jones, located in California; Nevada Independent; Oklahoma Watch; Orb, located in Washington, D.C.; ProPublica, located in New York; Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR), located in California; and the Texas Tribune.

These organizations are not identical. The scope of their worldview varies from citywide, to statewide, to nationwide across the nonprofits. Some organizations invite audiences to a world in which traditional news beats — politics, education, crime, science, etc. — have the most value, while others are specialized, highlighting one issue such as the justice system (The Marshall Project) or environmental issues (High Country News). Despite their differences, the studied nonprofits each operate on a digital platform and rely on donations. The dependence on audience donations and participation largely contributes to similarities in worldview that sets nonprofits apart from and minimizes the importance of for-profit news organizations.

Scene: A "ravaged" journalism, and nonprofits as an option for the future

Nonprofits tell a story of journalism that is set in the scene of a changing media "landscape" (Maryland Matters 2018, Mississippi Today 2018, GroundTruth Project 2019). Nonprofits describe the state of journalism not only as irregular (as landscapes often are), but as unsettled or volatile. Not only financial stressors, but issues of public trust and change ushered in by digital platforms have led to a "ravaged" scene, which is more difficult to cover (GroundTruth Project 2019). In this narrative of a broken field, nonprofits identify themselves as a remedy for the disrepair of modern digital journalism.

One way in which nonprofits present themselves as a solution for this "ravaged landscape" is by inviting audiences to see the time dedicated to their work. Nonprofits' annual reports dedicate pages to descriptions of their most significant investigative projects. These descriptions tend to emphasize the amount of time spent reporting on the story — at times investigations were "months-long," (Texas Tribune, 2019) or lasted "more than a year" (Oklahoma Watch, 2019). ProPublica in particular says it "sticks with issues as long as it takes to hold power to account" (2017). The emphasis on time spent on a project sets nonprofits apart from for-profit news, particularly because time is referenced in nonprofit literature as one of the resources traditional organizations lack. Although they emphasize explicitly monetary downfalls among traditional media in a majority of their literature, nonprofits communicate that the most valuable resource in journalism in the use of time (and reporters' time) as a commodity that must be spent well. Unlike with monetary figures — like the "millions" raised, highlighted in annual

reports (ProPublica, 2019; Texas Tribune, 2019) — nonprofits cannot assert that they possess more time than their traditional counterparts, only that they use it more effectively. The story of journalism, for nonprofits, is one in which lengthier reporting is more useful — the more time journalists spend on a story, the better it is for their audience.

Many nonprofits give presence to "daily" issues as a reason for their own continued coverage, even as they highlight the ineffectiveness of traditional, daily journalism. Although both forms of journalism organizations publish stories daily, nonprofits tell a story in which they accommodate for their reader's daily lives, not one in which audiences need to make an effort to find quality journalism. Audience members are invited to see themselves as a driving force for morally good journalism. This contrasts with the story told by for-profits, in which journalists are detached from audiences for the sake of objectivity, and are therefore completely detached from the humanity of an "ordinary" life. For example, the Texas Tribune says its reporting goes "beyond daily coverage" (2019) to provide more contextual and enterprising stories that for-profits are missing. Simultaneously, the Tribune gives presence to the importance of its work on a daily level. "Everyday Texans" can be understood as "ordinary citizen" and readers have "daily lives" that are affected by elected officials and the Tribune's reporting on those officials (2019). As a result, the Tribune draws attention to the "journalism we produce each day" and newsletters "delivered daily" (2019). The Tribune's annual report also references "around-the-clock coverage" of Hurricane Harvey, an incremental news event. In order for Texas to be informed "at election time

and at all times," explaining and investigating other coverage must happen on a daily basis. The issues the Tribune is covering "directly affect [people] ... each day" (2018a). Similarly, the High Country News says that it "didn't cover the daily blow-by-blow, tweet-by-tweet upheavals" of the Trump administration but instead "founds ways into those stories through longer investigations" (2019). Although High Country News does publish content everyday, it manages to separate itself from traditional, daily publications by highlighting the time spent on "longer" projects and the content of its stories. By defining their content as "investigative" and "explanatory," both the Texas Tribune and High Country News hide the fact that other daily journalism is required for their own reporting to be relevant. Without daily coverage on the Texas statehouse or the Trump administration, supplemental explanation and investigation would be useless for the "ordinary citizens" who do not seek out news information on their own.

