Introduction: The Problem of Hate

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Abstract
The expansion of hostility against journalists and the mainstreaming of white nationalist ideologies globally necessitate a much-needed elaboration of the problem of hate. In particular, this chapter aims to expose a vulnerability in the production of digital journalism. Journalists are not just bystanders in the problem of hate, but in some ways are unintentionally culpable for the rising visibility of hate. This chapter overviews the text and additionally considers how journalists conceptualize the problem of hate.

NOTE: This is the ACCEPTED manuscript (preprint) and hence may not reflect all changes in the final version.

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Introduction

A recent US journalism school graduate woke to an unpleasant story assignment from her newsroom; she'd been assigned to cover a white nationalist summit. White supremacists gathered from around the United States in a small town in Tennessee—approximately 40 miles from Knoxville. Stormfront, a far-right Neo-Nazi forum, sponsored the event. At the time, Stormfront boasted more than 300,000 members (Al Jazeera, 2017). When the reporter arrived at the event, she was confronted by complete chaos. On the one hand there were the "Nazis who look like Nazis" as she described it—wearing Schutzstaffel patches on their clothes and tattoos of swastikas. But there were also the "Nazis in suits"—leaders of the event in sweater vests and sports coats more akin to a TED talk. Additionally, there was the police presence, media presence and there were counter protesters. The police worked to protect space between the white supremacists and the counter protesters. Perhaps unremarkably, such an event attracted significant attention from journalists.

As the journalist was assessing this particular situation and trying to determine the best approach to covering the event, her newsroom called and reminded her that she had not yet delivered her required daily Facebook Live. She needed to go live on Facebook, they reminded her, to meet her newsroom expectations. She went live on Facebook and, as she described it, the crowd maneuvered her toward the center of the summit. Once there, one of the summit's top organizers—Billy Roper—took over her Facebook Live. According to the journalist, the way he talked and the words he used seemed reasonable and rational at face value. It was only as she watched the comments popping up that she began to realize what he was saying: it was Holocaust denial.

The journalist felt ashamed—she'd granted Billy Roper a platform for hate speech. Near the end of the day, in a smaller session, Roper pointed out her publication by name and offered his thanks for "finally giving my people a voice."

In recounting this story, the journalist I spoke to expressed shame. She told me that "my Papa fought these people in World War II" and she felt frustrated equally to see this same hate represented in small town America and to be unable to cover it as well as she felt she could.

This is a situation that went wrong in a number of ways and should never have happened. This situation also illustrates perfectly the rationale for this book which seeks to understand the ways in which journalism—and specifically digital journalism—has been complicit in facilitating hate groups and suggests ways, driven by the experiences of working journalists—to combat their influence. As a former journalist, I can say with confidence that very few journalists have actively promoted or encouraged hate groups. Quite the opposite. Journalists are called to neutrality, clear-minded verification procedures and science-like precision.

Journalists are trained to report all sides of a story. I remember vividly even as a sports reporter confronting a story about a little league baseball team that had won the Little League Baseball World Series amidst a controversial coaching experience. I submitted a story to the *Palm Beach Post* detailing the story from the parents and coaches—not enough, I was told: I had only presented one side of this controversial coach story. This was little league sports. But I have to admit that when the editor told me, I was immediately receptive. I did need to make sure everyone could speak into this story.

This call to journalistic neutrality does not negate the fact that journalists are also activists for an open and inclusive public sphere. Indeed, the profession is built upon a reliance on an open public sphere, and it is perhaps here that the most obvious chink in journalism's armor lies for white nationalists—they would argue that their voice is as important, or more so, than many of the other voices journalists include in the story. Even when buried, journalists own commitment to an open and inclusive public sphere can lead them to lend coverage to such groups. But it is those very groups who would most like to see the public sphere closed.

Hence, it is quite natural that in conversation with journalists you would generally expect to find strong opposition to hate groups. So, when I propose in this book that journalists have been complicit in facilitating hate, this is by no means a reflection of the active ideology, identity or practices of journalists. Journalists would hope their practice reflects the opposite.

Chignecto

It is in the dark—unreported or under-reported—that marginalized groups can most often find themselves victims of hate. As I approach this topic, I think it's essential to share that my own family story, which has a large Indigenous presence, has a stake not just in the results of hate but in journalists reporting on it.

My family is Acadian: a French-speaking culture that once had its own nation in the modern-day US northeast and Canadian Maritime provinces and which had a close relationship with the Indigenous peoples of Canada. When the French settlers arrived in the region, they had little power to offer. Yet they found friendship, aid and compassion with the Mi'kmaq—a First Nation people of those provinces. The region of *Chignecto* was particularly essential. *Chignecto*

was a place of reciprocity among the First Nation for millenia and the Acadians were welcomed to this place for trade, co-existence, and intermarriage.

This peaceful exchange of culture, ideas, blood proved threatening during the Seven Years War and led to the Great Deportation: when the British deported most Acadians from their land and killed many others. Some, such as my family, found safety and protection with the Mi'kmaq at that time. The affinity and partnership of the Acadian and the Mi'kmaq is a beautiful story that makes me proud of my background. And yet that experience of oppression persists. In my family, our heritage is not often discussed and if considered closely, one would see that my family made *whiteness* a goal to be achieved. To acknowledge the nature of hate in our world is to acknowledge natively troubling issues of power: who wields power (those who are white) and who is powerless.

Marginalization still exists in these communities today, often emerging amidst issues of language politics and Indigenous fishing rights in Canada. For example, in 2020, a lobster fisherman of the Sipekne'katik (the second largest Mi'kmaq band in Nova Scotia) found himself trapped in a lobster storage facility as a rally of 200 commercial fisherman threw rocks at him and hurled racial insults (McKinley & McKeen, 2020).

As a journalist, it doesn't strike me as surprising that the Mi'kmaq and other First Nation tribes receive little news coverage and yet are overrepresented as victims of hate crime (Wang & Moreau, 2020). I believe journalism plays an essential role in this story—journalism can call out injustice and can increase the scope of the *us* in a society. Too often though, we in journalism can instead end up strengthening the power structures that exist and amplifying the marginalization of communities.

Hence, this is a topic that is important to me personally and motivates me to work toward a world more inclusive than my own or my ancestors have faced. So, consider this book, our *Chignecto*, the meeting place I offer to share what I have learned from the experiences in journalism and research that might work on the behalf of a more inclusive future.

My first encounter with the structural biases—the amoral biases that shape how much reporting occurs—in journalism came during my time as a sports reporter at the *Palm Beach Post*. As a sports reporter, any given day witnessed a deluge of press releases requesting me to report on one topic as opposed to another. As our newsroom made the move to digital, I found myself leaning on these press releases more rather than relying on my own original story development—press releases promised a guaranteed story and another weeks' paycheck in my pocket (this process, by the way, leads to what I will later discuss in this book as the problematic process of "churnalism;" Davies, 2011). I noticed, however, that an increasing amount of my press releases came from religious groups: evangelical softball associations, Jewish community centers offering yoga, the Catholic shuffleboard team. Then one morning, I read in the South Florida Sun-Sentinel—our competing newspaper—about a growing Muslim community in Palm Beach County ("An Islamic Growth Spurt," 2008), and it occurred to me: I had never written about someone in the Muslim community and I had never received a press release from the Muslim community. It was then I realized of course that the two were interrelated. A few searches through my news organization's database demonstrated what I suspected to be true: Muslims were nearly invisible in Palm Beach County—at least as measured by their presence in local news and press content. I was troubled by this, given what I'd just read, and this was my

impetus to learn and study how journalists successfully (and unsuccessfully) worked toward creating a more equitable society.

Once I entered the academy, I conducted a few studies exploring issues of hate but the impetus for the present book is of course the Capitol siege on January 6th, 2021. As a scholar, I've studied a variety of topics related to journalists' uses of technology in the presentation of historically marginalized communities: digital journalism presentations of the Syrian refugee crisis, gaming journalists covering issues of gender, live television reporting at the San Bernardino shooting and a variety of studies reflecting on technology and its implications. As a scholar in the field of journalism, I have published in some of the most highly rated publications in my field. At the time of writing, I'm currently serving as the Fulbright-Botstiber Visiting Professor of Austrian-American Studies at the University of Vienna, working on projects related to journalists' use of Instagram and how lifestyle journalists manage issues of hate. It's hard to study reporting on marginalized communities without running into the wall of hate—the groups that work very hard to restrain or decrease historically marginalized voices in our society. In short, this book you are reading is the product of more than six years of study, and thoughtful analysis that brings together the threads of many different studies conducted during that time.

The Capitol Riot of January 6th

As I watched the riot unfold, I felt concern for US democracy. The supporters laid bare the blinding problem of hate in the United States as they entered the building with Confederate flags, shouted racist epithets and displayed Nazi symbols. It was like watching the attempted seizure of American democracy by a Who's Who of America's greatest threats – Confederates, Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan. Their behavior in the capitol was both shameless and childish, with rioters putting their feet on the desks of Congress people, rifling through congressional memos, stealing laptops, defecating in offices. The National Guard eventually stepped in and forcibly removed the rioters from the premises.

For a period of about three years, I lived and worked in the inner city of Washington, D.C.—about six blocks from Capitol Hill. As anyone who has lived in inner-city DC will tell you, you never mess around near the Capitol. The Capitol police stood vigilant, pulling over anyone and everyone they deemed slightly suspicious and you certainly knew to never try to park near the Capitol building. And so, on January 6th, 2021, as supporters of former president Donald J. Trump stormed the Capitol building, I felt a mix of shock, anger and fear. As a former Washingtonian, let me assure you—that should never have been able to happen. And, at the time of writing, it seems apparent it would *not* have happened if not endorsed to at least some degree by people in power.

That moment shone a spotlight on a significant problem in American society. As Marty Baron's character in *Spotlight* famously says "when the light gets turned on, there's plenty of blame to go around" (McCarthy, 2015). Some of that blame certainly falls on digital journalism.

Meredith Shriner, writing for the *New Republic*, on February 15th argued that the Capitol riots reflected on the problem of reporting as a "'view from nowhere'—in which 'objectivity' is performed by reporters as a 'he said, she said' dance without regard to either news value or truth" (Shriner, 2021).

> Republicans like Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell recognized years ago that "the view from nowhere" media doctrine could work to his advantage. With no lens of "right" or "wrong" imposed on political reporting—the entire idea of moral arbitration replaced with a meaningless array of horse-race or process coverage that treated both sides as equal regardless of who acted in good faith—he could manipulate the media into any outcome he wanted while avoiding critical skepticism (Shriner, 2021).

Shriner (2021) of course points to one aspect of the problem—objectivity—that will be discussed in more depth, but there are numerous problems highlighted by digital journalists' coverage of hate.

Why Report Hate?

For such a seemingly dangerous field and amidst such increasing hostility towards journalists, it is remarkable to see journalists' willingness to cover it. As media law scholar Brett Johnson, and his team (2020) argue, journalists simultaneously "essentialize[] hate speech as a necessary phenomenon for the exceptional American tradition of free speech" (Johnson et al., 2020, p. 12). In other words, journalists report on hate because they know it's important.

There is less research than one might expect on the fraught topic of reporting on hate groups in the United States. But as one might suspect, this is a topic equally fraught in Europe, where there is a robust base of research.

Germany is often held up in many circles as a country which has successfully confronted, reckoned with, and recovered from a white supremacist history. But similar to the current situation in the United States, Germany finds white supremacy increasingly reflected in its military and policing personnel. In 2020, a report in Germany noted more than 370 suspected cases of right-wing extremism among German security and police; the military reported 477 cases. A key strategy in white supremacy is to infiltrate security and military personnel—a situation that allows for white supremacy to persist at a structural level (Meier, 2022, January 30).

One journalist, working for a hyperlocal news site in the rural US, described uncovering a Ku Klux Klan leader who had moved to her community and was working to recruit members. She was only able to uncover the leader's identity once a close local police contact let her know that he was working to befriend members of the police force and fire department, and increasingly sharing some of his materials with them. She reported on his strategy, encouraging him to leave the community, but it does reveal that the strategy of white supremacy extends beyond individual acts to enacting structural change.

As Anna Meier, a foreign policy professor at the University of Nottingham, argues: "To view white supremacy in a structural sense means understanding it as a system of institutions and practices that position white people as the dominant group in society and make that positioning so natural as to be unremarkable" (Meier, 2022, January 30).

To understand that journalism serves as an institution necessitates a reckoning of the ways in which the practice of our field can be complicit in this situation. Research seems to reflect that is the case in Germany. Predominantly examining the pernicious dangers of anti-Semitism and growing anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe, this research has found that

journalism's role in moderating such groups is vital, but in some cases unsuccessful. Baugut (2020), for example, found that Jews in Germany perceived that local journalism actually fostered antisemitism nearly a century after the fall of the Nazi regime. Baugut (2020) argues:

> Some 75 years after the Holocaust…German Jews considered several media including quality newspapers to be a contributing factor to ongoing antisemitism.
>
> From Jews' point of view, the selective perception and retention of "negative" or "threatening" characteristics of media coverage is arguably important for their safety; this seems to be particularly true for those who perceive high levels of antisemitism and consequently more strongly identify with their community…Plausibly, Jews' definition of unfavorable media coverage is shaped by their assumptions or experiences of the media's influence on [others] they perceive to be hostile (Baugut, 2020, p. 20-21).

However, as Baugut (2021) argues, German journalists seek to combat this through numerous role applications depending on the context of reporting and, furthermore, the "Journalists' personal perspectives as citizens may motivate them to act in line with their political convictions even when this requires deviation from what they perceive to be the general task of their profession" (p. 14). In other words, journalists may be willing to depart from their norms, in order to work more actively in the interest of targeted Jews. As with journalists elsewhere, the journalists in Baugut's (2021) study were committed to enabling an open public sphere.

When undertaken correctly, journalists can create a positive news agenda with their reporting. When journalists quote minority groups targeted by hate—as with Muslims in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland—the likelihood that minority groups will be differentiated from the accusations against them (e.g. a link between Islam and terror) is significantly higher (Matthes et al., 2020). The stakes are quite high given that a survey of 15 countries across Europe indicated that the mere exposure to populist, —a social identity developed in regards to a *dangerous other,*—messaging had the ability to encourage support for populist ideas (Hameleers et al., 2021).

It is helpful, perhaps to consider hate group messaging a bit more like a virus, that journalists can inadvertently spread merely through encountering it and not through any poor intention. And this has certainly been a part of the strategy of hate groups.

Hate Groups and their Strategy

Michael Edison Hayden of the Southern Poverty Law Center was interviewed in a 2019 podcast episode of "All About Journalism" concerning the challenges facing reporters who cover hate. He pointed to the mosque shooting in New Zealand, which was racially charged and informed by the ideals of white nationalism.

> These shooters are not just psychopaths. There are people who agree with them in our society and in our government…We're not going to have journalism at all if the fascists win. People don't realize the stakes sometimes. When you're embedded in it, you do understand…Once you understand the underlying fear of these groups it becomes a lot more clear that the worst way you can cover these

mass shooting events for instance is to be "It's crazy! It's white supremacy!" but never think about how someone becomes a white supremacist (O'Connell, 2019).

Most hate groups are linked to preservation. In America and Europe, this reflects the preservation of white ethnicity and often a white male dominance. The distinction between white supremacy and white nationalism is subtle but worth noting here. White supremacy aims to create a white ethnostate to rule over a given state, while white nationalism reflects the belief that the participants can create a separate white state (Hartzell, 2018). That said, in this book I will not distinguish strongly between the uses of the terms given that there is considerable overlap between hate groups with individuals who tend to float between the groups of Aryans, Ku Klux Klan and others. The demographic root of the problem of hate groups is located in young white males with research reflecting that the prototypical "recruit" for white supremacy is found among young white males who feel cast aside in society and have plentiful free time and with higher than average access to the internet. Propaganda from hate groups tripled during the first three years of the Trump presidency, 2016 to 2019 (Yellin, 2020). Historically, when a problem arises—young white men feeling powerless—it might seem reasonable to look to elites as the source of the problem but, in reality, disadvantaged groups tend to be targeted. In Charlottesville, throngs of people chanted "the Jews will not replace us"—perplexing and deeply troubling chants, given the state of the Jewish people and the relative historical proximity of the Holocaust. However, in white nationalist circles, narratively the Jews take on a powerful role in the upset of the white male-empowered status quo—they are perceived as *directing* actions taken by minority groups (Thompson, 2001).

In the 1990s, researchers argued that the United States would be at the forefront of a far-right revolution—a revolution motivated and promoted through digital means (Back, Keith & Solomos, 1998; Daniels, 2009). This argument came with some rationale. The Klan and Nazi groups had been pushed to the fringes of American society following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Federal Bureau of Investigation counter intelligence program and government hearings. Consequently, in spring 1984, Louis Beam Jr. created the Inter-Klan Newsletter and Survival Alert. This network was later shared with Aryan Nations as a way they could collaboratively avoid the ban on sending their publications through the U.S. Mail. This network grew in the 1990s, eventually facilitating racist video gaming (Winter, 2019).

It's fair to say that hate groups were in the forefront of digital technology long before journalists. And, while this far-right revolution failed to materialize in the timeframe suggested—with the exception of Klan leader Don Black's *Stormfront*—hate groups did find an impetus for growth in 2008 (Winter, 2019).

Historians note that the strategy of hate groups—especially white nationalists—shifted in the wake of the election of Barack Obama, who was the United States' first black president. This shift in strategy reflected various factors: (1) an acknowledgement that their prior strategies had proved ineffective if a black man could be elected president; (2) an acknowledgement that, based on current population trends, whites could be a minority population during the 21st century—a concept that exposes a great deal of fear in among some white populations, and; (3) the need for a softer, more mainstream friendly messaging in order to better appeal to white collar Americans.

Perhaps the moment which best illustrates this change in strategy was captured in the Al Jazeera English documentary *White Power (USA)*. During the documentary, the videographers

capture the former head of the National Socialism Movement (U.S. Nazi Party) marching down the streets of Tucson, Arizona trying to start a chant to expel blacks, Hispanics, Jews. The new leader of the movement swiftly corrected him and started a new chant: "U-S-A! U-S-A!"