The journalistic work of nonprofits is closely related to the existing work of other media, both in values of timeliness and originality, and in that the work of nonprofits is often in response to event-based coverage from other media. Although journalism tends to be based on the present, nonprofits tell a story of journalism that looks to the future, a time in which the landscape is no longer broken or ravaged. Nonprofits also invite audiences to see them as the healers of this landscape, through emphasizing their purpose as a service to citizens and the field. Nonprofits certainly also highlight the past in their language about the failures of for-profit media, but because most lack a substantial history to draw from, their emphasis on the future sets them apart from legacy news organizations. Nonprofits also focus specifically on the future of journalism,

and the role they seek to have in that future. The overall mission of the GroundTruth Project, for example, is to "restore journalism from the ground up by supporting the next generation of journalists" (2019). Supporting the work of this "next generation" will, in turn, "restore faith in the industry" (GroundTruth Project 2019). Although nonprofits seem to focus on journalism "today" more than the "next generation," they rely on strategic plans for the future to maintain the trust they seek to restore. Charlottesville Tomorrow, besides its appropriate name for this discussion, says its goal as a news organization is "to slow down, to develop long-term source networks" (2019). Charlottesville Tomorrow's "slow" approach is in-line with the emphasis on "deepness" and "thoughtfulness" from other organizations and does not necessarily refer to the frequency of reporting or publication. Rather, the slowness, along with "long-term source networks" tells a story that Charlottesville Tomorrow is approaching journalism differently than traditional publications, if not performing it differently. What ties considerations of the future to nonprofits' overall goal of rebuilding journalism is their attention to innovation. Stories are presented in "innovative" digital forms and the organizations look for opportunities for "progress," in redesigning journalistic processes or using new forms of technology (ProPublica 2019, Texas Tribune 2019, Orb 2017, CIR 2015). Similar to breaking stories, being the first to implement a new technology or editorial process, by highlighting innovation, nonprofits tell audiences that for-profits have not modernized and adapted to new technologies, making them unable to progress to consider the future, as nonprofits have.

Actor: Audiences as “participants” in the story of journalism

Nonprofits initially seem to tell a story in which journalists give information to the “ordinary citizen” — the “everyday Texan” (Texas Tribune 2019), “anyone who … cares about Connecticut” (CT Mirror 2010), “ordinary citizens” (Mississippi Today 2018), or even “you, your neighborhood, your Commonwealth” (KyCIR 2019). According to the narrative constructed by the genre of civic journalism, ordinary citizens are defined by traditional democratic functions, and nonprofits tell a similar story about “voters” and “political observers” (Texas Tribune 2019, Charlottesville Tomorrow 2019, Mississippi Today 2019, Mother Jones 2016). Rather than representing the role of journalists as educating ordinary citizens, nonprofits tell a story of participation and action of the audience, which depends on an audience of actualized citizens.

Actualized citizens are actors in the story of journalism presented by nonprofits, as they participate in “conversation” or “debate” (Oklahoma Watch 2013, Texas Tribune 2019, CIR 2015, Mississippi Today 2016, Orb 2019). The attention nonprofits draw to locality and the “communities” that participate in these conversations in their literature appeals to the civic responsibility of engaging citizens in public debate and democratic processes (Charlottesville Tomorrow, 2019; Texas Tribune, 2015; Oklahoma Watch, 2019; CT Mirror, 2010; Mississippi Today, 2018; Capitol News Illinois, 2019). Good journalism, in this narrative, cannot be divorced from the community it functions within. Nonprofits construct a narrative in which a journalist should feel guilty when they do not invite the public into newsmaking processes and remain detached from the community they report on. Journalists who do not “engage” with their readers about

issues and news are lower on the hierarchy than nonprofits, which associate their events and online boards that actively engage the public with their journalistic mission. The Texas Tribune, for example, not only "informs readers," but is the "only" organization in the state that "engages with them" (2019, 5). Oklahoma Watch, through its "in-depth and investigative journalism," says its goal is to "deepen public and private debate that makes a difference in the lives of Oklahomans" (2013). Charlottesville Tomorrow gives less stake to the decision-making of individual citizens by using the tagline "Informed Citizens make Better Communities" (Charlottesville Tomorrow 2019). The Charlottesville organization uses the constructive strategy of engaging audiences concerned with community values — it justifies bad news by pointing out its necessity. Even in reporting "bad news," Charlottesville Tomorrow offers audiences the opportunity to use the information to better their community.