This small moment is indicative of larger strategy shifts that aim to ride populist, American conservative movements in order to make mainstream the essential ideals of a hate group. As SPLC's Hayden argues, hate groups have gone for a subtler look with more emphasis placed on the recruitment of white collar workers in order to offer a more sophisticated message (O'Connell, 2019). Key to that strategy was seen to be translating that hate for online distribution. As Don Black, a prominent Klansman, told the Newhouse News Service: "Anyone can work to promote our ideas without being a member of any organization. I used to be annoyed by people who didn't join my organization, but I see the advantage now" (Southern Poverty Law Center, ND). Black points towards this new strategy—it's not just about official recruitment but about feeding the poison of the ideology into numerous aspects of American public life.

After the election of Barack Obama, the Tea Party was the first populist movement in America to see this strategy deployed (Zeskind, 2012). While the Tea Party was never, officially, a movement that dealt with race, it takes very little digging to see that the basic politics of the movement had a strong racial under pinning. Using the language of white disposition and arguing that 'country' is an essentially 'white nation' (often with phraseology such as Christian, European nation), the movement popularized slogans such as the need to "Take our country back." When such a phrase is employed, over throngs of cheering whites, it becomes clearer who a country needs to be taken back from. And it is exactly in this way that hate groups have begun operating by focusing in particular on getting their message to the people and into national infrastructures, such as current members of the military, police officers, and firemen, and white collar, middle-class Americans who are driven by fear.

Fear is key to the appeal of hate groups. As one white supremacist recruiter expressed it: the key to recruiting someone is to find that person's worst fear and "let it fester" (White Power USA). It may be that the recruit's girlfriend left him for a person who is black or that a person's job was taken away, with a new job given to someone who is Asian. Such moments can be latched onto by recruiters as an opportunity to scapegoat the race of a perceived beneficiary. The small anecdote from a person's life is made emblematic of a much larger campaign aimed at replacing whites in America. They build on subtle fears of immigration and rising birth rates of immigrants—nods to "Replacement Theory"—and make those issues personal to the new recruit (Jones, 2022). Using phraseology which is seemingly not race-based - such as "Take our country back," - allows these groups to sound as if they are simply speaking as a concerned, conservative voter and the implicit nature of the phraseology allows them to shrug off concerns as merely reading too much into their slogans.

White nationalists, for example, tend to use terms like 'alt right' as a way of providing a palatable, mainstreamed terminology (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019) and journalists, thus, have the unenviable task of explaining these nuances to their audiences without elevating them (Perreault & Meltzer, 2022). The term alt-right, short for "alternative right" was coined by Richard Spencer, the president of the National Policy Institute. Spencer is known for leading a rally in Washington DC following the election of Trump in which members "raised their arms in Nazi salutes and declared 'Hail, Trump'" (Greene, 2017, August 14). According to the Southern

Poverty Law Center, the term refers to a "set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that 'white identity' is under attack by multicultural forces using 'political correctness' and 'social justice' to undermine white people and 'their' civilization" (Southern Poverty Law Center). The use of the term, alt-right, is contested among journalists in part because it grants white supremacists the power to name themselves and provides the veil of a new phenomenon to disguise long-standing racism (Mohajer, 2017, Aug. 14). The label alt-right is valuable to white nationalists—and they often insist on its use—given such labels help to shape how the audience contextualizes a group. The term alt-right serves as a rhetorical Trojan horse, designed to bring white nationalism into mainstream public discourse (Hartzell, 2018).

Since the election of Donald Trump in 2016 as United States President, hate groups in the United States have felt emboldened—more comfortable in voicing opinions that they may have long felt, in part because (1) of the facility of social media that enables and encourages people to voice their opinions and (2) of the affirmation of those beliefs by people who were in power. That said, the election of Donald Trump is simply a single data point in a more global slide toward authoritarianism, white supremacy and racial hostility (Nair, 2021).

This does raise the question then, if spreading hate online has been so effective through the use of social media, why do such groups continue to promote in-person rallies? Translating their online persona to public events has proved to be a remarkably successful strategy for increasing the visibility of the organization. As one journalist shared with me:

> There was a hate group that came to [my] campus. They held these signs, they harassed a Muslim woman, telling people they would burn in hell… We found contact information from the organization they were from and they declined to talk. We tried to interview more students to describe the scene that it caused. Other students came for sort of a counter protest. We found them online and pulled their mission statements. If it was hateful, we wouldn't have published it. That same group came back once a year for 3 years. The stories got shorter because it wasn't as interesting [in Philadelphia, U.S.A]…There was a right-wing extremist march coming to Philly. We focused the story on 'Yes, they are coming' but we focused more on the counter protest that was gonna happen. Especially because our mayor was definitely more on the liberal side. We tried to focus more on things that wouldn't be highly offensive to people. We don't want to say anything that is factually untrue (Deidentified Participant, 2019).

When asked, why had they chosen to come to her campus? This journalist responded "absolutely for attention. College campuses are typically more liberal places, kids typically aren't religious on college campuses… And they got a lot more attention."

In this case, the journalist's response to the continued visits from the hate group was responsive to the situation. But this does mean that journalists can find themselves reporting on hate groups in several venues: their rabid online personas; their published manifestos; their acts of violence, and their non-violent, if offensive rallies. As with any advocacy group, hate groups work these venues toward one another— Social media pushes people to consider the rallies or to raise the visibility of their message while manifestos and acts of violence are presented in the press which can then increase their exposure, but also give hate groups a chance to respond, to argue that they disagree with the tactics but not the method by which it was carried out. Again,

rallies provide opportunities for hate groups to agitate against the opposition and, they would hope, to show that the counter protestors are as unreasonable and more violent than they are. This creates and presents several avenues for journalistic reporting, and all of them require care.

Journalistic Fears and reporting on hate groups

So then how should this topic be reported? In digital journalism, Hayden points towards the "click-based mindset"—in which journalists think through their reporting primarily as a way to increase the number of people who click to their website—as an approach that has only exacerbated the situation (O'Connell, 2019).

In a study of primarily legacy media journalists—many of whom practiced what we describe here as digital journalism—we found that journalists operated under the assumption that addressing this topic effectively necessitated the application of the watchdog role. However, journalists struggled to navigate their role enactment in particular at hate group rallies—a watchdog role would seem to be a problem given that rally participants often perceive themselves as the powerless population and a *disseminator* role—whereby journalists passively just represent the various bits of information gathered—would seem equally problematic in that it would lead to equivocating views between racists and non-racists (Perreault, Johnson & Klein, 2020).

Similar to what we argued in Perreault, Johnson and Klein (2020), Hayden from the Southern Poverty Law Center argues for the importance of putting hate actors in the context of their beliefs. He notes that the reporting process requires a delicate balance—dehumanizing the subject matter doesn't help, but neither does romanticizing it (O'Connell, 2019). He argues that in the rush to report on a hate activity, digital journalists in particular like to latch onto a singular rationale for the motive—even when that rationale is entirely persuasive. It isn't enough to focus solely on the influences on a—for example—white supremacist manifesto of the mosque shooter that came from Daily Stormer. Hate groups find the fuel for their fire in a wide range of media including clear-cut hate group organizations such as Daily Stormer as much as pundit Tucker Carlson, the now defunct 8chan as well as FOX News and FAIR.

To ignore such context is to provide hate groups with what they want; equivalence with other mainstream perspectives. And this is precisely what journalists fear doing unintentionally. Moreover, journalism's preoccupation with equity does at times mean that journalists report stories that could be characterized as "on the one hand truth, on the other hand falsehood" that can lead to further misunderstandings. Extant research on news coverage of hate in the United States suggests a similar concern to that in Europe—journalists fear that covering hate groups grants them legitimacy (Perreault, Johnson & Klein, 2020). The facilitation of hate operates at a deeper level for journalists, working its way through the norms, practices and institutional understandings of the field.

While this is a novel presentation of a problem, this is not a new problem. A look through the history books of journalism will display in rather stark colors, that journalism historically granted incredibly favorable coverage of the Ku Klux Klan (Scharlott, 1988). Similar practices occurred abroad with lauding reports granted to the Nazis (Mazower, 2009). Journalists fear granting oxygen to the fire of such white nationalist groups (Perreault, Johnson & Klein, 2020).

Journalists represent a valuable vehicle for white nationalists—a means for which they can mainstream their ideas (Fitzgerald, 2019).

Following the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, the Society for Professional Journalists offered clarified advice on coverage of white nationalists: journalists conducting such coverage should do so without "inflat[ing] situations or mak[ing] matters worse" by giving these groups a platform (Seaman, 2017). The Associated Press offered even blunter advice that encourages journalists to call racists, racists. In my prior research on legacy media journalists, journalists addressed this concern by enacting the storyteller role, which allowed journalists to provide more nuanced coverage (Perreault, Johnson & Klein, 2020).

Historically, U.S. journalists have struggled in the coverage of hate groups as well as out of concern for their own safety. Fear of retribution led to remarkably favorable coverage of the Ku Klux Klan in particular in the 20th century (Scharlott, 1988). Journalists still express fears for their physical safety (Perreault, Johnson & Klein, 2020) but more commonly their concern is mainstreaming the coverage of hate groups through poor choice of terminology (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019) or through sourcing that lends legitimacy to hate (Fitzgerald, 2019).

In an interview with a female journalist in the midst of the GamerGate controversy, a campaign against women and minorities in video gaming, she double- and triple-checked that I would be keeping her information anonymous for an academic study. "Do you know what would happen to me if you posted my name along with the hashtag GamerGate?" She told me to do a search on Twitter of the other women mentioned in allusion to GamerGate. I told her that I was familiar, and that of course she would remain anonymous (and still remains so here). But this begets a very common journalistic impulse. "Journalists covering white nationalist[s]…do so at great potential risk to their physical safety" (Perreault, Johnson & Klein, 2020, p. 14). In some ways this reflects what Scharlott (1988) described in regards to the Ku Klux Klan.

That journalists are in such a precarious position isn't an accident—it's intentional to place journalists between their fears of personal safety and their fears of normatively practicing journalism. While certainly, culturally America was in a different place during the time frame Scharlott (1988) describes and so some of what is identified in terms of journalistic complicity could simply be a result of that. However, it is worth considering that this no-win situation necessarily places journalists in a position that similarly necessarily puts hate groups in an advantageous position.

Finally, journalists fear hitting the wall presented by their own lack of knowledge about hate groups. Journalists struggle to define the terms relevant to hate groups. At what point does a work of "hate speech" become the work of a "hate group?" What differentiates "racist language" or "bigoted language" from "hate speech?" At what point does a crime against a minority become a "hate crime?" Prior research has questioned how journalists conceptualize hate speech, arguing that their limited conception of hate speech results in journalists failing to fulfill "a duty to safeguard democracy and ensure citizens have the requisite tools for self-governance" (Johnson, Thomas & Kelling, 2020, p. 32). Without a robust understanding of hate speech, journalists easily become what they fear: a "mere conduit for white nationalist propaganda" (Perreault, Johnson & Klein, 2020, p. 11).

Journalists covering hate speech find themselves in a contentious arena where they must weigh their normative approaches to the field against the needs of the audience, even as hate

groups put pressure on journalists to shape their coverage a certain way. As a form of reporting, news coverage of hate represents a form of coverage that "may have severe consequences for those at the center of the media reports"—the targets of hate activity (Baugut, 2021, p. 4). As newsrooms across the country have found their situations changed by the development of digital technology and decreased financial resources, they have been able to lean less and less on trained human news editors. Such editors can "see the difference between vulgar personal insults...and attempts to drum up hate in support of public policy that violates basic human rights" (Russell, 2019, p. 34).

All of this together indicates that this is not a new problem. But it is a more serious problem.

As I argue in this book, digital journalism has in many ways amplified a problem that already existed in the journalism field. Each chapter makes a broad argument to contribute to the overall thesis, but several of the chapters offer an additional and explanatory case study to help describe the nature of the issue at stake.

In Chapter One, building on the framework of digital journalism studies, this chapter applies original data from interviews with 142 digital journalists to understand how journalists undertake definition making, identify the values of the field and how they practice digital journalism. The chapter aims to do two things: (1) explain exactly what we mean when we say "digital journalism" and (2) from that basis explore the places from which interview respondents saw journalism as vulnerable. Debate exists within the study of digital journalism on the degree to which digital journalism, as a practice, actually refers to most legacy media journalism. This chapter considers digital journalism primarily through "digitization" and argues for a practice-based view of digital journalism, drawing on the interviews with practitioners. The speed of digital only highlights how easy it is to share unverified, or under-verified information, and audience orientation can also be problematic if the audience promotes hate speech.

Chapter Two examines the problem of audience orientation in digital journalism. Far from being able to mediate or even educate this portion of their audience, journalists often feel constrained by the need to serve their audience—but, to put it bluntly, what if your audience is terrible? This chapter explores the digital journalistic focus on audience and reflects that giving the audience, or who we perceive the audience to be, what they want can be a bit of a slippery slope that can play into the hands of hate groups.

In Chapter Three, we consider what gives hate groups the impetus to act and implicate, in particular the use of "churnalism?" "Churnalism," the frowned-upon digital journalism process of quickly aggregating and reinterpreting information, is reflected on as a method used to promote hate against particular groups. Through consideration of Churnalism and the thirst to be first" (Lewis & Cushion, 2009), this chapter reflects how digital journalism can ultimately conclude by providing an avenue for the messages of hate. Finally, this chapter reflects on the roles of digital journalism and the ways in which digital journalists seek to address issues of objectivity associated with their reporting (Winston & Winston, 2020).

Chapter Four considers the problem of definition making. The labels associated with actors in news are important signals to the audience regarding who is speaking. In some forms of reporting—notably religious journalism—it is considered best practice to allow actors to self-identify. This proves problematic with hate actors who—as noted earlier—use terms such as the

label “alt-right”—a term intended to mainstream white nationalist ideology. Allowing participants to self-identify can then provide white nationalists with an avenue to mask their intentions. This chapter also seeks to explore how a group becomes a “hate group” in digital journalism. Largely in the United States this is motivated institutionally through the definition making of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League—groups that are most likely to send out press releases and produce documents that journalists can use for speedy reporting reflected in chapters three and four. This chapter looks at the definitions produced by Southern Poverty Law Center, Anti-Defamation League, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation through their public documents related to hate groups. In particular, the chapter examines the fraught discussion of defining hate groups in terms of domestic terrorism; a connection long resisted by the FBI.

Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the prior chapters and argues that the solution to the problem of reporting hate which arises in digital journalism resides in tactics that have been key to legacy journalism’s normative success: slow, painstakingly careful reporting, comprehensive interviewing and adherence to AP style guidelines. These keys to legacy journalism’s past success have been in many ways the antithesis of what has been successful in digital journalism and, hence, this chapter argues that the solution to the problem posed by hate groups does not lie in “digitization.” This proposal is not meant to ask digital journalism to shed those traits in all situations—indeed it would be financially dangerous and technologically counter-intuitive to do so—but rather to treat reporting related to hate groups as operating in a different category entirely; a category that demands the best of digital journalism’s normative legacy.

The journey is treacherous

In closing, one more story that reflects what is at stake in this form of reporting. During one KKK rally, a journalist found himself surrounded by members of the Klan’s Loyal White Knights sect who had brought knives for self-defense. They were squaring off with anti-fascist protesters, and tensions were high. It did not take long for violence to break out, and a number of people were stabbed, one of them just a few feet from the journalist, who by that point had stopped interviewing people in order to direct his full attention to the growing violence. He ended up next to a Jewish former police officer who, moments later, sprang into action to save the life of Klan leader William Quigg, who was nearby and being stomped by protesters. As they recovered and caught their breath, the Klansman and ex-officer began having a conversation that the journalist recorded. And in the end, the journalist asked just one question of Quigg: “How do you feel that a Jewish man saved your life?” The Klansman replied: “Thank you.” This story was reported widely after the rally, and it was able to be told only because a journalist put himself in harm’s way to navigate the complexities of covering a hate group (France24, 2016).

Journalists putting themselves in a place of such danger is regrettably not an uncommon experience. Unfortunately, providing hate groups with a platform is also not uncommon.

It is treacherous transit without a map, and the goal here is to create such a map. A few points from this story: (1) was the story worthy of the journalists’ personal safety? (2) was what happened to the Klan leader worthy of reporting as much as the marginalized communities who would be personally affected by the Klan’s rally? (3) what did the police see?

This text seeks to understand the nature of the problem with nuance, to share particular cases I believe are relevant more broadly, and to connect research from our fields in ways that will unravel the problem a little further. Lastly, the text seeks to provide applied solutions to this problem with the hope that journalists, journalism educators and journalism scholars will find a new way forward that preserves the essential activities of journalism while operating effectively in the digital space.

Here is what this text cannot do, which is to address the root issues of hate. Those are societal, structural problems that require much more thought (and another book—or, well, five books) in many forums. That said, digital journalism is essential in mitigating how it currently is operating in our world and it is here that change can and must be made.

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1. (Digital) Journalism

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Abstract
What is digital journalism? Journalists have often emphasised technology to form the definition when considering what counts as *digital*. That said, journalists use their technology in a wide variety of ways depending on their news organization; it may differ even for the individual journalist. Understanding the vulnerabilities of digital journalism necessitates an understanding of what digital journalism actually *is*. This chapter seeks to explore just that, connecting numerous streams of scholarship concerning the nature of digital journalism and here, specifically, to understand the values of the practice. This text will situate itself within two central ideas of digital journalism that are often placed at odds: (1) that digital journalism—at the time of writing—is industry standard throughout the journalistic field, and yet (2) digital journalism maintains meaningful differences from legacy, analog journalism. From that conceptual basis this chapter seeks to assess the meaning of digital journalism and the aspects of the practice vulnerable to exploitation by hate actors. With this in mind, this chapter examines defining digital journalism primarily through "digitization" and argues for a practice-based view of digital journalism, based on the interviews with practitioners.

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Just following the explosive success of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, real life piracy off the Somali coast expanded drastically in the late 2000s. Following the collapse of the Somali government, a number of fishing vessels took to piracy in 2008, carrying out 111 attacks on vessels during that time and hijacking 42 vessels. In just the first two months of January and February that rate increased 10 fold. The news updated daily, reporting on hijacked cruise ships with a fervor approaching moral panic: questioning the ties of the pirates to "Islamic terrorism," and questioning why affluent Americans would put themselves in such danger given that some Americans were slain in these hijackings.

When confronted with this story, *Wired Magazine*, rather than mirroring existing news reports instead took a different tack: they created a video game.