Citizens are also, however, acted upon by journalists in the narrative established by nonprofits. Although nonprofits highlight the actions of citizens, journalists own acts of "moderating" indicates that in this narrative, journalists are responsible for guiding the conversations and debates citizens participate in. Nonprofits tell a story of for-profits failures to engage citizens and, as a result, a faltering public trust in journalism. Nonprofits invite audiences not only to participate, but to look to nonprofits as a means to "restore" public trust in journalism and, in turn, the field as a whole (GroundTruth Project, 2019; Illinois Capitol News, 2019). Public forums are one means nonprofits use to demonstrate their narrative of journalistic responsibility and invite audiences to see their role in the education and engagement aspects of a nonprofit story.

The forums feature people in positions of power to speak on issues, but the centerpiece of the events is that the citizens who attend can "learn," "engage in thoughtful discussion," and "ask questions" (Texas Tribune 2015, Oklahoma Watch 2019, Charlottesville Tomorrow 2019). Audiences for these events are not merely attending, but are participating in the collecting and distributing of information — and therefore the content creation eventually intended for these events through the organization's archiving and publishing. Conversation, like a collaborative work of art, is meant to be "shaped" by audiences and "moderated" by journalists, so it can still function as content for the organizations (Texas Tribune 2019, Charlottesville Tomorrow 2019, CT Mirror 2019). The story that nonprofit organizations tell personifies audience members, emphasizing abilities to directly "see," "hear from," and "speak to" candidates (Texas Tribune 2019, Oklahoma Watch 2019). Because the story of journalism is dependent on participation from the audience, participatory efforts are just as much intended to inform and educate as they are intended for citizens to act, giving nonprofits a means to "moderate" the story of journalism as a path to public action without abandoning the "detached observer" character expected of journalists. For-profits, on the other hand, *only* function as detached observers, thus failing to involve audiences in the story of journalism, which renders their journalism ineffective.

ProPublica also invites audience members to see themselves as participants in journalistic work. One example of this process is the organization's "Documenting Hate" project: A submission-dependent tip system specifically for victims and witnesses of hate crimes. Although participation is distinctly anonymous in this system, a far cry

from participating in debate at public forums, ProPublica's story of journalism, as told through the project, is still one that depends on the actions of citizens. Because "America does not do a good job of tracking incidents of hate and bias," according to the nonprofit, "We need your help" (ProPublica 2018). ProPublica is telling the story that when confronted with a "national problem," actualized citizens are convinced to act. ProPublica shows urgency by giving presence to fear, "prejudice," and "violence," even when discussing "lower-level intimidation" like online bullying. Additionally, referencing a lack of data and lack of definition of hate crimes from law enforcement agencies invites audiences, again, to see a broken government system that for-profits have failed to expose. Both public forums and submission projects like Documenting Hate not only places some of the responsibility of content creation on audiences, but ensures that nonprofits will be reporting on "public interests," as they are reiterating what citizens say their interests are.

Rather than tell a traditional story in which the journalist plays the role of an interpreter, deciding what information is most important for the public to know, nonprofits invite the public to see them as another member of the community, with no higher power or obligations. Nonprofits are not an objective interpreter of information, but instead function as a caring provider for audiences. The Tribune "gives Texans the tools to be more thoughtful" (2019), Reveal "empowers the public" (CIR 2015), data reporting "gives readers easy access" to information (Mississippi Today 2018), Orb "delivers … emerging and important stories (2019). In the story told by nonprofits, traditional journalism has failed to care about its audience, and thus fails to engage and

inform the public. In turn, nonprofits invite audiences to see the ways in which they can depend on nonprofits and cannot depend on for-profit organizations for information.

Agency: Stories that "dig deeper"

Although both nonprofit and for-profit organizations use the metaphor of watchdog to describe their work and methods, nonprofits level the term as a moral one to set themselves apart from traditional publications. Within this story, nonprofits have "revealed," "questioned," and "brought to light" information, all of which are acts that align with the drama of watchdog journalism (Oklahoma Watch 2019, ProPublica 2019, Texas Tribune 2019, CIR 2015, GroundTruth Project 2019). The metaphor of journalism as light is common across for-profit and nonprofit groups, but nonprofits adapt this metaphor so that undiscovered information is not simply in the dark, but buried, intentionally hidden. Nonprofits invite readers into a world not only in which the government is intentionally hiding information, but in which for-profit journalism is failing at its democratic role to hold those in power accountable. Nonprofits not only produce "in-depth" reporting, but also say they "dig deep" or "dig beneath the surface" for information and stories (ProPublica 2017, Oklahoma Watch 2013, Mississippi Today 2018, Orb 2019, KyCIR 2019). The metaphor of burial does not entirely dismiss the metaphor of journalism as light, but rather than simply referencing light, which is a natural phenomenon, the burial metaphor highlights that work is required to bring information "to light." If the "surface," as Oklahoma Watch (2013) implies, is the journalistic work of for-profit organizations, then the fact that the truth is buried

highlights the increased amount of effort nonprofits dedicate to “uncovering” and “unearthing” information (KyCIR 2019, Texas Tribune 2018b). To that end, nonprofits invite audiences to see a lack of effort by for-profit organizations. Because their work remains at the surface, nonprofits must take on the responsibility of doing more investigations and “digging deeper.” In this worldview, for-profit organizations do no simply lack the time or resources for investigation, but the willingness to uncover.

Even as the “digging” methods are disruptive, the result is generally positive. The Texas Tribune’s “unearthed” facts result in “context and clarity” (2018b). The CIR’s stories are “groundbreaking” in order to “improve lives and protect our democracy” (2015). Nonprofits invite audiences to see that the truth, however unpleasant it may be, is buried treasure, capable of making things better through the work of nonprofit journalists. Journalists, through the burial metaphor, become inherently moral characters in the story of journalism, which operates on a moral hierarchy that assumes public information is better than hidden information. Nonprofits not only tell audiences a story based on this hierarchy, but push down the position of traditional journalism by bringing “more information” to public attention, according to their own literature. The act of journalism, in the drama established by nonprofits, is to reveal. Actions of digging and uncovering by journalists are made necessary by those in positions of power, who nonprofits tell audiences are intentionally withholding information from the public. While nonprofits for the most part tell a story that situates them as adversaries to “politics” and those politician’s “public policy” (Texas Tribune 2019, Oklahoma Watch 2013, CT Mirror 2010, Mississippi Today 2018, Capitol News Illinois 2019, KyCIR 2019)

the most important story they tell is not one of what those in power are covering up, but on what other outlets have not covered. CT Mirror is one nonprofit that tells a story in which its reporting is necessary because of “a decline in watchdog journalism” (2010). Despite its mission to use watchdog journalism to produce “in-depth” and “deep” content, other parts of the Mirror’s literature indicate more traditional content values. Rather than inviting audiences to see the value of long-form projects like ProPublica, the Texas Tribune, and Mississippi Today, for example, the CT Mirror draws readers’ attention to its “breaking news stories,” which are “setting the pace for the rest of the state’s media” (2010). Although the CT Mirror says it “holds officials accountable,” the organization otherwise represents its primary competition as existing with “other Connecticut media,” saying “every news organization wants to be first with the best story” (2010). This “competition” indicates that, in the worldview adopted by nonprofits, even if the work of nonprofits is no “more thoughtful” or “deeper” than for-profit outlets, the coverage is better merely because it comes from a nonprofit, formed in response to for-profits failures. Once the failures of other media are ingrained into the worldview of these organizations, the work of for-profits can no longer be represented as the best coverage of an event.