More specifically, they created what is known as a *newsgame*. The game is rather simple in playstyle; the player controls a pirate ship with the goal of making money. The audience quickly learns that capturing ships is tricky. Attempting to capture a fishing boat isn't worth it—they don't have much money and are nimble enough to outrun the pirates; neither is attempting a

capture of an oil tanker. The oil tanker is slower, but the military chases you down quickly, providing very little time for negotiation. Cruise ships, on the other hand, are the perfect middle ground—slow enough to be captured, good potential for revenue and, given that many of the hostages are foreigners, the pirates have some time to manage negotiations.

The description of the newsgame on *Wired Magazine's* website reads:

> You are a pirate commander staked with $50,000 from local tribal leaders and other investors. Your job is to guide your pirate crew through raids in and around the Gulf of Aden, attack and capture a ship, and successfully negotiate a ransom (Smallbore, 2009).

After you take part in the capture of seafarers, the game provides a number of negotiating options: Feed, Threaten, Torture, Kill. Players have to proceed with a delicate balance: torture and killing can easily backfire, given that the negotiators have to trust that there would be some chance that the hostages will be safely released if they're going to pay.

The game raises rather obvious ethical concerns. Beyond just the concept that the news reader is placed in the interactive role of a pirate, the game leads the player through several problematic activities. Is that the role of news? Yet *Wired Magazine* conducted research following the release of their game and found that *Cutthroat Capitalism* players understood more about the Somali pirate situation than people who had read a series of news articles on the topic and significantly more than people who followed news about it on television. Why would that be?

These findings garner little surprise among digital journalism scholars. *Cutthroat Capitalism* is emblematic of the best of what digital journalism undertakes: connection with the audience, interactivity, and innovative approaches to news—these three properties in many ways speak to the success of *Cutthroat Capitalism*. So what do we mean when we say "digital journalism?" Why not just "journalism?" What is it particularly about digital journalism that differentiates from the problems journalism faces with hate groups?

Often discussions of digital journalism begin with some *new technology*, but also some questions to consider: (1) what do we mean when we say *new technology?* Certainly not all technology is the same. (2) Who has access to the tools to perform digital journalism? (3) What is the professional culture of digital journalism? (4) What values are associated with digital journalism? And (5) who are the beneficiaries of digitization? Journalism studies presents a thorough—at times daunting—scholarship on the values, roles and norms that both enhance and haunt journalism practice.

This chapter seeks to lay the groundwork for this book, by elaborating the definition of digital journalism. Given that the assertion of this book is that there are structural weaknesses in digital journalism that contribute to how hate groups can leverage it, it would be worthwhile to first define what is meant by digital journalism and forecast the structural weaknesses hate groups could leverage.

Interviews with Digital Journalists

In laying the groundwork, this book was backgrounded through a substantial number of long-form interviews with digital journalists. Throughout this chapter and the rest of the book, their perspective will be reflected not only in my positioning, but in how I think about the

problem of hate. The interviews began through initial outreach to hundreds of journalists in waves starting in 2017, predominantly in the United States, but also some in Canada and the United Kingdom. In identifying these journalists, journalists were considered to be "people who work for a journalistic medium as their main job" and "carry out journalistic activities" such as publishing on "current and socially relevant topics" (Fröhlich, Koch, & Obermaier, 2013, p. 815; Weischenberg et al., 2006, p. 30-31). Furthermore, journalists were asked if they considered themselves digital journalists and were interviewed in backgrounding this book if they did so.

This work resulted in numerous publications that helped inform this book—many of them cited in these chapters (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021; Perreault & Belair-Gagnon, 2022; Perreault & Bell, 2022; Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020; Perreault & Hanusch, 2022). At this point, the number of digital journalists interviewed exceeds 200.

The aim of these interviews was to uncover journalists' experiences with digital journalism, the things they valued in digital journalism and their priorities in their coverage. The interviews ranged in length, but averaged about 30 minutes to an hour. The questionnaires emphasized open-ended questions such as "how is digital journalism done in your newsroom?" and "what does the term 'digital journalism' mean to you?" Questionnaires also posed questions specific to the sample, questions about influences on their coverage, questions about the technology used in their work, and how they chose their stories." There were quantitative components in some of the questionnaires—questions which included measures for how frequently journalists used technology such as news games, virtual reality and mobile devices.

Questions in the various interviews were divided into five areas. Broadly, (1) questions about journalists' professional background and current occupational context, (2) questions about journalists' priorities in regard to their journalistic roles (Hanitzsch et al., 2013), (3) questions about their most important roles as digital journalists, (4) questions about journalists' potential sources of influence on their work (Perreault & Stanfield, 2019) and (5) questions about how they define and think about the practice of digital journalism.

The interviews are presented here anonymously, given that this was agreed as part of the ethics approval. More significantly, their identity isn't really all that important. What is important is their perspective. Ultimately, the journalists who agreed to be interviewed came from a range of locations, urban and rural, large-scale, and small-community. Some journalists came from newsrooms that were name-brand, associated with historical legacy media such as *CNN,* NBC *Charlotte, The Guardian* and *USA Today.* Others were from digital only newsrooms such as *The Intercept* and *Buzzfeed*.

Throughout the remainder of this text, when digital journalists are sourced, they are simply referred to in a similar manner to the journalists from the introduction: with reference to their work, and by the pronouns to which they self-identified.

Definitions of Digital Journalism

Digital journalism has been frequently defined, but largely in relation to legacy media. Legacy media refers to traditional newspaper, magazine and broadcast that predated the internet, and are at times considered digital journalism (Cheruiyot, Baack, & Ferrer-Conill, 2019; Christian, 2012). Such definition making is important for the purposes of this book—as noted above—but is broadly important to the field in that the field of journalism often operates under

the perception that journalism is "hurting and new technology…[could] provide the answers" (Vos & Perreault, 2020, p. 483).

In defining digital journalism, there would initially seem to be two distinct scholarly tracks: a track that defines digital journalism in some ways as "simply journalism" (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020, p. 1312) built on the infrastructure of existing journalism, that reflects a "difference of degree rather than kind" (Zelizer, 2019, p. 349); and a track that pursues digital journalism as more exclusive, "digitization as it is embodied in journalism" (Duffy & Ang, 2019, p. 379).

In regards to the later, journalism scholars Andrew Duffy and Peng Hwa Ang (2019) argued that digital journalism should be defined as "digitization as it is embodied in journalism" (p. 378). They argue in effect, that scholarship, as it has been rooted in journalism, ends up privileging newsrooms and existent newsroom routines at the expense of focusing on the more innovative elements of journalism. Rooting the discussion of digital journalism in journalism has a few limitations in scholarship: scholars seem to express disappointment in the passivity of users and journalists (Borger et al., 2013), frustration with the compromise of quality that accompanies attempts to please the audience (Aitamurto, 2013), and rooting the use of social media in how it is used to accomplish journalistic tasks (Thurman, 2018). As Duffy and Ang (2019) argue, "new media are assessed according to old media norms" (p. 379) and hence, studies tend to find that tweeting journalists keep to established newsroom values (Hedman, 2015) and reader comments are made to fit with journalistic values (Carlson, 2015; Wolfgang, 2018).

This approach to digital journalism that Duffy and Ang (2019) propose will be quoted at length here:

> [This approach] involves losing the normative accretions surrounding journalism and starting from the principles of digitization as articulated through news media. It requires a continued shift of focus away from legacy news production and how digitization is being worked into the newsroom, to consider instead how digitization is a feature of society and how journalism subsequently articulates or informs that. This will allow some established friends into the room: digitization opens the doors for under-represented communities to speak, for citizens to be heard, for specialist groups to connect, for publics to rally. It introduces novel forms of multimedia creativity, delivering new narrative forms. It makes information searchable, so that it can be repurposed, redirected and revitalised, or misrepresented, degraded and corrupted… Specifically, for example, focusing on an affordance of digitisation—ease of circulation—rather than on the texts that are circulated.
>
> …
>
> Legacy journalism's business model is broken; new ideas are needed from digitisation. It is incumbent on journalism to pursue the digital, then. This will drive change, loss and cost, growth, experimentation and innovation. Each of these will be driven by the cowboy ways of digitisation rather than being corralled, tamed and ridden by journalism (p. 383).

The implications of this definition then reflect digital journalism as a narrower subset within journalism.

In the former track of definitions, digital journalism is defined primarily in relation to its practice and process. So while at one time, digital journalists represented a unique breed of journalist who built their "professional identity around digital disruptions, journalists are now treating digital technologies as just another part of their jobs" (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020, p. 1313). Similarly, this reflects journalism scholar Barbie Zelizer's (2019) notion that "thinking about journalism through its digital apparatus is much like erecting a building while focusing primarily on its exterior" (p. 343). Zelizer (2019) uses an architectural metaphor to define digital journalism: digital journalism is a new exterior form of journalistic architecture but built on old proven staples. So while digital journalism may represent "hypnotic bridges, green power plants and rotating towers" the reality is that this journalism is built in the same manner as the architecture that preceded "plumbing, lighting, roofing, support beams" (p. 343). With this in mind, given the expansion of digital tools this would mean that "there is no such thing as 'digital journalism' anymore to actors in the field; it is simply journalism" (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020, p. 1312).

For this book, *digital* is not just technologies to perform journalism but conceptualizations of the "new opportunities to gather and analyze reams of data, to inform comprehensively, to investigate power, to engage with multiple publics, and to tell multi-sided stories" (Waisbord, 2019, p. 357). Through the lens of digital journalism studies, digital journalism "is not journalism that is transformed by being digital; it is digitization as it is embodied in journalism" (Duffy & Ang, 2019, p. 378). Duffy and Ang (2019) note that much of the scholarship in digital journalism has started from the perspective of journalism, rather than from digitization—in other words, starting with concerns about change in journalism as opposed the focus of digitization or "what can we do" (p. 383).

As media historian Will Mari (2019) defines it, when journalists utilize tools such as laptops, tablets, cellphones and digital voice recorders, self-publishing tools and inexpensive digital video recorders for digital publication, this tends to be considered what separates legacy journalism from digital journalism (Mari, 2019). In this definition, researchers and journalists do not separate digital journalism from legacy journalism through newsgathering processes or communication routines—instead they are distinguished by the tools employed during those routines or practices (Ferrucci, 2017). Journalists themselves, when determining who is a digital journalist and who is not, have often used technology as a means to form the definition (Ferrucci & Vos, 2017; Vos & Ferrucci, 2018). That said, journalists use their tools in a wide variety of ways depending on their news organization; it differs even to the individual journalist (Silva & Eldridge II; Tandoc Jr & Ferrucci, 2017). In effect, this would mean that the vast majority of journalism would be reflected to be digital journalism. Given the important roles of technological tools in journalists' daily habits, Mari (2019), as well as Zelizer (2019) and Perreault & Ferrucci (2020) would argue it doesn't necessarily make sense to separate the *digital* out of most journalism. In my research and in many studies, digital journalists do not attempt to differentiate themselves from legacy media journalists—rather they saw what they did as the norm in contemporary journalism (Ferrucci & Vos, 2017; Cheruiyot, et al., 2019; Perreault & Bell, 2022; Perreault & Vos, 2020).

The History of Defining Digital Journalism

In Steen Steensen and Oscar Westlund's (2021) elaboration of "digital journalism studies" they reflect on the ways in which research on this topic is thematically clustered, noting an emphasis on "technology," "platform," "audience" and "Business." Of lesser emphasis? "Professionalism." (p. 26). The definitions of digital journalism/journalists and how they are constituted remains foundational—these definitions shape a range of crucial activities including how journalists prioritize sources to how journalists work their content for audience consumption. It is worth considering that this is a process that has developed over time, responsive to changes in journalism as well as changes in digital formats.

This definition-making regarding digital journalism began with a variety of other terms including newsroom convergence, or the coalescing of technologies from formerly discrete media such as print or broadcast. In the early 2000s, newsroom convergence, and expressions such as "backpack journalist" and "MoJos" came to reflect the desired goal and mission for journalism organizations. Such terms describe journalists carrying the tools necessary to file multimedia stories while in the field and without access to any of the tools available in the newsroom (Singer, 2011). The term *converged journalism* implies that the technologies are distinct and separate, but being brought to bear in a singular manner. At the introduction of *converged journalism*, newsrooms began to innovate, at times struggling to determine how to deploy resources in a shifting industry (Singer, 2011).

Yet as the initial set of definitions suggests, technology may be decreasing in importance in defining digital journalism (Carlson, 2019). For example, it could be that the most essential part of digital journalism is the professional role employed, as Scott Eldridge II and Bob Franklin (2019) argue (more on this in Chapter 4). Digital journalists have shown more acceptance for the *advocacy* roles in journalism compared historically with legacy media journalists (Ferrucci & Vos, 2017). In the interviews with digital journalists—here producing work for digital-only formats—Ferrucci and Vos (2017) found that digital journalism is primarily a mindset that is based on output. So in other words "to be a digital journalist, a journalist must consistently be thinking about digital publication throughout the working of a story" (p. 874).

Throughout the history of digital journalism, discourse about it has battled between utopian and dystopian discourse. When a new technology is introduced, people hypothesize the consequences of that technology based entirely on their assumptions of it (Baym, 2010). Technology typically goes through a process through which its meaning is made and then later is publicly remade (Schulte, 2013). So for example, for newsgames to reflect an aspect of journalism reflects developments in thinking both about journalism as well as about the import of gaming and gamification (Perreault & Vos, 2020; Vos & Perreault, 2020). Initially, gaming was considered an edgy, transgressive medium and a political threat to American conservativism in particular, which attacked it relentlessly in the 1980s and 1990s (Williams, 2003). Arcades of course, brought a mix of ethnicities, genders together to partake in a democratizing activity—it would seem to upset the natural order of the time in how pastimes were enjoyed. Yet gaming now is nearly ubiquitous and hence, reflected in its use in journalism (Vos & Perreault, 2020). Its integration into digital journalism then depended to some degree on the utopian discourse of gaming outweighing the dystopian.

While new technology often goes through this process of being conceptualized and reconceptualized, this is a process still occurring in digital journalism (Ferrucci & Vos, 2017).

Digital Journalism Studies

Scholarship has addressed the question at the heart of this chapter—the nature of digital journalism—through conceptualizing Digital Journalism Studies as a field distinct from journalism studies (Eldridge et al., 2019). This framework presupposes the second set of definitions introduced in this chapter, that digital journalism may be best understood through the framework of digitization as opposed to that of journalism. By contrast, this runs counter to the other set of definitions given that if Digital Journalism Studies were conceptualized separately, then digital journalism would necessarily be about a great deal more than just the tools used and seek to focus attention away from the structural infrastructure the two have in common. "Digital Journalism Studies should strive to be an academic field which critically explores, documents, and explains the interplay of digitization and journalism, continuity and change" (Eldridge, 2019, p. 394).

I will offer that I broadly disagree with conceptualizing digital journalism separately from journalism studies—and this book provides support for that rationale relative to the topic of covering hate. In this book, you'll see that I frequently use the terms digital journalist and journalist interchangably in part to acknowledge my essential stance: that to be a *journalist* is to be a *digital journalist*. However, it is nevertheless worthwhile to consider what is proposed through this framework given that a work on digital journalism necessarily must consider the framework of Digital Journalism Studies.

As Eldridge et al. (2019) argue, it is worth "embracing the digital with journalism, continuity and change" (p. 318) given that, second, it is difficult to disentangle the "digital" from contemporary journalism. The position of this book is, however, that this presents all the more reason why digital journalism *should* be considered in relation to journalism studies. There is no denying the influence and sway of digitization in journalism, but as Zelizer (2019) argues, the digital journalism "buildings" are not being built with new materials. To return to the example of *Cutthroat Capitalism*—an example that would seem to be emblematic of all that is worth of perceiving as "distinct" from journalism studies—the information for the game was still (1) gathered through interviews and public documents, (2) verified, (3) developed and produced in a format to educate the audience. In short, while the shape of the sausage produced looks wildly different from that produced in traditional newspapers or broadcast, the sausage nevertheless came from the same animal.

This is not to say that this was always the case. In my prior research with Patrick Ferrucci, our interviews with journalists indicated that digital journalists *were* at one time, new entrants to the journalistic field—presenting alternative methods for producing the news (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020). This is consistent with my research on mobile journalists (Perreault & Stanfield, 2019) and Ferrucci's prior research on digital-only journalists (Ferrucci & Vos, 2017)—in both these cases, mobile journalists and digital-only journalists argued that they were on the periphery of the field and not entirely welcome within the traditional journalistic sphere. Yet what the journalists in Perreault and Ferrucci (2020) argue is that while digital journalism forms were on the periphery of the field, the field shifted to accommodate them. This was done

to such a degree that journalism has, in essence, reshaped itself in the image of the peripheral digital journalist. While this finding runs counter to Duffy and Ang's (2019) call to consider digital journalism more from the lens of the digital, it nevertheless still acknowledges that "legacy journalism's business model is broken; new ideas are needed from digitization" (p. 383), given that the field has shifted to accommodate the digital.

Moreover it demonstrates something essential to consider about journalism—that the boundaries of the field are *soft*. While journalism is frequently critiqued for its lack of adaptability—often in relation to its inability to develop a new digitally-based financial model—the field has in the past proven to be relatively adaptive to new entrants and changes in the field. The field shifting and reshaping to fit the nature of digital journalism certainly evidences this (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020). More specifically, we frequently see journalists adapting to new methods of reporting in order to better do that work. This can include integration of new forms of technology (Perreault & Hanusch, 2022a) as well as accommodating new collaborators in their reporting spaces (Perreault & Hanusch, 2022b). For example, in my work with University of Vienna journalism scholar Folker Hanusch, we found that journalists defended their professionalism when confronted with influencers moving into their digital spaces (2022b). But this was not to diminish the work of influencers but rather to distinguish the differences in how they thought of their work—they did not tend to see differences in the work they actually did. This reaction is emblematic of a *heteronomous* field. Journalism is, in other words, able to adapt, but this sort of field also tends to be the most unstable. This is certainly reflected in what we know of the economic and workforce challenges in journalism (Hermida & Young, 2019; Hanusch et al., 2017).

Similarly, Burgess and Hercombe (2019) argued that digital journalism may have once been a journalistic niche but was now "everybody's business" (p. 359); and in a similar manner, this book illustrates that in a standard journalistic process—journalists covering hate can now scarcely avoid the needs presented in Twitter and other social media.

Perhaps though we've spent too much time in the field considering the failings of legacy journalism—its funding model—and not enough time considering its normative successes: the aspects of legacy journalism that ought not be discarded.

Utopianism in Digitization

As indicated earlier, digital journalism tends to reflect a fair amount of utopianism. The rationale of this book, in rooting digital journalism in the actual practice of working journalists as opposed to solely in scholarship is in part as a way to address that. Innovations are exciting, but as noted earlier they at times come at the expense of the current work force (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021). For example, in journalism scholarship, at times journalists who respond negatively to digitization are argued to lack the "self-reflexivity to consider their work and ideals in light of a new media world" (Usher, 2010, p. 924) or, in other words, are reflected to be out of touch.

The emphasis on digitization poses problems in a variety of areas of coverage in that scholars have argued that it contributes to normative failures in the industry (Siegelbaum & Thomas, 2016). In short, the emphasis on digitization in general seemingly operates with the assumption that journalism is "hurting and new technology…[could] provide the answers" (Vos

& Perreault, 2020, p. 483). Responding to digitization requires a degree of nimbleness and flexibility; these don't necessarily come naturally to newsrooms given that in order to be comprehensive in reporting on communities, newsrooms are often large. Those that lack size, tend to conversely lack comprehensiveness and—as a result—the financial resources needed to engage digitization. Hence, it is the rare small, focused, financially-solid newsrooms or large, financially-flush newsrooms that can respond (Christensen, 2003). This then limits significantly the number of newsrooms that can participate in innovative work.

More to the point, when digitization has been employed within the field and thoroughly integrated—social media would be an example of a process that has redefined many of the infrastructure processes of journalism—these have left the industry upended and struggling to adapt (Singer, 2011). But digital turns that have changed the actual practices, as Singer (2011) describes, tend to be few and far between. More commonly, the norms of traditional journalism dominate even as the industry faces digitization (Vos, Craft & Ashley, 2011). Indeed, digitization has proven to be remarkably poor at altering the professional culture of newsrooms (Lewis & Usher, 2013; Singer, 2003). If anything, the journalism industry in the late 20th century boasted one of legacy journalism's most robust and yet least flexible professional cultures. Hence, at the introduction of digitization, legacy media journalists actually fought strongly against it (Ferrucci, 2018; Singer, 2011). The failure of legacy media journalists to quickly and intensely engage digitization is unsurprising. Legacy media journalists who describe themselves as *digital journalists* often feel that innovation in the field comes at their own expense (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021).

This reflects quite a lot of scholarship, but it highlights an essential point: digital journalists interviewed for this book largely took a skeptical view to digitization even as it was increasingly a part of their professional work.

Digital journalism as a practice would naturally be employed quite differently at resource rich newsrooms such as the *New York Times*, CNN, or *The Washington Post* compared to much smaller news organizations. Indeed, in one study, I conducted we found that innovation—far from making reporting easier—in many cases actually made it much more difficult. Journalists discussed being repeatedly asked to integrate new technologies into their work routines but being given no training in terms of how to do so effectively (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021). In fact, journalists largely reflected on innovation as market-driven and as instigated from the top-down as opposed to the ground up. In other words, while journalists certainly perceived themselves as "digital" journalists, the digital was only in regard to their main means of communication but did not actually reflect in any way their ability to achieve their normative goals within the field. With this in mind, journalists saw the "digital" in digital journalism as being a liability more than they saw it as improving their practical work. Journalists perceived it as a liability because it came—understandably—at their own expense given that as new digital trends emerged they would be the ones required to learn the skills necessary to be effective (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021). Other research reflects similar findings: that innovations within the field would not seem to actually increase the quality of work within the field (Nelson, 2018).

From the perception of journalists, for digital journalism to be effective—as effective across the board as it can be at the most resource-rich newsrooms—it would need to come from a new workforce.

Herein lies three difficulties in digital journalism: (1) historically the journalism industry features a distinctive and strong professional culture that tends to resist change, even when such changes are merited (Spyridou et al., 2013); (2) most of the current workforce isn't trained in new tools and also lacks the financial resources to fund the professional development necessary for such tools to flourish (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021; Tandoc & Ferrucci, 2016) and; (3) finally, given that journalists tend to buy into their normative goals more than technology, journalists then tend to push back on digital technologies that do not seem to make journalism better (Siegelbaum & Thomas, 2016).

Discussion of digital journalism too often ignores the vast majority of newsrooms that find integrating such innovation immensely difficult and instead focuses on only the richest newsrooms. Hence, the value of the present study because hate groups are not solely a national, elite story. No, rather this is a story widespread and relevant throughout the American news marketplace. Indeed, among digital journalists—particularly those who work in smaller, locally oriented publications—innovation often comes at the expense of the current workforce. Such local reporters often lack the core competencies required to utilize innovation in the way necessary to attain idealized outcomes. This can lead to situations like that at the Billy Roper rally in which journalists are asked to integrate a new technology without being granted the training and preparation to meaningfully consider where and when it should be employed.

Journalists are expected to be responsive to changes in technology in order to best reach their audience and successfully tell stories relevant to that audience. Yet journalism has traditionally either embraced changes late--only conceiving of the need to charge for online content after audiences had become used to receiving it for free--or by embracing change only later to realize the negative implications associated with it--journalists realized the structural limitations of storytelling via social media and the ways in which algorithms can work to limit and divide their audience only after committing resources to its use. I would suggest that such lack of understanding of a new medium is possibly unavoidable and a standard part of normalization of practices within the field. Furthermore, the push-and-pull of the field makes it natural that journalists seeking the social capital that could be gained from digital journalism—and their promotion of it—may have naturally overlooked the equally important need for economic capital. However, I would also suggest that a lack of clarity within the field regarding the role of a digital journalism and the essential practices integral to digital journalism, only exacerbates the lack of understanding of the field as a whole (Ferrucci, 2018).

Digital Journalism Values and Structural Weakness

The later track of digital journalism, digitization embodied in journalism, would seem to have the most at stake in this discussion. Through the lens of Digital Journalism Studies, examinations of digital journalism need to include as much focus on digitization as on journalism and so I'll elaborate here on a few areas to rationalize the concern in this area:

1) The forms of digital journalism attend to the importance of analytics, interactivity and a digitially-minded focus. If hate groups have demonstrated anything in the past five years, it is the ability to leverage digital platforms in order to achieve their goals. Indeed, recent years have reflected that in some ways algorithms on social media would seem to privilege hateful content. Late 2021, it was revealed that "controversial" Facebook reactions (e.g. love, shock, anger) were

privileged in the social media algorithm and granted the posts that caused these reactions more play. Content related to hate groups then would be perfectly positioned to trend on Facebook in that naturally posts by hate groups (and by extension) reporting on hate groups would naturally bring about such reactions (Oboler, 2008). Recent years, have demonstrated that hate groups have found ways to effectively "game" online algorithms in order to gain more visibility. Memorably, when Barack Obama was inaugurated as U.S.'s first African-American President, the Google Maps location for the "White House" was renamed by users as the "Black House"—a result that can only come through trending votes for such renaming. Similarly, hate groups have found ways to effectively use memes in order to share their messaging.

2) The argument has been made in the past that the digitization itself is white privileged from a media production standpoint and there would seem to be some support for this given that internet technologies were all developed by white cis-males. In one study of YouTube for example, content creators argued that YouTube's "algorithms prioritise and sustain the links between White users' channels, reinforcing White visibility" (Bishop, 2019, p. 2598). Similarly, Noble (2018) details how the world's most powerful search algorithm reflects significant race and gender exclusionary biases. Such social media biases create a sort of a feedback loop where digital journalists will reflect what is algorithmically promoted given that it would seem to be what interests the audience, which means they will then create additional content that promotes the "white perspective" (Foucault Welles & Jackson, 2019, p. 1701).

All of this together should indicate that regardless of your predominant conception of digital journalism, the coverage of hate groups is worthy of concern and one that becomes more essential given the digital nature of digital journalism. In this book, the author's personal approach lends toward the perspective that at this point, "digital journalism is simply journalism" (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020, p. 1312) and that perspective is an acknowledgement of the development that legacy media journalists have made in progressing. In other words, these issues of hate are essential throughout the field.

In an article in *The Columbia Journalism Review*, John Pavlik (1997) examined the future of online news. In the piece, the author explained how the merging of journalism with digital technologies could be "interactive, on-demand, customizable" and "incorporate new combinations of text, images, moving images, and sound," but also "build new communities based on shared interests and concerns" (p. 30). While romanticizing the potential of online news, the article goes on to detail, in reflecting on a digital newspaper with traditional sections that could disseminate information in a variety of manners. Within three years, the same influential trade magazine published a piece about the converged newsroom at *The Tampa Tribune*, a merging of newspaper and television newsrooms that potentially could be a "dominant news source" and the blueprint for the future of journalism (Colon, 2000, p. 27). In those early years of digital journalism's growing popularity within the industry and beyond, much of the content optimistically predicted how technology could drastically improve journalism's relationship with its audience and help practitioners better accomplish their mission of service to citizens (Scott, 2005).

At the same time, many industry players lamented that technology could destroy journalism and, in effect, weaken democracy (Kawamoto, 2003). Perhaps there is no better reflection of the dueling utopian and dystopian rhetoric that play into digital journalism; rhetoric

that in the end perhaps serves its most important role in distracting from the normative successes of legacy journalism.

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2. The Problem of Audience Orientation

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Abstract
This chapter interrogates the digital journalistic focus on audiences: metrics, comments and primarily the participatory emphasis of the field. While journalism has always been strongly tied to its audience, digital journalism amplifies this through its emphasis on micro-targeted audiences. But what happens when this audience ends up being, well, a terrible one? And what happens if the audience you have isn't the audience you thought you had? This chapter examines audience orientation noting that the focus on giving the audience what it *wanted* in digital reporting in some cases facilitated the worst impulses of the audience. Furthermore, it reflects that journalists many times see their audience as defining issues of "hate" differently than they do.

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The Syrian refugee crisis represented a defining crisis in Europe during the 2010s as numerous countries sought to determine whether, and to what degree, they could accommodate refugees. The Syrian refugee crisis began March 15, 2011, forcing 6.8 million Syrians to leave the country as refugees and asylum-seekers, while another 6.7 million people found themselves displaced within Syria. In total, the United Nations estimates that more than 13 million Syrians needed—and continue to need— humanitarian aid. Internationally, a number of countries offered to take citizens of the Syrian civil war: Germany accepted more than 788,000 refugees and asylum seekers, Sweden 172,000, Austria 45,000 and the United Kingdom about 23,000. The refugee crisis was an international topic for digital journalism in particular as countries were making decisions about how many refugees and asylum seekers they could welcome (Syrian Arab Republic, 2021).

This news coverage included reports in *Christian Today*. This digital news source was founded in 2004 in London, with the aim of providing explicitly evangelical-oriented reporting on world events. On their "about us" page, the site is explicit about both its audience and its aim:

> We produce daily news, comment and analysis covering the global church and religious affairs, politics, theology, culture and spiritual encouragement. We aim to be *objective and fair in our reporting, rather than sensationalist or polarising*, and we look to explain why things are happening, and, where relevant, represent a range of Christian opinion (About Us, 2021, *emphasis mine*).

Noteworthy are the normative claims in their statements: to be objective and fair as opposed to sensationalist. And while the site claims to represent a range of Christian opinion, it is worth noting that they simultaneously provide 11 points of belief aimed at distinguishing what reflects being *Christian*. It would seem then that the goals of the site are placed at an interesting juncture: their normative claims about objectivity and fairness, and their audience-oriented claims (reflected in their perspective on traditional news as *sensationalist* and *polarizing*—a standard claim in many evangelical circles; see Schmalzbauer, 1999).

When it came time to conduct reporting on the Syrian refugee crisis, this juncture reflected its fault lines: *Christian Today* conducted no original reporting—leaning for some information from Reuters as well as fringe, far-right sources such as wnd.com. *Christian Today's* work relied on providing secondary-analysis of refugees and asylum seekers which they described in explicitly dehumanizing terms (Perreault & Paul, 2019).

In one story from *Christian Today*, the refugees were argued to have left behind "an orgy of garbage and feces of unparalleled dimensions" (Torres, 2015) from their time in Austria. They cited German news source *Unzen Suriert,* arguing that the refugees called the Christian women of Austria "Christian whores." The refugees were described as treating Austria's Christian residents with "vileness" and hence, described them as a "horde" who "left their dirt in Austria" (Torres, 2015).

Certainly, *Christian Today* does not speak for all Christianity as a digital news source—as it's points of belief make clear—but it does reflect a particular audience within Christianity. And one that would be motivated to read *Christian Today's* perspective on the Syrian refugee crisis and perhaps find their original perspectives rationalized by its reporting. This begs a question: if audience orientation is indeed an essential aspect of digital journalism, what happens if your audience is hate-oriented, or becomes so?

Audience orientation

Journalism scholars Sina Blassnig and Frank Esser note the power of the audience in digital journalism. "With the advent of Web 2.0 and digital-native media" they suggest "audiences have come to have a power of their own, influencing the logic of journalistic action—independent of ongoing commercial constraints" (Blassing & Esser, 2021, p. 2). In their study, which examined digital journalism in the United States and Switzerland, they saw a strong connection between commercial logic and audience orientation. Audience orientation represents an arena of journalism that is by no means new. Historically, serving audiences is a normative goal of journalism. But perhaps a difficulty is that in many cases, journalists don't have a firm grasp of who their audience is, according to scholar Jacob Nelson (2021).

> Like all forms of media, journalism's success depends in no small part on its reception... As a result, the choices journalists make—in the stories they tell and the ways that they tell them—are molded and constrained by the assumptions they form about the people they hope to reach. These assumptions have always mattered, but they have grown even more important in recent years. As the news industry attempts to overcome its ongoing crises of diminishing revenue and public trust, its focus has increasingly shifted toward embracing a public it was once all too happy to largely ignore (Nelson, 2021, p. 2).

Journalism has granted numerous names to audience orientation: e.g. participatory journalism, engaged journalism, reciprocal journalism. At times, journalistic work toward the audience is more performative

than substantive. Nelson (2021) elaborates in one story about how a Chicago editor reworked a headline that took the news story from being the site's 40th most read to its fifth. He recalls "it's not about *preferences*, he said. It's about *presentation*" (p. 12). Elite journalists are often implicated in these discussions, but as Paula Ellis and her team point out, local/community journalists are no less culpable (Ellis et al., 2021). As a project manager for Your Voice Ohio put it, "most local editors and reporters have become 'parachute journalists' in their own communities—so great has the chasm grown between even local journalists and the people about whom and for whom they're reporting" (Ellis et al., 2021, p. 92)

This is certainly just one approach however and oftentimes the hunt for an audience requires a much deeper commitment than through presentation. The problem of course is that journalists can't always know who their audience is. Prior to the arrival of digital technology, journalists often relied on "gut feelings" to imagine audiences (Lewis & Westlund, 2015, p. 26), while in the digital age, journalists more often rely on analytics and reader comments to imagine their audiences (Banjac & Hanusch, 2022).

The audience for journalists is then, an imagined one. Imagined audiences "stem from both the information they collect from those audiences and the assumptions they maintain about them" (Nelson, 2021, p. 21-22). *Christian Today* laid out their 11 points of belief aimed at clarifying who a "Christian" was and this accounted for an imagined audience. Indeed as Nelson (2021) argues "many in journalism have embraced the notion that news audiences prefer political news that aligns solely with their own ideologies rather than those that put forth contradictory positions" (p. 15). *Christian Today's* dehumanizing coverage of Syrian refugees then begins to make sense if the goal of the digital news site was only "objective per se"—objective, if the facts of the case already align with their preconceptions. However, they also acknowledge an additional audience—the news audience as a whole—and this is reflected in their description of how they presumably characterize their competition: *sensationalist* and *polarizing*.

The problem of the audience perhaps finds its journalism studies roots in the "Lippman-Dewey debates." Reporter and commentator Walter Lippman argued that humans have limited attention spans and hence suggested that journalism's primary role should be to make the language of politics more easy for citizens to understand. By contrast, philosopher John Dewey argued that journalists had an essential role to play in engaging citizens for involvement in political life.

All of this is to say that digital journalism's emphasis on the audience by no means exists in a bubble, but represents an issue simmering in journalism studies for more than a century. However, as journalism scholar Sandra Banjac argues "digital technology has changed the relationship between audiences and journalism" (2021, p. 1). Similarly, other scholars have argued that the dynamic between producer and receiver has changed as a result of the digital era in many fields, but in no site more acutely than journalism (Anderson, 2011; Coddington et al., 2021).

The emphasis on audiences in digital journalism results from the potential for audience metric data and social media (Coddington et al., 2021). Social media in particular has transformed the ways in which scholars describe journalists' perception of their audience "because of people's dependence on their imagination during everyday online interactions" (Litt & Hargittai 2016, p. 1). The use of metrics predates the internet with the use of ratings in broadcast journalism. In the past decade, through digital journalism's use of metrics, the field has developed an "uneasy relationship with longstanding norms and ideals about professional autonomy and one's news judgment" (Coddington et al., 2021, p. 1032).

The digital medium provides a means with which to potentially understand the audience in a way that was less plausible in the pre-digital era. A newspaper may be purchased by one person, it can be left on a subway seat and read by 4 others by the end of the day—newsrooms remain entirely blind to the engagement of this kind. Yet digitally, clicks and time spent on a website can be used to gain a sense of their audience's composition and preferences. These remain imperfect methods, however, in that digital newsrooms often believe they know more about their audience than they may actually know (Nelson, 2021).

Journalists' rationale for pursuing the audience may seem motivated by economics and there is evidence that this happens (Ferrucci, 2017; Ferrucci, et al., 2020), but it is also true that pursuing a mass audience doesn't necessarily lead to better journalism. Nelson (2018) argues that journalists should define their audiences more narrowly, since 'pursuing a more collaborative relationship with the news audience is ill-suited to a mass audience approach to news production' (p. 215). In general, the guiding rule of thumb is for journalists to treat their audiences in a positive, if paternalistic manner:

> If journalists perceive their audience in a more positive light—as rational, smart, deliberative citizens—they are more likely to take audiences more seriously and may even more earnestly and effectively fulfill their normative aims as journalists (Coddington et al., 2021, p. 1041).

But what happens if you believe in the audience you're developing, but your audience changes?