Nonprofits frequently invite audiences to see the stories other organizations missed. ProPublica’s story that resulted in a child held in a U.S. Customs and Border protection facility being reunited with her parents was spurred by “national attention” (2019, 6). ProPublica’s description of the protests that followed demonstrates a worldview in which their own work has reached the public sphere (“protesters blared

the recording at demonstrations across the country"), but hides the reporting from national legacy media that originally brought information about the camps to public attention. In a nonprofit drama, stories are not a purpose for acting, nor are an action themselves, but are the agency through which the actor — the public — can achieve changemaking goals. The Texas Tribune's long-form projects from 2018 included extensive reporting about Hurricane Harvey, which flooded Houston and other parts of southeast Texas. The Tribune tells a story in which "the national spotlight moved away" from an important story, but it continued dedicating "significant reporting resources" to covering the aftermath (2019, 11). Unlike ProPublica, which does respond to national issues in its coverage, the Tribune is a local organization that only covers Texas. By drawing attention to the fact that national organizations stopped covering Harvey as the Tribune dedicated increased money and time, the Tribune presents a drama in which audiences suffered because of for-profit organizations' inadequate resources and lack of dedication to the necessary agency in a drama. Rather than showing that for-profits were covering other important stories that affect national audiences, the Tribune's story shows that the spotlight merely "moves away" from an important story for the Tribune's readers. Additionally, the Tribune means to imply that its own reporting does not act as a "spotlight," despite the fact that devoting resources to Harvey coverage inseparably siphons resources away from the coverage of other statewide issues. The Tribune, ironically, tells a story in which it provides statewide coverage to other organizations, which "frees up partners to cover more local issues" (2019), but hides from audiences a similar content hierarchy when discussing traditional, national media. Overall,

nonprofits not only describe their purpose as uncovering information that powerful figures attempt to hide, but uncover this information because for-profits cannot do the "deep digging" required to bring it to light. Their story of nonprofit journalism, then, is not simply one in which they help to inform audiences, but fill a coverage gap created by for-profit organizations.

Act: Publishing with "partners" as a means to spread information

To this point, the drama presented by nonprofit journalism is based on the actor of citizens, who use the journalistic work of nonprofits as an agency to affect change. Nonprofits are necessary within this worldview because for-profit media have failed their own role of producing content the audience can act on. Even as much of the story of journalism from a nonprofit worldview is a response to a perceived failure on the part of traditional news media, they simultaneously emphasize collaboration with traditional publications, because within the nonprofit drama of journalism, it is their responsibility to fill the "void" created by for-profits and provide information for audiences to act on. The act required of audiences, clearly, is to take actions to affect change. But nonprofits, in their literature, emphasize their own action in partnering with for-profits.

Many nonprofit organizations have what they call publishing or media "partners" that are traditional, daily, for-profit newsrooms that publish nonprofit stories in their publications (ProPublica 2019, Oklahoma Watch 2019, Texas Tribune 2015, CT Mirror 2010, Nevada Independent 2019). Although a "partnership" implies shared tasks between two collegues, the relationship between most nonprofits and their for-profit

counterparts are unbalanced. Rather than sharing journalistic responsibilities of reporting, writing, and editing, nonprofits assume all content creation responsibility, leaving their partners to function as distribution channels. Rather than having shared ownership of a project, organizations that republish stories from their nonprofit partners may have to follow republishing guidelines that highlight the control the nonprofit has over the content (Texas Tribune, n.d.; Oklahoma Watch, n.d.).

On the surface, nonprofits are telling a story in which they collaborate with for-profits to achieve similar goals, the motivation for these partnerships indicates the nonprofit view that they must intervene to achieve the goals of journalism that for-profits are failing to complete. Despite overarching goals to "better inform" and "educate and engage," nonprofits do not draw attention to for-profit organizations' reporting in a similar means of republication, which hides the significance of daily, non-investigative reporting. When on nonprofit sites, readers are inundated with language that reinforces the nonprofits' roles in "public service," "community," and the "public interest," but do not use the opportunity to show the work that "supplements" their own, indicating that audiences are invited to see their work alone as the most informative and as upholding the role of provider (Texas Tribune, 2019; CT Mirror, 2019; Oklahoma Watch, 2019). Nonprofits not only invite audiences to see them as a provider to the public, but as a provider to other journalism organizations, emphasizing the service component of their own participation in these partnerships. Partnerships are described as the nonprofit "providing" content to for-profit media "for free" (Texas Tribune 2019, CT Mirror 2010, Capitol News Illinois 2019), which emphasizes further

the failure of traditional newsrooms to provide sufficient investigative coverage and undermines audience trust in their ability to produce complete and accurate news content.

This form of "partnership" is not the case for all nonprofits. ProPublica's Local Reporting Network (LRN) functions inversely from the partnerships examined at other organizations. Rather than "better informing" audiences through publishing its own work in other publications, ProPublica funds reporters at local publications to "work on important investigative projects affecting their communities" (ProPublica 2019). Although ProPublica is primarily a funder or producer for these investigations, the nonprofit invites audiences to see it as a creator for stories its D.C.-based reporters did not create. Take a description of one LRN story highlighted briefly in the nonprofit's 2019 annual report, for example: "... our immersive investigation showing what it sounds and looks like when a gas driller overruns your property ..." (7). The referenced article was funded by ProPublica's LRN, but was reported, investigated, and written by two local reporters with the Charleston Gazette-Mail in West Virginia. Again, regardless of the method, nonprofits use these partnerships to tell a story in which they are producing important journalism and projecting it to larger audiences through for-profit media, which frames for-profits not only as failing to produce their own content, but as an agent for nonprofits to achieve their goals.

Purpose: Arming readers in the "fight for journalism"

In the “fight for journalism” (Oklahoma Watch 2013) and during an age in which journalism is “under attack” (Mother Jones 2019, GroundTruth Project n.d.) nonprofits make actualized citizens their soldiers. Readers are “armed” and “equipped” with information (Texas Tribune 2019, Mississippi Today 2016) that allows them to “deploy” daily decisions (Orb 2017) and “combats ‘alternative facts’” (Mother Jones 2018). To be successful, however, nonprofits cannot only rely on actualized citizens, but must invite ordinary citizens to see a world in which they should not be content with the news published by for-profit media. Nonprofits look to show ordinary, “everyday” citizens that they, like actualized citizens, care about issues enough to participate more actively in democracy. Within their worldview, nonprofits highlight that politics and journalism affect the everyday “lives” of all citizens (Texas Tribune 2018a, KyCIR 2019, Oklahoma Watch 2013). Additionally, by showing ordinary citizens that they live in a world in which nonprofits cover “matters that affect them most” (Nevada Independent 2019) and the “biggest stories” (Mother Jones 2018), nonprofits can draw in ordinary citizens who may be overwhelmed by issues and want reporting specific to their individual experience. Within a nonprofit story of journalism, audiences respond to the caring, defensive role of journalists by becoming advocates for the industry as a whole. In this worldview, journalism does not support any causes — journalism is itself a cause.

By pushing for journalism that causes a reaction of “real-world change” and “action” from their audience (ProPublica 2017, Texas Tribune 2018b, Orb 2017, High Country News 2014, CIR 2015), nonprofits walk the thin line of an activism or advocacy group’s worldview. To meet their changemaking goals without appearing to function as

advocacy or activism organizations, nonprofits consider change to be a chemical reaction. Furthermore, this chemical reaction affects the nonprofit's audience rather than issues themselves, telling a story in which audiences make the changes, not the nonprofits themselves. Their storytelling "sparks action" and "ignites real-world change" (CIR 2015), is a "catalyst of the action" and causes people to "activate" (Orb 2017), "sparks public conversation" (KyCIR 2019) and "turns knowledge into action" (Texas Tribune, 2018b). In the story nonprofits tell, when you add information to the public, action inevitably occurs. This does not mean, however, that nonprofits do not place the public on a crucible to intensify and accelerate the reaction.

By correlating reporting with public action, debate, and discussion, nonprofits are not simply straying from the story of journalism as a detached information disseminator. Nonprofits are establishing in their narrative that some information — information that the public can act on — is better than information about seemingly unchanging trends and events, as those presented day after day by traditional organizations. Stories that spur change are stories with "moral force," which perform a "public good" (ProPublica, 2019; Texas Tribune, 2019). Fact-based journalism can change "minds, laws and the lives of ordinary people," according to ProPublica. Although most of these nonprofits tell audiences their reporting "holds the powerful to account," they rarely tell a story about responses from powerful figures, but instead highlight public action, whether through debate and conversation (Texas Tribune, 2019; Oklahoma Watch, 2013; CT Mirror; 2010; Mississippi Today, 2018) or protests and "outrage" from citizens (ProPublica, 2019; Marshall Project, 2014). Although nonprofits

tend to dissociate themselves from advocacy organizations, by highlighting public response nonprofits tell a story in which they function as “changemakers” and morally charged groups that “better communities,” causes for which they must sacrifice objectivity, both in the content of stories as well as in what stories they choose to report (ProPublica 2019, Charlottesville Tomorrow 2019). Nonprofits are not attempting to produce journalism, but “journalism of consequence” (Texas Tribune 2019).