GamerGate

Gaming journalism is a quintessential beat with digital journalism and, along with sport, is one of the first specialties to produce a digital product and to exclusively report digitally (Perreault & Vos, 2020). Gaming journalism started as reporting for a niche, culturally and gender diverse population (Williams, 2003). However, it is this niche—gamers—that ended up also leading to the creation of a hate group as the audience matured. Gaming scholar Dmitri Williams in his 2003 piece on news coverage of video games analyzed more than 30 years of news coverage of gaming, describing gaming itself as a "lightning rod" in large part because of its audience. Huddled around arcade cabinets, the young gamers posed a natural threat to the conservative agenda at the time. Williams argued:

> Early accounts of public arcades tell a story of positive, inclusive space for the mixing of age, gender, class and ethnic groups…These locations were threatening to a conservative establishment already struggling with a rapidly changing and increasingly diverse society. It is no wonder then that arcades earned a special dose of ire in early 1980s coverage, and that adults frequenting these locales were suddenly framed as deviants (p. 544)

The audience was largely a powerless one in the classic economic sense—they lacked the discretionary income of adults and, particularly during the moral panics regarding video game violence, the audience was driven into the home and had little ability to speak to the issues levelled at them publicly. But as Amanda Cote (2015) argues, over time, gaming journalism developed a white, cis-male audience that perceived their enjoyment of games to be at odds with the inclusion of women in gaming culture. Games culture and gaming journalism then worked in an unspoken tandem by at once (1) creating strong white male representation and (2) amplifying sexualized and weak depictions of women (Lynch et al., 2015).

Gaming journalism reflects a number of other digitally-focused specialties referred to as the *enthusiast press* (Carlson, 2009). Much like technology journalism and sports journalism, gaming journalism remains reliant on industry officials. The gaming industry provides journalists with early access to games in addition to access to developers and directors. Without this access,

such journalists would find themselves ill-suited to serve their audience and unable to provide the information they feel normatively obligated to provide: it's a familiar situation within lifestyle journalism where reporters find themselves needing to lean on the goodwill of industry officials in order to do their work. These journalism specialties, in other words, operate successfully in part through collaboration and goodwill—perhaps placing them in a vulnerable, unprepared position when it comes to managing coverage of a hate group.

Hence, during the digital transition, a gaming audience developed that was almost a mirror to the original one: gamers dedicated to "make[ing] the gaming community an unwelcoming space for women and other marginalized groups" (Cote, 2015, p. 18). Female game developers and critics suffered through a sustained campaign of misogynistic attacks during GamerGate (Golding 2014) largely stemming from its origins in a male-centric gaming culture. This culture was developed in no small part through early gaming journalism itself (Cote 2015). *Nintendo Power* in the 1990s did not "treat women as equal members of the gaming community" (Cote 2015, p. 16-17). With this context in mind, the developing audience for gaming—nearly half female (Casti, 2014)—might be a reason for the early, cultivated and exclusionary masculine audience to feel threatened. The GamerGate controversy brought this to the fore through an almost-immediately disproved conspiracy: that prominent female video game developer had slept with a gaming journalist in order to obtain better coverage for her game (Perreault & Vos, 2018). The game developer, Zoe Quinn, had indeed had a relationship with *Kotaku's* Nathan Grayson, but within hours of the original accusation, *Kotaku* was able to confirm that (1) Grayson had conducted no reporting on her company after they began their relationship and indeed (2) Grayson had never reported specifically on her game (Kaplan, 2014). However, this accusation nevertheless galvanized critics via Twitter who tweeted using the hashtag #gamergate to argue that gaming journalists were actively colluding with the industry to promote a social justice agenda and focusing primarily on the cultural/social aspects of the game. In a bizarre progression that evidences that the real goal was never to challenge gaming journalism ethics but rather to mark gaming as the territory of white males, the hashtag was used as a means to harass women and minorities in game development and gaming criticism through death threats and doxxing—researching and releasing the personal information of game developers and critics (Chess & Shaw 2015). In particular, women were disproportionately targeted (Massanari 2015).

Gaming journalists, amidst the attacks on women and minorities by a part of their audience, were called on to police their audience—a task they were largely deemed to have done poorly by the broader field (Perreault & Vos, 2020). Yet gaming journalists were simply doing what is natural in digital journalism—making use of metrics and comments in order to supply what they suspected their readers wanted. In so doing, it turned out that the values of gamers had departed from the *imagined*—but perhaps one-time—values of gamers. GamerGate was when the issue emerged, but as indicated by the strange nature of the event, it could have been raised by any event. The audience orientation of the niche set it up for conflict as gaming journalism, undetected by the journalists, developed two audiences that were quite different.

Audience definitions of hate

This case perhaps reflects an essential point—the importance of how "hate" itself is defined. Journalists often collapse a variety of interrelated terms together in discussing hate. Journalists view hate as a broad category, that includes harassment, "hate mail," hate speech, hate crimes, bigotry and hate groups themselves (Perreault et al., 2022b). It is possible—in other words—that part of the difficulty in managing hate by their audience is in journalists navigating the vagueness of the term itself.

Journalists are largely able to recall and offer operational definitions for *hate speech*. That said, journalists also argued that their definition of hate speech might differ significantly from what their audience might offer. In interviews with journalists, they described incidents where their audience would excuse actions generally considered to be hate speech with rationales ranging from "it was just a joke" to "I'm sorry that that offends people, but it's based in my religious beliefs." Other times, their audience saw hate speech as simply resulting from personal preference (e.g. a preference to not work around people from marginalized communities).

This then reflects the problem of the audience in digital journalism: when reporting is geared to an audience that doesn't support an open, inclusive public sphere, journalists find themselves skating a delicate balance. Journalists find themselves trying to conduct reporting in which they at once, want to be truthful and report the pertinent, relevant activities of their communities but also seek not to offend their audience.

It makes sense then that *hate crimes* would largely tend to be underreported, even as research suggests they are relatively common (Herek & Berrill, 1992; Herek et al., 1997). Furthermore, although many claim hate crime offences come from interpersonal disputes, they are often indicative of organized hate group activity (Bradley, 2007).

Given current trends in which news in many countries can be dismissed as exaggerated or made-up, there is a sort of cultural populism that forms around certain figures in which any reporting that challenges them would be circumspect (e.g. U.S.'s Donald Trump, Belarus' Alexander Lukaschenko, Russia's Vladamir Putin). But what is a populist? Clearly, it reflects more than just that they are popular—indeed, cultural populists tend to rhetorically operate with the mindset of hate groups. *The People,* among cultural populists, are the perceived "native" members of the state (Kyle & Gultchin, 2018). They then seek other critics, minority groups in particular that stem from "non-native" members of the state. Journalists have the perspective that their audience may see them as being *overly sensitive* if they were to call out certain activities as hate (Miller & Lewis, 2020).

Another term often collapsed with *hate speech* by journalists is *harassment*. Less research explicitly offers a definition from journalists—although journalists tend to perceive harassment as personalized hate (Miller, 2021). University of Alabama journalism scholar Kaitlin Miller proposes a theory of hostility toward the free press in which she argues the harassment of journalists, while often perceived as a phenomenon that occurs on the individual level, is actually an activity that occurs at the level of work routines. Journalists have routines for mitigating and navigating harassment and harassment itself would naturally affect the operation of those routines as well.

> As journalists transition in many respects from purveyors of truth to ones having to also brand themselves and their identity online…there is harassment linked to the journalist as a highly accessible figure of the press (Miller, 2021, p. 11).

Miller's (2021) argument builds on prior research on digital journalists' conduct online—for example, Finneman et al. (2019) argue that journalists are often required to brand themselves on social media—a ubiquitous practice journalists undertake to expand their viewership, garner recognition and increase

their job security (Molyneux, Lewis & Holton, 2019). But, Miller (2021) argues, it is precisely this ubiquitous visibility that also creates more vulnerability to receiving harassment—or personalized hate. This vulnerability is all the more acute when journalists are women or come from marginalized communities.

Harassment would seem to have a cyclical relationship with journalists given that in receiving angry phone calls/messages this would also naturally shape their perceptions of the audience for whom they are reporting and perhaps affect their longevity in the field.

Perhaps it's unsurprising that journalists struggle to reflect on disconnection. Journalists often consider disconnection—from their audience, from their work—to run again the norms of the field. Journalists believe they need be "always on?" and "always connected" in order to conduct effective reporting. However, this does present a significant mental health dilemma for journalists when they suffer hate from their audience (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2022). Journalism scholar Valerie Belair-Gagnon and her team suggest that disconnection may be a necessary journalism skill.

> Disconnection…may help journalists to vent pressure that might otherwise lead to anxiety, overloaded stress, and burnout. And while journalists can afford to exit the profession for employment in more reflexive and responsive industries, journalism cannot afford the exit of those who hold it up (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2022, p. 3).

One journalist described reporting on the state Wi-Fi in London for a UK-based news site and receiving significant hate speech in response—speech that seemed completely divorced from the topic of the story itself. In her newsroom, she was encouraged to just grow a "thick skin and move on."

> Okay, well, whatever…if you know that everything you did is factual and you did the best job you possibly could telling the truth based on what research unveiled then you don't have to worry about any of that. If, there's any doubt in your mind about, "Oh gosh, should I have said that?" "Or is that the right stat or anything?" Like, you know, that's why it's really important to check and double-check and triple-check all your facts and make sure that there's nothing to worry about. You know, if you know you're right, because you did the research, then it, then it's just a bunch of noise.

And the journalist did seem as though they'd been able to do so, but it is worth noting in the above quote the number of questions she asked herself following the story. It is possible for such speech to get under the skin of journalists and despite truisms to grow a "thick skin" this proves more challenging in the particular—when it's *your* story—than in the abstract. The journalists went on to note that as a result, they were "not being super, super invested right now in my own personal social" media accounts, given the amount of hate journalists receive.

False Balance

Digital journalists commonly discuss, in a variety of terms, their concern about what we've already described as the *objectivity trap* (Craft & Davis, 2016). I use this term as opposed to "false balance" or "false equivalence" or similar terms since it reflects the menacing situation journalists believe they face: where one of their essential norms could be used against them. The *objectivity trap* perhaps appears even more commonly in environmental journalism where journalists can feel pressured to include information from climate change deniers as a way of maintaining the story's "objectivity." In hate group reporting, the *objectivity trap* tends to result in dangerous ideas and bad actors being granted undue play

In a classic *Daily Show* skit, Jordan Klepper conducted interviews at a Donald Trump rally asking rally attendees where they get their information that supported conspiracy theories about US politics.

> As one participant put it "Umm Facebook and Twitter. Everything and I..."
> Jordan Klepper interjected "So you'll look at facts and bullshit and put it all together?"
> "Exactly."
> (Noah, 2016)

Journalists fear doing exactly this: providing a story that has somehow managed to dilute the truth by making it share news space with falsehood. In reporting on hate groups, digital journalists often feel pressured to make comparisons with progressive groups. Most hate groups tend to be conservative and right-wing, hence, they feel pressure to make their stories objective by acknowledging extremism on the left as well (Perreault et al., 2022a).

Norms are norms for a reason—typically they have served some historic purpose. The ability of journalists to acknowledge limitations of the norm indicated however that there is rationale for rethinking it. In the United States, the objectivity norm was historically rationalized as a protection for journalistic autonomy (Tandoc et al., 2013). Yet scholar Edson Tandoc and team (2013) go on to point out that the audience remains remarkably influential on news coverage, despite this norm. Rethinking and reshaping norms proves problematic and journalism in particular tends to be resistant to change in its norms. Even amidst new entrants to the field and new technologies, many journalistic norms simply refuse to shift (Perreault & Hanusch, 2022a; Vos, Craft & Ashley, 2012). For example, there is evidence concerning social media use that journalists adopting Instagram persist in using it in almost an identical manner to Twitter; evidenced by the 280 characters per post, a requirement not of Instagram but of Twitter (Perreault & Hanusch, 2022b). The objectivity norm however proves to have serious implications in coverage of marginalized communities, who can often find themselves disadvantaged as a result of the objectivity norm.

Black U.S. journalists Nikole Hannah-Jones and Wesley Lowery have noted the problematic nature of objectivity, arguing there has "been … a chorus of mainstream journalists who have called for our industry to abandon the appearance of objectivity as the aspirational journalistic standard, and for reporters instead to focus on being fair and telling the truth, as best as one can, based on the given context and available facts" (Lowery, 2020). Lowery (2020) argues this is a necessary change in that objective truth tends to be decided "almost exclusively by white reporters and their mostly white bosses."

This challenge to the objectivity norm has been advocated for years. According to Hannah-Jones,

> I've never subscribed to the view that the journalist is this objective observer. I'm not, and none of us are. Every decision we make, who we're going to talk to, who we're not, how we frame a story, where we place the story in the paper, whether we give that story 30 seconds or five minutes, these are all subjective decisions, they're all value judgments. (Howard, 2017).

The objectivity norm would seem to work *more* on the behalf of white supremacists than on the behalf of marginalized communities. This begs the question then, how the norm can continue to

be rationalized when it would seem to run counter to so many of the essential social responsibilities of journalism?

Audiences historically have played a role in spurring journalists to maintain their social responsibilities (Kananovich & Perreault, 2021) and critiqued them for falling out of line with their own norms (Craft, Vos & Wolfgang, 2016). The objectivity norm is a readily recognized norm for audiences and hence it follows that audiences would naturally spur journalists to maintain the norm. The objectivity norm "guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts" and prescribes reporting that is "cool, rather than emotional, in tone" (Schudson, 2001, p. 150). Through the objectivity norm, the journalist is required to report on news without slanting or shaping it. Yet, such a norm would be difficult to employ in emotionally-charged reporting such as that on white nationalists, and journalists struggle to provide the "moral clarity" needed (Lowery, 2020).

Journalists are quick to defend the objectivity norm, often recognizing it's limitations given that the world is "increasingly complex and needed to be not only reported but explained" (Schudson, 2001, p. 164).So while journalists may feel confident in their ability to present *two* sides to a story, they may also be able to recognize there are many others that remain unrepresented and which they lack the time and training to be able to recognize. Important to note that journalists have recognized the problems with the objectivity norm since it was introduced (Vos, 2012). Indeed, the objectivity norm and criticism of the objectivity norm would seem to have been introduced hand-in-hand historically according to scholar Tim Vos. Journalists at the introduction of the objectivity norm were quick to point out they could appear to be *biased* simply by providing the most accurate information

Digital journalists largely indicate that the objectivity norm—both sides-ism and cool-headed labeling—simply do not work in reporting on hate. As newsrooms rushed to implement policies for mitigating hate in the US, particularly following the election of former US President Donald Trump, these policies provided a manner for eschewing the debate entirely. Journalists could point toward the policies put forward by the Associated Press, or their newsrooms as a way to avoid audience pressure (Perreault & Meltzer, 2022). In their policy making, journalists argued that they needed to be explicit in their description of the groups and their beliefs. And while, this certainly would seem to draw the ire of audience, this was done as a way in which to provide what journalists perceived journalists *needed* instead of what they *wanted*.

For example, journalists found themselves needing to change their policy in allowing for self-definition following the coverage of the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, USA. The Unite the Right rally operated as a sort of national *coming out* for the white supremacist group known as the "alt-right." However, a variety of different understandings existed about the definition of alt-right. The term "alt-right," short for "alternative right" was coined in 2010 by Richard Spencer, the president of the National Policy Institute. Spencer gained prominence for leading a rally in Washington DC in which members "raised their arms in Nazi salutes and declared 'Hail, Trump'" (Greene, 2017). Alt-right, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, refers to a "set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that 'white identity' is under attack by multicultural forces using 'political correctness' and 'social justice' to undermine white people and 'their' civilization" (Southern Poverty Law Center). The use of the term "alt-right," is contested by journalists in part because it grants white supremacists

the power to name themselves and provides the veil of a new phenomenon to disguise long-standing racism (Mohajer, 2017). In other words, the phraseology offered by individuals at Charlottesville of "alt-right" would appear safe on the surface given it's not sensationalistic and it was self-identified by the individuals. It would seem to be an audience-friendly label (Perreault & Meltzer, 2022). However, it was also not the most accurate description and hence, in journalist's policymaking they pressed for clarity on behalf of their audience. The objectivity norm, far from helping create more accurate coverage, naturally lead them towards an objectivity trap.

The Unknowable Audience

A classic piece of satire, *Saturday Night Live* in 2019 presented a mock live feed of a reporter trying to cover a war zone. Given that signals get blocked, the reporter (played by Mikey Day) employs what is a common tool for reaching younger audience—SnapChat—in order to reach the studio. During the live feed, his phone is damaged and the reporter conducts his reporting with deadpan humor as the filters change the reporter to a buck-toothed child, a merecat in a birthday hat and a hotdog. In panting breaths, the reporter explains near the end of the feed that soldiers are removing him from the hotel and taking him to an undisclosed location. With the hotdog filter on, he reports: "Soldiers are moving us to a new location. I'm unclear where I am going—oh my god that's a dead body—umm kids: if you want to be a journalist, this is what it looks like" (Saturday Night Live, 2019, May 5).

It's a great piece of humor that pokes fun at one of digital journalism's soft-spots: that in trying to reach the audience, we can sometimes look like idiots and particularly when the stakes are high. With the issue of hate of course, the stakes couldn't be higher.

Journalism operates under the presumption that the audience is knowable. It would seem like it after all? Their web analytics can provide a whole host of details related to visitor data—how long people spend on a page, bounce rate. As journalism scholar Edson Tandoc (2013) puts it:

> Faced with the reality of declining economic capital for traditional journalism still unmatched by the slow increase in digital revenues, journalists clearly perceive capital instability within the journalistic field. This instability has opened up the gates to the influence of the audience, conceived of by journalists as largely a form of economic capital that can be maximized to preserve capital stability in the journalistic field. This mechanism explains why the editors used web analytics mainly to inform strategies to further increase web traffic (p. 571).

In other words, as journalists looked to reshape their field in the image of digital journalism, they did so with the presumption that in examining "pages per visit, bounce rate and page views" (Nelson, 2021, p. 144), they would have greater access to the audience. And greater access to the audience presented itself as a form of economic capital for journalists. But this rationale operated under the assumption that the audience was *knowable*. As Nelson (2021) articulates his conclusion in examining the expansive efforts to understand the audience in digital journalism: "journalists combine audience data their organizations compile with their innate beliefs to arrive at their own distinct notions about their audiences" (p. 145). This is, obviously, a rather

unscientific approach to addressing what is an essential emphasis in digital journalism: the audience.

Conclusion

All this taken together indicates that the problem of the audience is multidimensional: (1) the audience you have might not be the one you think you have (Nelson, 2021), and (2) the audience's definition of hate might not match the journalists understanding. As a result, journalists face a significant definitional problem in the use of the term "hate". If journalists have an audience they *think* they know and they perceive the audience differs in its definition of hate, journalists have the option of challenging the audience on that definition—and perhaps alienating them—or instead to eschew the issue all together.

The making of these definitions will be dealt with in greater depth in chapter 4, but it is worth acknowledging at this point that "hate" operates as a residual category in journalism—a category that requires journalists to work to find other terminology that better represents the values of their audience. Hence, why digital journalists often underreport issues of hate—hate speech and hate crime (Herek & Berrill, 1992; Herek et al., 1997; Perreault et al., 2022b). Journalists can also dilute the impact of such stories on their audience if they fall into the objectivity trap by creating an equivalency between groups such as Black Lives Matter—one journalist did tell me that he felt pressure from his audience to label Black Lives Matter as a *hate group*—and white supremacists. Again, this is similar to pressure journalists have felt in other domains (e.g. climate change stories needing to be balanced with climate change deniers).

A potential solution then; in a study of rural journalists, scholars found the term *hate* similarly ambiguous and vague. Given the need for a more formal term, journalists could use this opportunity to work with social justice groups in defining the terminology for use in newsroom policy manuals.

Journalists feel normatively obliged to report on hate groups and were motivated to do so even when their job responsibilities did not encourage it — a finding that aligns with similar research by Perreault et al. (2022a), Johnson et al. (2020) and Baugut (2021). However, while the digital journalists in this study can articulate a clear definition of hate speech, that definition is often so narrow that it excludes potentially relevant events to their own perceived audience. Even in the case of GamerGate, the journalists' fear of alienating the industry they depend on has led to a "pervasive sense of resignation among journalists and is used to justify self-censorship and self-imposed limits" (Foxman & Nieborg, 2016, p. 19). Hence it makes sense that the GamerGate controversy would have struck the subfield by surprise given that the nature of the digital journalism niche set it up so that the hate rising within the community would be largely invisible.

Similarly, Blassnig and Esser (2021) further point out that, while their analysis of Swiss and US media reflected numerous findings—most point toward an increased audience orientation. They argue, in effect, that "the news media have been increasingly shaped by commercialization" (p. 17). There's an interesting mentality reflected in the digital journalists interviewed for this book. As opposed to "the customer is always right," there is instead a baseline assumption that "the audience is always right." Journalists never explicitly articulated this, but this nevertheless represents their reporting foundation that they would then respond to in terms of what they approached differently or why it was necessary to accommodate the audience.

Indeed, many of the journalists interviewed, in describing their reporting process, reflected that much of it was reader instigated. This audience orientation would make it likely that hate speech is more invisible than it is in reality. If the audience views hate as different (Perreault et al., 2022b)—or nonexistent—then this places journalists in an impossible situation where it would be easiest to eschew the issue altogether.

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3. The Problem of Churnalism and Being First

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Abstract: The very terms hate groups use to label themselves operate as a rhetorical device meant to grant legitimacy. Practices of journalists can at times act as an avenue for hate in public discourse as a result. In particular, *churnalism*, the frowned-upon digital journalism process of quickly aggregating and reinterpreting information, and the desire to be "first" in reporting, which then does not allow sufficient time for balancing, verification; provide ample avenues. Many journalists struggle with reporting in real time in the midst of an event as complex and danger-laden as a white nationalist demonstration and such reporting practices, far from an intentional emphasis, often end up inadvertently causing problems. Indeed, it could be that white nationalist groups are hoping journalists will operate in this manner, thereby providing them with a chance to get their ideas into the mainstream—perhaps hoping for the same favor shown to the Klan in the early 20th century.

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Alex Jones isn't a journalist. The US conspiracy theorist runs a radio show and YouTube channel popular with white supremacists and a range of actors that have broadly taken on the label "alt-right." His message, broadly, reflects the sentiment that US elites are waging war on the *average US citizen* and he is their sole voice (Papacharissi, 2015). More specifically, his work reflects his belief that,

1) Satanist-Illuminati….are building a New World Order that will be run by a lizard super race
2) The government is controlling the weather…
3) Prominent Democrats including Barack Obama, Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton are lizard people…
4) [This group] is complicit in mass shootings by lone gunmen to take away people's guns (Van den Bulck & Hyzen, 2020, p. 49).

Jones gained particular attention for labeling the Sandy Hook school shooting—a mass shooting event at a northeastern US elementary school that resulted in the death of 26 first-grade children—as a hoax. In November 2021, Jones was charged with defamation for his statements about Sandy Hook after the victims' families filed a lawsuit.

To call Jones a journalist would be to bestow on him a degree of legitimacy that he doesn't deserve but furthermore, withholding the label also acknowledges the essential normative practices

missing from his work. Yet, in a piece published in the *International Communication Gazette*, the scholars describe Alex Jones use of media in the following way:

> Starting from his streamed radio and television show, he repackages this content to fit web and social media formats, markets and algorithms. Every day, new material is re-edited into shorter videos befitting social media like Facebook and YouTube. Algorithmic sorting and recommendation systems make sure this reaches a wide audience…So, rather than social media simply 'making' Alex Jones, he uses social media as amplifiers of his right-wing alternative media enterprise, itself a tool in spreading his message (Van den Bulck & Hyzen, 2020, p. 50).

This process described here is discussed in journalism studies scholarship as *churnalism*: "recycling information … with little attempt at verification or independent reporting" (Kristensen, 2018, p. 2171). Churnalism as a process largely stems from a close audience relationship and hence, an idea of what the audience would like to read. Such studies have linked churnalism with cultural journalism, a form of journalism that would, in contrast to traditional journalism, hold 'different conceptions of their societal obligations and professional values' that are informed by their journalistic paradigm" (Ibid.). It bears noting that the stakes for churnalism differ wildly between classic cultural journalism—such as arts, beauty, gaming—and coverage of hate. Yet it is noteworthy to consider that churnalism occurs in such venues.

Perhaps it is worth considering the appeal of audience that has broadened through digital journalism. As a result, the *journalist* is able to recycle existing news and information into a format that would be pleasing to the audience.

And how big is that audience? In 2010, Jones' radio show reached 2 million weekly listeners—a number that has boomed with the rise of social media, with 1.3 billion views for his YouTube channels and 20 million monthly visits to his websites (Van den Bulck & Hyzen, 2020). Clearly this grants Jones a prominent status only amplified by the hurried "being first" culture of digital journalism. This chapter explores the interconnected problems of Churnalism and "being first."

Churnalism

Largely Churnalism concerns a too-close relationship to causes, sources, industries. Largely, digital journalists find themselves, in a similar mold of cultural journalists, in "complex and intertwined roles as cultural gatekeepers, connectors, marketers and valorisers, roles that are quite different from, for example, the norms and roles of autonomous, objective disseminators, watchdogs or observers, typically associated with Western journalism" (Kristensen, 2018, p. 2182). As a concept, Churnalism was coined in 2004 in order to describe how BBC journalists make use of wire copy. Tony Harcup argues in effect that wire services and public relations make up the "two primary conveyor belts" on the "assembly line in the news factory" (Davies, 2008, p. 74). Even in Harcup's original observations, the idea of churnalism had a negative implication when undertaken by journalists. The concept was later popularized by Lewis, Williams and Franklin in 2008. Ironically, the "real promise of the internet…[is] that it could liberate the mass media from churnalism" (Davies, 2008, p. 396); but if anything the internet has facilitated a sort of *news cannibalism* (Phillips, 2011) in which journalism swallows rivals. This cannibalism occurs for a few reasons, but noteworthy is that

the online advertising dominance of Google and Facebook have pushed commercial news to economize the news process and this has occurred largely through mimicking Google and Facebook.

> At the same time, convergence dynamics reinforce mimicry among news outlets … and induce "copy-paste journalism"; journalists are increasingly forced to rely uncritically on wire material and engage in minimal fact-gathering in order to meet the "standards" of cheap and "safe" news content (Saridou et al., 2017, p. 3).

Journalism scholar Theodora Saridou and her team examined the top 10 digital news websites in Greece and found that nearly 21 percent of the stories were copied from another source, 18 percent of stories were almost identical to the original content (80—99 percent identical). In general, they found that nearly half of all content was copied. In addition, the more legitimate the source, the more likely the source was to acknowledge where the information came from Saridou et al. (2017) argues. Finally, she claimed that this was a process that seemed to be increasingly prevalent in Greece.

While Saridou's analysis was of one country, it is worth considering her findings as reflective of the prevalence of this process elsewhere. Journalism in Greece isn't overly dissimilar from journalism in a number of advanced, Western countries.

Clearly, churnalism would have financial implications for entities that create the original content—why access (or pay for access) to the original content when it will be recycled elsewhere for free. By extension, this allows newsrooms to "ride the wave" of trending content in order to obtain their own audience for content they didn't have to invest in creating themselves. But the concerns about churnalism are rooted in the normative expectations of the field, not just in the financial.

> The relationship between news and democracy works best when journalists are given the freedom (and resources) to do the job most journalists want to do—to scrutinize, to monitor, hold to account, interrogate power, to facilitate and maintain deliberation (Fenton, 2012, p. 4).

When journalists instead are tasked with churning content already in existence, this places digital journalists in the ethically dubious territory of granting "uncritical use of material from PR practitioners" (Almgren, 2017, p. 1063). Copying material from other news organizations is often deemed to be preferable to journalists undertaking time-consuming original reporting. Furthermore, given that digital journalists often end up tied to their desks, churnalism would seem to allow journalists to respond to the interests of their audience—but they do so at the risk of developing echo chambers: reporting content deemed important by other news organizations. This grants PR professionals significant opportunity to shape the message of news and not all of these organizations act in good public interest.

In *Christian Today*, this is exactly the manner with which the news organization reported on Syrian refugees in Austria. No attempt was made to call Austrian officials or contact refugees themselves. Instead, the story of Syrians' boorish behavior was simply copied from a fringe site in Germany. In other words, the concept of Churnalism—while troubling in and of itself for journalism—becomes more deeply problematic once at least one of the "assembly lines" sends from a bad actor (Davies, 2008).

As one digital journalist, a sports reporter, argued, so much of the handling of *churnalism* is reflected in the norms of the news organization.

> People hate so easily. People hate so easily and the internet unfortunately has made the anonymity behind hate much easier to maintain, and as a result of that we see it a lot more often. I think that there's also a big difference just in outlets. For every outlet like *The Athletic*, or every reputable outlet, there are not as reputable outlets who stir the pot… It's a call for attention. It's trying to be noticed.

Being First

The competitive element of journalism is by no means a new phenomenon. Prior to the digital turn in the industry, newspapers often competed with each other to get the information "first" and hence the legitimacy afforded by being able to present the information first. With the digital turn in the industry, this has taken on a greater financial motivation—the first to the information also gets the profits from advertising/traffic to read the information. In my interviews with journalists, they felt strongly that speed—in particular, the speed of trying to be first—was an essential aspect of digital journalism (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021; Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020).

Journalists argue that through the use of social media, digital journalism can reach the audience in a more timely manner. Digital journalism has always been available since journalists disseminated it through computers and, more saliently, mobile devices (Franklin, 2014); hence, news could go from production to reception in a matter of seconds. Journalists described this speed in two different but related ways. They argued that digital journalism gets to the audience more quickly, but also pointed toward tools such as Twitter, which can provide virtually instant information. Digital journalism is "about getting news to your audience quickly and keeping them more informed than waiting for my 6 a.m. paper to come out the next day" (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020, p. 1307). Or put another way:

> I think it's a new (and) different way of doing what we've always done. Delivering accurate comprehensive news about a community in a timely manner. Back in the day, you could go to a meeting and have six hours to think about it until your deadline; now we want you tweeting during the meeting, you have to do it quicker (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020, p. 1306).

Journalists largely refer to the speed of digital technology in positive ways in terms of *what it can do*.

One journalist said in an interview "If used in the right way, (digital journalism) gives people the information that they could get in print (more quickly). It also allows anyone to become a journalist. It's definitely very positive … but there's also a lot of over-saturation." The process of editing and fact-checking has often taken a back seat in discussions of journalism, but this process is perhaps the one that most clearly normatively sets journalism apart from peripheral actors in this realm. If anyone has the opportunity to be a journalist, that does mean that *anyone* has the opportunity to be a journalist. As another journalist put it, "I think digital has helped to democratize journalism, however, just like a democracy, that has its pros and cons. For instance, it has led to issues with determining what is and isn't credible." Alex Jones has a huge audience and was able to speak to the Newtown shooting before many other journalists, and the resulting defamation evidences the problem this poses.

The results of this speed certainly include a lack of accuracy. The technology inherent in delivering information quickly also constrains the gatekeeping process intrinsic to traditional journalism, opening up information delivery mechanisms to those outside the field of journalism. However, generally, participants believed these drawbacks and negative unintended consequences were worth it.

In the wake of the United the Right rally in Charlottesville, much criticism was leveled at US newsrooms. Given that journalists would seem to have completed months of policy making (and

introspection in their own complicity in developing the personality cult of then-president Donald Trump), it was then discouraging to see that many newsrooms did not even follow their own policies for reporting on white nationalists (Perreault & Meltzer, 2022). Indeed, policies developed following the election of Donald Trump encouraged U.S. journalists to take care in bestowing labels on bad actors. Journalists struggled to keep to this policy in part because they had to be working so fast.

Journalists had legitimate reasons for putting in place policies about labelling. The sourcing itself was problematic at the rally—in that journalists had already granted power to white nationalists to some degree by using the term 'alt right' to describe protesters. The term 'alt right' is explicitly intended to deceive the audience, by making dangerous ideologies of hate more palatable and normalized. The AP policy noted that the alt-right term may be used loosely—as long as it is modified with phrases such as "self-described" or "so-called alt-right"—as a way to avoid using the term "generically" (Daniszewski, 2016, November 28).

Furthermore, the Associated Press policy pointed out, that the term must not be used without a definition, which they provided: "an offshoot of conservatism mixing racism, white nationalism and populism," or, more simply, "a white nationalist movement." In other words, the Associated Press emphasized that although the term 'alt right' should not be used generically, this didn't offer a license for journalists to allow the group to define itself: "We should… report their actions, associations, history and positions to reveal their actual beliefs and philosophy, as well as how others see them" (Daniszewski, 2016, November 28).

But it was in going beyond self-labeling that journalists struggled given that it required original reporting—reporting that takes time. Instead, journalists found themselves at the Unite the Right rally gathering quotes from white nationalists under the moniker 'alt right' with little description of what it means to be 'alt right' (Perreault & Meltzer, 2022). It's a frantic form of reporting, hurried for reasons we've already detailed here and in Chapter One.

Taken together Churnalism and the motivation to be first reflect an emphasis on efficiency in journalism, that cue journalists up for hate groups. And those hate groups would not want the reporting any other way.

PR tactics of hate

William Pierce wrote *The Turner Diaries* in 1978—a fiction story portraying a race war and the violent overthrow of the government to establish an Aryan world. The text became popular among white supremacists in the US and became a central text in the 1990s (Shinbaum, 1996). It is believed, in fact, that *The Turner Diaries* inspired the Oklahoma City bombing, given that the novel was found in Timothy McVeigh's car after the bombing and the bombing preparation itself follows the description in the book.

Texts like *The Turner Diaries* are quintessential in reflecting the use of narrative by hate groups (Lee & Leets, 2002). But, as opposed to the more-controlled environment in which *The Turner Diaries* was published, today white supremacy finds a more open venue for sharing content online and they produce two types of messaging that can find their way onto the journalism "assembly line" (Davies, 2008, p. 74): anecdotal evidence and statistical evidence.

Prior research has demonstrated that anecdotal evidence tends to be more persuasive than statistical evidence (Borgida & Bisbett, 1977; Lee & Leets, 2002; Slater & Rouncer, 1996, 1997). This is because of:

(a) the vividness of story evidence that makes persuasive messages more memorable and compelling
(b) Narratives are superior at helping message recipients judge causal relevance
(c) Individuals are insensitive to the small sample size of stories, believing in a law of 'small numbers'
(d) Story structure facilitates memory
(e) Story components often serve as simple cues, whereas statistics can be more difficult to understanding (Lee & Leets, 2002, p. 930-931).

Such content is ripe for churnalism in part because its memorable, and tends to find itself quoted and shared by white nationalists speaking to the press. As Lee and Leets (2002) argues, much of recognizing the danger of hate revolves around recognizing the sugar coating that surrounds messages of hate. And as a *sugar coating* Lee and Leet (2002) argue, that covering is fleeting and frequently replaced.

The goal of hate groups through their messaging is radicalization. Through exposure to hate in a variety of formats—ideally, including digital journalism—recruits "slowly adopt the identities, emotions and interpretations shared through the community" (Marwick et al., 2022).

McNamee et al. (2010) argue that "hate groups are increasingly using the internet as a vehicle to spread their message" (p. 258). Generally, the internet serves as a vehicle for hate groups to delineate criteria for group membership, group mission and group goals (Gerstenfeld et al., 2003; Schafer, 2002).

> The wonder and the horror of the Web is not that it takes you out into the world; on the contrary, it brings the world—in all its glorious, anarchic, beautiful, hateful variety—into your home. We'd prefer that…the neo-Nazis, the violent misogynists and all the other floating trash of a cacophonous culture not wash into our living rooms. But because they do, we are at least able to know the enemy (Okrent, 1999, p. 3).

The internet does not cause radicalization, but it does help it spread in a manner which it was unable to achieve in analog media environments. The digital format facilitates those interested being able to "form communities, and mainstream[] conspiracy theories and distrust in institutions" (Marwick et al., 2022). Indeed, white supremacist content that used to be hidden is increasingly mainstreamed (Daniels, 2016).

Generally, hate groups tend to articulate their message in term of threats. Hate groups reflect on *low* threats in terms of job competition, *moderate* threats in terms of immigration from minority, and *high* threats in terms of interracial marriage—and all of these threats tend to be moderated by extent ranging from personal impact to local impact to national impact (McNamee et al., 2010). Generally, hate groups tend to avoid openly advocating violence as a way to enhance their image and avoid government attention (Douglas et al., 2005; Gerstenfeld et al., 2003). However, violence may be more implicitly promoted.

Many hate groups integrate religious imagery and language in their rationale which may have an impact in their coverage. In Bostdorff's (2004) study of the Ku Klux Klan for example, they found that (1) appeals to white masculinity, (2) veiled promotions of violence and (3) inflammatory speech tend to be married with (4) religious imagery and language. The religious imagery and language proves valuable in that these provide hate groups with a "legitimizing authority in the form of greater force—God, Jesus Christ, Yahweh, Allah or Nature" to justify their actions and attitudes (Bormann, 1972, p. 310).