Although they draw attention to a story of journalism at war, nonprofits simultaneously use the attacks those in power have leveraged against journalism to further disenfranchise traditional media. “Fake news” and “alternative facts” are perhaps two of the best recognized claims about media bias, and tell a widely familiar story about journalists being opposed to some worldviews. Nonprofits call upon these claims in their literature, claiming to fight against “alternative facts” or “fake news” (CIR 2015, Mother Jones 2018). Orb refers to its stories as “liberated from the political, cultural and national biases that often impact which story gets told” (2019). As discussed in the literature review, claims of absolute objectivity like these are harmful for perceptions and expectations of journalism, because no story can be separated from what makes it newsworthy — always immediately affected by politics, culture, or national interest. Several nonprofits call their work “nonpartisan” (Texas Tribune 2015, Oklahoma Watch 2013, CT Mirror 2014, Maryland Matters 2018, KyCIR 2019, Nevada Independent 2019, Mother Jones 2016). By highlighting these terms and expectations of objectivity in a damaged “media landscape,” nonprofits may intend to reference to audiences an adversarial relationship with governmental figures. However, to readers

who lean on non-journalistic sources, who stand to pose the most threat to the media landscape, these terms tell a story which confirms that traditional journalism itself is a threat to certain populations. Highlighting loaded political speech without providing context does not pose a risk to nonprofits, which are not widely enough known as journalistic sources, but does pose a significant risk to traditional media if audiences sense criticism of their practices within the field. Even as nonprofits are attempting to separate themselves from a narrative in which journalism is discriminatory, they are actually reinforcing and acknowledging the validity of the story created by the very political figures who they consider to "hold accountable" and protect audiences from.

Discussion

Nonprofits offer several critiques of the field of journalism, and invite audiences to see them as solutions to these issues within the field. In response to the worldview that those in power take advantage of their power, journalists adopted watchdog journalism, which holds government officials and other people in *de facto* positions of power accountable. In response to concerns that journalism was not concerned enough with the public, journalists adopted civic journalism, with the goal of engaging the public and encouraging them not only to consume information, but use information to affect change. Finally, in response to criticism about the negativity of news reporting, journalists adopted constructive/solutions journalism, which highlights potential solutions for problems, rather than simply reporting on the problems themselves. Although journalists from several organizations have adopted the practices of these

emerging “genres” of journalism, nonprofits have combined aspects of each genre to address issues in the field of journalism — lack of public trust, too much inconsequential daily news, and failure to engage citizens, primarily — all while telling new stories in which they are a solution to each of these issues.

Nonprofits, in addressing these critiques of journalism, seem to tell several distinct stories about the field of journalism. In the nonprofit worldview, people in power are actively hiding information, giving journalists the moral responsibility to uncover the hidden truth for audiences. This truth is takes effort to uncover because nonprofits say journalism exists in a “ravaged” landscape, which not only makes the truth easier to hide, but is more difficult for news media to navigate. In the story told by nonprofits, journalism itself is “under attack” by people in power who want to hide information without it being uncovered. Therefore, a critical role of journalists is to arm audiences to fight against the attacks against the field of journalism, as a commitment to objectivity and avoiding advocacy seems to prevent journalists for fighting back themselves. This worldview of a threatened journalism has not only been adopted by nonprofits and scholars; many of these organizations were started by, or are now significantly funded by, journalism nonprofits which do not produce news but promote education and advocate for journalists — press foundations like the Illinois Press Foundation (Capitol News Illinois 2019) and the Knight Foundation, which promotes innovation in journalism (GroundTruth Project 2019). Funding from these organizations only better supports the narrative that journalism is damaged and needs

restoration — powerful figures in the field of journalism have accepted nonprofits as the remedy they claim to be.

Although nonprofits adopt this worldview of a journalistic field under attack, they also tell a story of innovation and of journalism in the future, in which they are on the cutting edge of technology and storytelling. In this story, the main problem facing the field of journalism is not a battle for its existence, but issues with outdated storytelling. Rather than urging audiences to support journalism, this worldview urges journalists to better engage their audiences with unique and entertaining storytelling devices. Journalism, in nonprofit narratives, is simultaneously engaged in a fight for its life and so assured in the field's success that it is prepared for a bright future, in which more stories will be told and more audiences will be engaged. Even as nonprofits invite their audiences to see a field of journalism under attack, they represent themselves as community organizations, divorced from the negativity audiences associate with news and the violence of the war between politics and journalism. Although a commitment to traditional journalistic traits of objectivity creates a narrative in which journalists are arming their readers, in another nonprofit story they cast aside the idea of functioning as a "detached observer" in favor of sharing a worldview with ordinary citizens.

Finally, nonprofits tell a story of journalism in which journalists need to collaborate with each other to reach a wider audience, and therefore create a better educated and more engaged public. They invite audiences to see a worldview in which engaging with the news is "a way of life" (Oklahoma Watch 2018). Although news outlets are constantly competing to put out the first story and the best story (CT Mirror

2010), in this narrative, different news outlets (particularly nonprofits and for-profits) are not competitors, but collaborators working toward a common goal. Nonprofits have created worldviews not only in which citizens help them, but other news outlets help them achieve their goals for the sake of informing the audience.

On first glance, these narratives seem disconnected from one another, as though nonprofits are inviting audiences to see several potential realities until one sticks, and journalism and the public can at last "share" that reality. However, each of these stories is connected by the underlying message that nonprofit journalism is compensating for the failures of for-profit, traditional journalism. Journalism exists on a ravaged plain because traditionally journalism has not performed its duty to hold powerful people to account. Only when nonprofits stepped in with increase accountability reporting did powerful political figures lash out, creating a journalism at war. Nonprofits also create a worldview in which they are community organizations because traditional journalism has lost public trust not only through a lack of accountability reporting, but through a lack of intentional engagement. Nonprofits invite the public to see that because for-profits function as a "detached observer," they have failed to truly inform the public on issues of public interest, which only fosters less public trust for traditional journalism. Finally, nonprofits narrative of collaboration with for-profit news outlets is based on shared goals of widening audiences, but also invites audiences to see the failure of for-profit outlets to produce their own long-form, investigative coverage.

Even as nonprofits implicitly criticize the role for-profits as detached observers, they avoid situating themselves as actors in the drama of journalism. Journalism, by

definition, is separated from action. To assume an activist role and aim for changemaking themselves, nonprofits would cross the boundary of the field and not have their work considered to be journalism at all. Rather, nonprofits position their work as the agency for audience action — the nonprofits can therefore continue to take some credit for the affected change, without transcending the boundaries of journalism. The nonprofit worldview, however, is affected by their own perceptions of the agency and purpose of journalism. For-profits seem to understand the role of journalism as informing audiences, and understand sources and stories as an agency to achieve this goal. To see the drama with nonprofits as the actor, we could predict that audiences are, in fact, the agency for achieving what nonprofits understand as the purpose of journalism: changemaking. Again, the nonprofit worldview values a moral outcome of journalism, a field to which for-profits and scholarly definitions avoid assigning any moral value. Nonprofits sit higher on the moral hierarchy than for-profit organizations — their work is more valuable to its audience, and thus it better achieve its purpose.

There is no denying that nonprofits produce important accountability reporting. What they ignore in their narratives of failing for-profit journalism is that their own work could not exist without the seemingly insignificant daily reporting and record-keeping produced by local and legacy daily newspapers. When nonprofits highlight the "void" produced by traditional journalism, they hide that for-profits are also filling in the gap in nonprofit coverage — both forms of journalism are necessary for an informed public. To accept the worldview we are invited into by nonprofits would be to accept that traditional journalism is a failure, and that nonprofits are the only hope

for the future, which ignores that journalism is always adapting and that scholars are hesitant to define it closely for that very reason. Perhaps we should not be wary of the reporting and engagement work that nonprofits are creating, but we should hesitate to accept their narrative of for-profit failures, as we cannot afford to lose daily journalism anymore than we can afford the loss of investigations and accountability reporting.

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