Hate groups often depict themselves as the unattended perspective in news reporting (McNamee et al., 2010). As a result, they focus on "clarifying or contradicting mainstream accounts, but these

messages are also unique in that they are typically presented in the tone and style of a news expose" (McNamee et al., 2010, p. 266). Neo-Nazi news, for example, tends to advance statistics and stories that claim strength of information such as "OFFICIAL RECORDS FROM INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS PROVE 'HOLOCAUST' WAS A FRAUD" (McNamee et al., 2010, p. 266). The title itself reflects that they have legitimate data (e.g. records) from a legitimate source (e.g. the Red Cross) with the aim targeting an outgroup (e.g. Jews).

If this sounds familiar, it's because it is. These are strategies that parrot some of the attempts at transparency and audience connection reflected in digital journalism, but whereas digital journalism is expected to have legitimate sources, such hate groups would only claim that this be the case. Another consistent element McNamee et al. (2010) found in hate group messaging was an emphasis on stories that they can claim—often correctly, and for good reason—being under reported in traditional news outlets.

A strong emphasis in the messaging of hate groups is in bolstering group identity which occurs through "strategically construct[ing] self-valorizing views by invoking religious language and imagery" (McNamee et al., 2010, p. 273). This is often done through stories of service and sacrifice often framed as *carrying out God's will* (Bostdorff, 2004; McNamee et al., 2010). Furthermore this is achieved by framing in-group members in relation to outgroups (e.g. African-Americans, Jews). "Rather than referring directly to the prototypical outgroup (i.e., African Americans), KKK, White nationalist, and Christian identity sites highlight negative events (e.g., criminal activities) that inadvertently implicate outgroup members" (McNamee et al., 2010, p. 274). Their messaging often serves as a vehicle to persuade and recruit through (1) fear appeals, (2) emphasis on member benefits and (3) inoculation strategies. Many hate groups sites are careful to distinguish between discrimination and difference. That is, many of the religious themes emphasize the idea that they do not discriminate against others but rather acknowledge what they perceive to be a fundamental difference (McNamee et al., 2010).

Generally, then these tactics tend to offer an opportunity for hate groups—of a variety of different stripes—to share, and reshare content the serves their own groups. Furthermore, given the emphasis in digital journalism on the speed of reporting, lack of accuracy and the need to respond to audience interest in trends, journalists may perceive such content and *news* as trending providing an avenue for it to enter into digital journalism content.

The use of religious language bears further examination in that this presents in additional challenges for digital journalism reporters.

Religious language by hate groups

The use of religious language throws an additional wrench into the reporting process on hate groups, and which makes hate group content more likely to be *churned*. As one group of journalists in the rural US described, their audience "would excuse things that would generally be considered hate speech as either a joke or rooted in their religious beliefs" (Perreault et al., 2022b). Prior research has reflected on a low level of religious literacy among journalists—not overly surprising, in that low levels of religious literacy has been found among citizens in Western countries in general (Weng & Wake, 2021). Legacy media journalism addressed this through developing a specialty beat for religion, harkening back to the *Church pages* of newspapers. On the surface, religious reporting would appear to be quite similar to other subfields that mix *hard news* journalism and lifestyle journalism—politics,

science and health & wellness would all require similar expertise and face competition from non-journalistic actors (Maares & Hanusch, 2020; Perreault & Montalbano, 2022; Perreault, 2021).

If religion indeed "determines belief systems, the ways people orient themselves to the world, how one perceives his or her place and how one interacts with others" then it would follow that the stakes of *getting the story wrong* might be quite a bit higher than some of the other mentioned subfields (Gormly, 1999, p. 25; see also Nord, 2004). In other words, even as many journalistic niches require subfield-specific expertise, the stakes in regards to the trust of their audience may be a bit higher for religion (Douglas, 2018). In other words, a lack of accuracy regarding the description of a belief espoused by a religious group could end up affecting a rather large audience.

Scholarship in journalism studies tends to argue that topics related to religion tend to receive poor news coverage (Hoover, 1998). Most cases where trouble occurs in such reporting are when non-religious specialists are asked to report on religious language—as has been shown in research on sports (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2018) and gaming (Perreault, 2021). In the case of hate groups, it would be more likely that such reporting would be assigned to crime or politics reporter. Indeed, religion reporting runs into few other niches more than political reporting (Mason, 2011). This religion-politics fusion has been particularly salient in recent years given the prominence of religiously-oriented political candidates in a number of countries (Eddy, 2021; Wilcox & Robison, 2018) and the use of religious language in identity politics (McNamee et al., 2010).

Largely, religion reporters see the niche as becoming increasingly a sub-specialty within general news—a beat that "a lot of other people run into" as a result of cross-cutting civic issues, such as hate groups (Perreault & Montalbano, 2022). Many journalists see the progression of religion reporting into a news beat as a positive development path to become one of the hallmark specialties of the news such as courts, crime or education. Perhaps this is most clearly evidenced by the fact that even as religion reporting specialist positions have shrunk or been eliminated, religion reporting has seemingly grown larger than ever. However, others see this a liability, given that specialists were not doing the reporting.

Journalists argued news publications tended to frame religion as two extremes, either "as somehow inherently progressive right that religion is about love or it's about the betterment of people, improvement, these sorts of things, or it's about extremism and exclusion and intolerance" (Perreault & Montalbano, 2022, p. 9-10). In religion news, much of the reporting occurs through digital-only news publications that tend to be oriented toward religious groups (e.g. *Sojourners, Baptist Press, Christian Today, Muslim News*; Perreault & Montalbano, 2022; Perreault, 2021). These religious publications tend to employ journalists who are "believers" and will identify with those traditions, resulting in tradition-based reporting that reflects those identities and emphases. Secular publications, in turn, tend to identify religion as that which occurs within institutions.

Journalists found themselves, with a few notable exceptions, in a weak position within the field in order to combat such perceptions or to at least address them. As a result of a lack of resources, journalists were critical of the comprehensiveness of their reporting—in particular, arguing that much of their reporting was focused on institutions and that they, hence, underreported on "lived religion," a type of religion they perceived as most likely to emerge

from lifestyle journalism. The reason the field has limitations, journalists argued, is that the public views the niche with more suspicion than other coverage areas.

All of this is to say that the use of religious language poses a complicating factor in light of the problems of churnalism and being first. How would non-specialists verify religious claims on a digital news deadline?

What is a journalist's role in this?

. This does then beg the question: what is the role of a digital journalist in these situations? As discussed in the last chapter, the objectivity trap reflects journalists' perceived pressure to *balance* a story by granting legitimacy to some degree to white nationalists. In the last chapter, we discussed this pressure through the lens of the problem of the audience, but it is worth revisiting here through the lens of churnalism and being first.

The objectivity trap is a trap, first and foremost, because of the role conception of digital journalists. If journalists didn't perceive their role in relation to serving the needs of the audience or in regards to producing expedient information (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020; Perreault & Bell, 2022), it would be less likely that journalists would step into the objectivity trap. Expediency would be a natural way in which journalists would respond to some of the pressure they are under. The objectivity trap is an expedient process because it requires little thought: any individual report warrants an opposing report. The brawl at the football match then requires a quote from a member of one team and a member of the other team. But the stakes of course, are quite a bit different between a football match and hate group rally, where—the objectivity trap would reflect—journalists find themselves balancing police reports, with comments from members of the hate group themselves (Perreault et al., 2022a). The norms of trying to be first in posting information obviously deemphasizes accuracy and verification. The norm of churnalism allows for the reuse of materials also with little verification. Taken together, this poses a recipe for disaster coverage of hate and provides white nationalist groups with the ideal conditions to propagate their message.

In journalism studies, role conception is an analytical, explanatory framework aimed at reflecting how journalists self-conceive their roles. And that self-conception may or may not influence their enactment of their journalistic norms. Journalistic role conception reflects a journalist's perception of their purpose and responsibility in society (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016) and some research indicates that the emphasized roles of digital journalists differ a bit from those of legacy media journalists (Perreault & Stanfield, 2018; Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020; Ferrucci & Vos, 2017). Role conception is an essential piece in the realm of journalism culture, and perceptions of these roles are evolving (Tandoc Jr. et al. 2013; Chung et al. 2013). Each specific role possesses its own function and purpose—hence, there is no role that proves more significant or effective than the others. A role that portrays facts as they are does not hold any more *correctness* than a role that analyzes information or a role that provides criticism. Furthermore, there is no great importance offered for journalistic roles that advise advocating for all voices as opposed to advocating for a specific audience or cause (Tandoc Jr. et al., 2013).

That said, tensions do exist between the expectations of roles. Professional roles represent the individual enactment of journalistic habits, or a "predetermined set of discourses and actions appropriate to a particular 'stage-part'" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 2). Numerous role tensions exist within journalism, especially between the roles of scrutinizing watchdog and advocate for specific people and causes (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). This tension is reflected in particular in political journalism (Perreault,

Stanfield, & Luttman, 2019; Perreault, Kananovich & Hackett, 2022) where journalists perhaps find these role tensions to be the most acute.

Journalists' role conception provides them with "specific cognitive scripts for how they think about their own journalistic role during the course of their day-to-day work" (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016, p. 151). However, expectations in society and cultural pressures shape the roles that journalists tend to step into (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016); hence roles which may be common in some cultures prove less common in others. Political journalists, for example, tend to identify with different roles depending on where they are. All countries have different governments and varying political structures, making journalists' enactment of those roles variable (Moon, 2020).

In many Western countries, journalists are expected to investigate political leaders as a result of a societal expectation that journalists hold the government and people in power accountable. This role is called the *watchdog* (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). How journalists comprehend public administration shapes how they perceive their own role (Tandoc Jr. et al., 2013). The public expects that it is the job of journalists to hold those in power accountable for what they say and do. Thus, journalists adopt that responsibility (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016).

Hanitzsch and Vos (2018) identify a number of roles operating internationally, that have greater or lesser emphasis depending on country and specialty. Persistent in Western journalism are the following roles: *watchdog, monitorial, storyteller, educational*, and, particularly in digital journalism, *advocacy* (Ferrucci & Vos, 2017).

- The *watchdog* role—most associated with the journalism field and is an active approach in pursuing truth. As watchdogs, journalists proactively evaluate leaders and provide critiques independent of external interests (McQuail, 2000).
- The *monitorial* role reflects many of the values of the watchdog role, but is more passively oriented given that journalists respond as they become aware of issues (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).
- The *storyteller* role offers perspective context aimed at explaining beyond the evident through history, culture (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).
- The *educator* role reflects a teaching function with journalists acting as educators to raise awareness in the public about problems (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).
- The *advocacy* role reflects journalists openly supporting specific causes and groups and tends to be a role more accepted in digital journalism than its legacy media counterparts (Ferrucci & Vos, 2017; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).
- The *disseminator* role–closely associated with the information dissemination function, journalists in this role see themselves as neutral, and bystanders to the events occurring (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986).
- The *adversary* role challenges journalists to be a "voice for the voiceless" as a counter to political power and as voice for the audience.

In digital journalism, the adversarial role tends to be far more prominent, with the disseminator role in particular far less emphasized. Digital journalists see their role as disseminators as being a more passive, background operation—a function of getting information out as quickly as possible. But the adversarial role would seem to allow digital journalists what it seems to be set up for best—to lean toward the audience and place less pressure on verification and neutrality (Agarwal & Barthel, 2015).

Conclusion

In the final chapter, we revisit this idea of the journalist role, but for the moment it is worth connecting a few points. In a lecture at the University of Indiana, famed investigative journalist Bob Woodward offered the following guidance on journalism "The job of journalism is not stenography. It is getting the full story and the meaning of that story," said Woodward (Hiskes, 2007, September 18). Woodward here is pointing toward a refrain common in journalism—"journalism, not stenography"—a phrase intended to point toward the goal of journalists investigating and analyzing. So how does this point toward the problem of churnalism and being first?

The two expediency-oriented practices of this chapter—*churnalism* and the emphasis on "being first"—(1) deemphasize accuracy and (2) privilege interaction and investment from the audience. The problems of *churnalism* and *being first* certainly have their roots in the economic conditions of journalism and the cultural expectations of the craft but those often manifest in roles. A common refrain among the digital journalists I've interviewed is that they aimed to do "objective" coverage—but once you dig into what objectivity *is*, at times it amounts to little more than stenography. That said, I must note also that many journalists, consistent with Ferrucci & Vos (2017), also found the digital medium to be a more empowering one for operating as an adversary *against* hate. As one journalist put it, the adversarial role helped them "find[] the fire" in their reporting and gave them the freedom to combat what they perceived to be an existential threat to their field.

In other words, while this chapter has elaborated on two problems posed by digital journalism, through the lens of role conception, we could also consider digital journalism's main role as also providing a potential solution. The solution here would be to emphasize the advocacy role in order to better cut through the use labels and language meant to intentionally mislead readers.

Roles tend to be responsive to conditions (Standaert et al., 2021) and hence, it makes sense that digital journalists would feel tempted to find ways to leverage the roles that prove successful in other aspects of their reporting, such as the disseminator role (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).

This brings us back to Alex Jones and his 2 million weekly listeners. The tactics of Jones and his like are aimed specifically at pushing journalists toward an objectivity trap. Journalists grant them coverage and hence, legitimacy, because (1) it's expedient, (2) it receives traction online, and (3) it reflects the objectivity trap—after all, isn't granting them the chance to speak the impartial option? Hafez (2018) offers the following guidance in relation to populist propaganda:

> To get out of the staging trap, journalism – in the midst of a substantial press crisis – needs to reinvent itself and start a debate about its potential co-responsibility for one of the greatest challenges to democracy since the Second World War. In order to become a real 'watchdog' in the age of populism, journalists need to learn to resist and ignore rightwing propaganda (Hafez, 2019, p. 25).

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4. The Problem of Definition Makers

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Abstract If not the audience, then how does a group become a "hate group" in digital journalism? Built on the problems of digital journalism and the nature of digital journalism reflected in prior chapters, this chapter reflects on how news organizations collaboratively worked with non-government organizations and to undertake definition making related to "hate." There is no universal definition of what constitutes "hate." Largely in the U.S., definitions of "hate groups" are motivated institutionally through the definition making of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League—groups most likely to send out press releases and produce documents that journalists can use for the speedy reporting reflected in chapter three. This chapter looks at the definitions produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Anti-Defamation League, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation through their public documents related to hate groups. In particular, the chapter examines the fraught discussion of defining hate groups in terms of domestic terrorism; a connection the FBI has long resisted.

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In North America, a common source on issues of hate is the troubled organization, The Southern Poverty Law Center. Situated in the former heart of where racial segregation operated—in Montgomery, Alabama—the Southern Poverty Law Center attempts to speak to a higher calling than many non-governmental organizations: to work "on behalf of the exploited, the powerless and the forgotten" in particular through their work "tracking and exposing the activities of hate groups and other domestic extremists" (About, n.d.).

In March 2019, however, the non-profit community was rocked amid the dismissal of the co-founder of the Center. In the reporting that followed, it became clear that far from being a bastion of plurality and inclusion, the Southern Poverty Law Center had become much of what it combated through institutional racism and gender discrimination. As one employee of the SPLC as you live" (Moser, 2019).e that you will never step foot in a more contradictory place as long

The Southern Poverty Law Center is one of a handful of sources used for defining who, and what, constitutes a hate group across the globe. The organization is best known for its research, policy recommendations and legal work in the US, but they also produce numerous reports that showcase their reach: in particular, with data on hate activity in Europe and Asia.

The SPLC was created in the United States in 1971 to push for equal rights during the civil rights movement. Historically, there was opposition and resistance to any new federal legislation that would provide equal racial protections (Our History, n.d.). Morris Dees and Joe Levin, both lawyers, founded the Southern Poverty Law Center in response to the destructive results of racial injustice witnessed as children from Alabama. In the 1980s, the SPLC shifted its attention from poverty law to focus on dismantling the Ku Klux Klan (Moser, 2020). The group won various unprecedented lawsuits regarding equality which ultimately gave the organization and its originators legitimacy. The SPLC monitors white supremacists and extremism and formed the Intelligence Project which is a tool used to detect and expose hateful organizations nationwide (Moser, 2020). This annual hate group list details of thousands of organizations that have been deemed extremists. The company consistently prioritizes cases that would spark widespread attention and used the list as a marketing tool to rake in high-brow donations (Moser, 2020).

However, the center has also had inconsistencies. The high-ranking employees at the SPLC received generous salaries while the nonprofit organizations the center claims to help receive little to none (Moser, 2020). In an interview conducted by John Egerton for *The Progressive*, Dees said "we just run our business like a business… whether you're selling cakes or cause, it's all the same." In 2017, following the Charlottesville, VA rally the center had received donations amounting to $132 million. Donald Trump's presidency had resulted in higher profits which happened to occur around the time of Dees' allegations (Moser, 2020). On March 14, 2019, Dees, the co-founder of the SPLC, was fired and removed from the center's website. In response to the firing, Cohen, the current head of the organization since 2003, gave a less than definitive answer to why Dees had been fired. Among the allegations against Dees, female staffers accused the co-founder of sexual assault (Moser, 2020). *The Los Angeles Times* and the *Alabama Political Reporter* printed that his firing was a result of mistreatment of non-white female staff which caused Meredith Horton, a black senior attorney of the organization to resign. Dees denies this reasoning (Moser, 2020). The allegations against the SPLC range from financial coercion, racial injustice, and sexual misconduct making previous staff confused as to why his firing took place when it did. Although the firing of Dees was warranted, staff feel as though current leadership should be addressed for their ongoing corruption and discriminatory nature (Moser, 2020).

Independent sourcing is a pivotal aspect of digital journalism, the inclusion of which helps differentiate *churnalism* from journalism. In fraught topics, these sources become all the more essential in that key media experts can provide shared terminology and definitions that can shape the overall stories. The Southern Poverty Law Center represents exactly this kind of key expert source in the United States and—to some degree—in Canada was well. What happens when there is one essential source of hate? In this chapter, we'll consider more regarding the troubled nature of the SPLC specifically—as a noteworthy case, definition making more broadly and how that raises problems for digital journalism more broadly.

In interviews, digital journalists referenced that the key to speed in reporting relied on (1) sources that would respond on deadline and (2) tactics that granted sources ownership in the story (such as the ability to self-define). Yet research suggests that both of these options can inadvertently play into the hands of hate-oriented actors.

The Credibility of the Southern Poverty Law Center

Dees' reputation as an authority, derived from his early success as an attorney, winning a variety of monumental civil rights cases, was coupled with an innovative approach to fundraising. As his professional career developed, Dees' classificatory authority for journalistic discourse progressed as that authority related to hate groups. Dees' historical accomplishments gave him reputability in the business world and the political world. Dees had a reputation for transforming American politics by being integral in pushing for racial equality. He also gained influence by using direct mail as a source of donations bolstering the organization's annual income (Schlozman, 2019).

The SPLC as an institution has the public authority of dismantling hate due to its historical accomplishments. The SPLC won major cases that gave them notoriety against the Klu Klux Klan, like the one in 1998, in which Dees won a $138 million judgment against Klansmen who committed arson against a black church in South Carolina. Such cases are what led the public to associate the SPLC as heroes against the Klan, giving them authority over social justice practices (Moser, 2019).

If you were just reading the news articles, you could be forgiven for considering Dees to be an inspirational leader: one guiding the American people towards equality, but--as eventually became clear-- employees of the SPLC internally questioned his character (Satija, 2019). *The Washington Post* examined in-house documents that suggested the organization had been pushing for Dees' removal for several years. Sexist conduct towards women and racist tendencies were the main reasons for his desired departure (Satija, 2019). This racial prejudice is exemplified by the disparity between what positions black and white employees hold. Bob Moser, a former SPLC employee, noticed that all black employees were a part of administrative and support staff and none of them held "acknowledged" positions like educators or lawyers (Moser, 2019). A former intern at the SPLC, Christine Lee said, "I would definitely say there was not a single black employee with whom I spoke who was happy to be working there" (Robinson, 2019). Meredith Horton, the highest-ranking African-American woman at the SPLC resigned, writing that the organization must do more "to ensure . . . values we are committed to pursuing externally are also being practiced internally" (Satija, 2019). As a black woman, her resignation caused widespread alarm amongst employees forcing them to question the SPLC's moral authority (Satija, 2019).

The turn of discourse with regards to Dees as an authority occurred during his public and sought-after retirement. Dees had refused to retire quietly and claimed that the allegations against him were untrue leading the organization to fire him. Over a dozen staff signed an email to senior executives in the SPLC that praised Dees' termination and demanded accountability from the bystanders who ignored and covered up his misconduct (Satija, 2019). Stephen Bright, a longtime SPLC critic said, "These chickens took a very long flight before they came home to roost" (Moser, 2019). A former SPLC employee following Dees' firing commented on the nonprofit's working conditions, "It's shameful, but when you're there you kind of end up accepting things. I never even considered speaking out when things happened to *me*! It doesn't feel good to recognize that. I was so into the work, and so motivated by it, I kind of shrugged off what was going on" (Moser, 2019). Journalists who have previously worked for the SPLC have

expressed feelings of being "complicit" in the organizational misconduct but Dees' public firing forced all journalists, unaffiliated or not, to question SPLC credibility (Moser, 2019).

A key concern then, is the analytical work of the SPLC—work which provides valuable statistics to support news coverage of hate.

The SPLC, Defining Hate

Journalists perceive Southern Poverty Law Center data as valuable, if perhaps incomplete. The current SPLC analysts report 917 active hate groups nationally but their means for detecting these groups have yet to be defined clearly. The SPLC analysts argue that they classify these groups based on "hate group publications, citizen reports, law enforcement agencies, field sources, web postings, and news reports" (Methodology, 2020). The vagueness in how this detection is conducted can be attributed to the fact that there is no universal definition of what "hate" is (Robinson, 2019). The SPLC does not offer a scale to determine the magnitude of these organizations, they only list their name and general location which can be misleading. It is also difficult to distinguish these hate groups because the classificatory data used to determine hate organizations is widely regarded as ineffectual. The data collected is only based on voluntary state and local law enforcement reports (Sun, 2017). Nevertheless, the SPLC is the only organization with this classificatory data, making journalists reliant on them to label these hate groups for them. Citizens and journalists continue to trust that this organization has ethically detected these groups despite the organization's ethics being in question. A study conducted by Greer (2003) concerning source credibility, showed that source credibility is commonly viewed as irrelevant when compared to brand credibility online (Greer, 2003). This further explains why the SPLC is an impenetrable force of authority despite the founder's indiscretions.

The internal culture of the SPLC is inconsistent with the organization's mission to defend racial justice. The SPLC has deceptive tendencies of denouncing inequality while perpetuating it with their bigoted internal culture as they lack the racial diversity they publicly fight for (Robinson, 2019).

Journalists' relationship with a critical source

Before the ousting of Morris Dees, the Southern Poverty Law Center operated as a collaborator for journalists covering hate groups and hate speech. The SPLC would not only be cited for the rationale for labeling a group a hate group but more actively involved in the development of newsroom policies for coverage of white nationalist groups in particular. Journalists denoted the legitimacy granted to the organization in part through praise used by introducing the source. For example, in a story calling for the development of a beat for white supremacy, Mbakwe (2017), introduces the SPLC: "One of the best authorities on right-wing extremism in terms of thorough and consistent reporting is the Southern Poverty Law Center." Similarly, in a story about the development of a tool to document hate group activities, NiemanLab discussed the SPLC as a foundation in the development of the tool (Wang, 2017). The use of the SPLC by NiemanLab—a central trade press location where journalists read to learn about journalism—extends the function of the SPLC beyond being simply serving as *a source* on hate groups to being a *collaborative* source on hate groups.

However, the SPLC's work in raising awareness of right-wing extremism has at times also served to amplify right-wind extremism. In a 2017 Poynter piece, the Southern Poverty Law Center published an article detailing how the SPLC's uncover of a photo provided an essential marketing tool for the organization (Griner, 2013). The photo, which depicts a toddler in Klan robes gently touching the shield of a black state trooper, was buried in the B section of *The Gainesville Times*, but rediscovered by the SPLC and featured prominently in their community guidebook "Ten Ways to Fight Hate." It then went viral online, largely as a way to denounce the enculturation of youth into hate, but also, by the KKK, to soften their own image.

And herein lies a central thread in the discourse that is only touched upon lightly prior to Morris Dees--that to some degree, the work of the SPLC only propagates the message of hate groups. Years earlier, Silverstein (2000) had noted that the Southern Poverty Law Center had a financial incentive to document a "growth" in hate groups given that the SPLC could then reflect on having faithfully documented this growth.

At the time of Morris Dees' firing "no specific reason for the termination was given," although the story from NPR noted that it involved "a personnel issue" (Wamsley, 2019). The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the SPLC was "wrestling with complaints of workplace mistreatment of women and people of color" (Pearce, 2019). *The New Yorker* drew out the thread of this personnel issue, revealing a long history of gender and racial discrimination at the SPLC.

Moser (2019) notes that when he, a former employee of the SPLC, and colleagues walked to lunch they would "cast a glance at the inscription from Martin Luther King, Jr., etched into the black marble—'Until justice rolls down like waters'—and intone, in our deepest voices, 'Until justice rolls down like dollars.'"

What Moser (2019) documents is the SPLC leveraging their centrality in news coverage of hate groups to fundraise. Satija et al. (2019) notes that the SPLC's endowment topped $470 million in 2018, "and contributions more than doubled to $132 million in the year after Donald Trump's election." The accusation most consistently ascribed to Dees during this period is that Dees was more devoted to fundraising than to fighting injustice--a devotion that perhaps explains why workplace injustice was able to develop within his own organization.

After the initial announcement of Morris Dees' firing, journalists returned to their familiar sourcing practices with the Southern Poverty Law Center as the source for information about the proliferation of hate groups. Noteworthy is that while the data from the Southern Poverty Law Center is used, individual experts and sources from the Southern Poverty Law Center are noticeably less prevalent following the news of Morris Dees. In a similar vein, the praiseworthy monikers also declined with only one offered by Poynter in July 2019 when they noted that "The Southern Poverty Law Center has been excellent in scanning state curricula" regarding the history of race (Ordway, 2019). More typically, journalists used the Southern Poverty Law Center as a point of reference such as describing a group as a "Southern Poverty Law Center-designated hate group" in describing a story about the Proud Boys (Hare, 2020).

Definition Making in Journalism

Through the Southern Poverty Law Center—and organizations like it—digital journalists have an avenue to avoid allowing problematic sources defining themselves. It's an elegant

solution, reflected in journalist Denise-Marie Orway's (2019) Poynter piece ("Southern Poverty Law Center-designated hate group"). It places the onus for a difficult definition on an expert source.

Definition making reflects an arena of digital journalism that has been reflected as particularly problematic throughout this book. Definition making is largely reflected through the concept of metajournalistic discourse, but with authority granted to expert sources, such as the SPLC on hate.

Metajournalistic discourse, simply put, is journalists talking about journalism and at stake is that the "stories journalists tell themselves have the potential to shape the field in powerful ways" (Moon, 2021, p. 1). Metajournalistic discourse, as the field's institutional conversation, is a "site in which actors publicly engage in processes of establishing definitions, setting boundaries, and rendering judgments about journalism's legitimacy" (Carlson, 2016, p. 350). Metajournalistic discourse "stabilizes the field by norming shared experiences and perspectives within the field as a way to revisiting the normative expectations" of the profession (Perreault et al. 2021, p. 27) and this is done through diagnosing problems (Johnson, Bent & Dade, 2020), labelling transgressive actors (Kananovich & Perreault, 2021), and delineating the boundaries of the field (Perreault & Vos, 2020; Vos & Perreault, 2020).

Some of this definition making is outward-facing--reflecting journalists' awareness of the interests of those outside the field--but primarily, this discourse tends to be inward-facing, aimed at discussion primarily among other journalists (Vos, 2016). Definition making is a primarily outward-facing activity. Primarily, the institutional aim of such definition making is to assert professionalism, normalize practices and improve legitimacy in journalistic practice (Carlson & Lewis, 2015) and journalists use expert sources to help accomplish this. Metajournalistic discourse is often journalists talking about journalism, but journalists need not be the only participants in such discourse.

A central concept to metajournalistic discourse is that discourse is adaptable. Adaptability allows the field to be responsive to changes in the institutional terrain (Ferrucci and Vos 2017; Perreault and Ferrucci 2020); terrain structured by journalistic rules, principles and norms. Definition making is a crucial arena of metajournalistic discourse where the placement of actors within the field would naturally be determined (Perreault and Vos 2020). Prior research indicates that during a crisis this definition making occurs in part because editorial policies become more lenient during a crisis; hence, conversations that normally cannot occur are able to take place (Carlson 2016; Schudson 1982; Perreault et al. 2022a).

One aspect of metajournalistic discourse in *boundary work* is the practice of "constructing a social boundary" distinguishing a group or category from other things (for instance, distinguishing journalists from non-journalists, or scientists from non-scientists) (Gieryn, 1983, p. 782). Put another way, it is "the process through which definitions of social phenomena come to be accepted or rejected" (Carlson, 2019, p. 1). Scholars have applied the concept fruitfully to understand the dynamics within and between different social groups in journalism, but it also has useful applications to how journalists sort and classify concepts they encounter in their work.

In times of crisis, definition making tends to be at its most crucial given the need to clearly define the crisis at play. However, journalism often fails to assert itself as central to the

crisis situation and hence, often misses the definitional opportunities to consider alternative approaches (Zelizer, 2015). Any crisis presents a feeling of uncertainty, second-guessing, and the urge to change the outcome—even as a challenge grows larger and becomes overwhelming (Bauman & Bordoni, 2014). Definitions present valuable opportunities for editorial policies. Some editorial policies become more lenient in a crisis—such as presented by the storming of the US capitol in January 6, 2021 by Trump supporters, in which journalists were given more flexibility in regards to neutrality on social media—and allow for conversations that would not normally occur, reflecting journalism's layers of transformation in history (Carlson, 2016; Schudson, 1982; Perreault et al., 2022a).

Largely in the U.S., definitions of "hate groups" are motivated institutionally through the definition making of the Southern Poverty Law Center, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Anti-Defamation League—groups most likely to send out press releases and produce documents that journalists can use for the speedy reporting reflected in chapter three. Many countries have similar definitional bodies, with the Fundamental Rights Agency operating as a central source for the EU.

Definitions of Hate

In this chapter, we've reflected at length about the Southern Poverty Law Center as an emblematic case in definition making and so here it is worth considering alternative definitions for point of comparison.

The Anti-Defamation League's background stretches back to the early 1900s with the aim of combating anti-semitism and bigotry. Noteworthy is through collaboration with the Associated Press in the 1910s, the Associated Press promised to "not bring racial or religious prejudice into our reports" (Our History 1910s, n.d.). They define a hate group as

> An organization whose goals and activities are primarily or substantially based on a shared antipathy towards people of one or more other different races, religions, ethnicities/nationalities/national origins, genders, and/or sexual identities. The mere presence of bigoted members in a group or organization is typically not enough to qualify it as a hate group; the group itself must have some hate-based orientation/purpose (Hate Group, 2017, May 3)

The emphasis for the ADL is on combating anti-Semitism although the group responds to numerous manifestations of hate. Accordingly they also have a "hate map" aimed at locating anti-Semitism across the United States. The ADL has also been more motivated internationally than the SPLC, criticizing an anti-circumcision measure by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, arguing that it was "leading Europe in a horrific direction toward the forced exclusion of Jewish citizens" (ADL Circumcision Resolution, 2013, October 4).

The Anti-Defamation League has also found itself embroiled in controversy. For example, the organization took an oppositional stance to the proposed Park 51 Community Center—a proposed Islamic community center and mosque aimed to be built near the rebuilt World Trade Center towers in New York City. The organization argued for a different location for the community center, saying that the proposed location over the World Trade Center memorial would cause unnecessary pain to the victims of the September 11th World Trade Center tower attacks. Similarly, in the 2000s, and 2010s, the Anti-Defamation League found

itself at odds with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or Mormon Church, when it was discovered that the names of Holocaust victims had been submitted into the database for post-humous baptism (e.g. "Baptism for the dead"). These proxy baptisms are intended by the Mormon tradition to offer a chance of salivation (through the Mormon lens), but are deeply offensive to Jews and the families of Holocaust victims in particular (Perreault et al., 2017). The Anti-Defamation League pushed the Mormon tradition to ban the practice of baptizing Jews, a practice that is a bit challenging, given that proxy baptism is designed to have names suggested on an individual level as people work through their own ancestry to suggest potential names for proxy baptism. Nevertheless, the Anti-Defamation League worked as an intermediary between US Jews and US Mormons as a moderating influence in press coverage. Implicit in the Anti-Defamation Leagues' statements is the belief that the Mormons had committed "acts of hate" that were unintentional. This unintentionality would seem essential in a *hate group*. Regardless, the response had the result of seemingly arguing that the Mormon tradition as a whole operated as a hate group. The Anti-Defamation League's blundering of this intermediary role is problematic since it is in conflict situations that definitionary groups like the ADL provide a means through the which the press can "make peace" between groups when it is possible (Perreault et al., 2017; Narayana & Kapur, 2011). Here the definitional power of the Anti-Defamation League, Southern Poverty Law Center, etc. could lay a roadmap for what peace could look like between the two groups.

In the European Union, a similar source exists in the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). The organization began as the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. It formally opened in Vienna, Austria in 2000 after the Council of Europe noted several years of rising hate activity and xenophobia. The FRA manages the RAXEN network—in which experts of each state provide relevant data and information to be shared in an EU-wide report.

Similar definitional work was conducted in developing a "working definition" of Anti-Semitism in 2005—to be used for collecting data related to antisemitism. Yet the FRA faced criticism when it later removed the definition from its website, noting that it was never adopted by the EU (SWC to EU, 2013). Since its founding it has undertaken several surveys—to examine, violence against women, minorities and discrimination, EU LGBTQ and a survey of the Roma. The FRA has been questioned as duplicating the work of the Council of Europe on human rights but also questioned for not issuing judgments on legislation by member states (several EU states, maintain legislation against LGBTQ populations).

It is noteworthy that amidst their other work, their most seemingly divisive work of the FRA has been related to its definitional power.

Domestic Terrorism

While the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League are both non-profits, with the goal of raising awareness of social injustice, another entity engaged in definition making is the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Definition making here, as with the FRA, poses significant consequences in that the definitions developed would have implications from institutional resources etc. And hence, the FBI for years has taken criticism in the United States for seemingly obscuring the threat posed by white supremacy (such as by using the category

"racially motivated violent extremism" to group the activities of both white supremacist groups and those of Black Lives Matter protestors; Act Now, 2022).

A series of statements by the FBI starting in 2019 gained substantial attention in that they seemed to signal a reevaluation of the physical threats posed by white supremacy. Perhaps most noteworthy, following the January 6, 2021 storming of the U.S. Capitol by supporters of former president Donald Trump, was when the FBI labeled white supremacists as a threat on a par with the US's top international terror priorities, e.g. ISIS.

> The top threat we face from [domestic violent extremists] continues to be those we identify as Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists (RMVEs), specifically those who advocate for the superiority of the white race," FBI director Christopher Wray testified before members of the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday (Connolly, 2021, March 3)

A long standing concern regarding white nationalism is that its aims are often predicated on the need for violence in order to accomplish group goals. This reflected in the actions of radicalized individuals. For example, in Norway, Ander Breivik killed 77 people in 2011 after leaving a hate-filled manifesto aimed at Muslims and immigrants. Similarly in Australia, Brenton Tarrant killed 51 Muslims in his attacks on mosques in New Zealand again after publishing a manifesto "The Great Replacement"—a reference to the popular white supremacist conspiracy theory "Replacement Theory" (Hate Beyond Borders, 2019).

In 2019, the FBI announced that it had put in place a new system that allowed for the sharing of hate crimes, resulting in findings already supported by the ADL and Southern Poverty Law Center: that hate crimes appeared to be on the rise. Furthermore, while the FBI took pains to reflect on its mitigation plans, it also acknowledged that actors in hate groups "tend to be radicalized online and target minorities and soft targets using easily accessible weapons" (McGarrity & Shivers, 2019, June 4). The use of social media to radicalize makes it difficult for the FBI to combat until it reaches the level of an attempted crime (Marwick et al., 2022).

This observation was reaffirmed the following year in a public statement regarding a rise of Anti-Semitic activities: "the greatest threat we face in the homeland today is that posed by lone actors radicalized online who look to attack soft targets with easily accessible weapons" (Sanborn, 2020, February 26). The statement again reflected on the troubling use of social media as a means to recruit and disseminate information.

> With the aid of the Internet, like-minded violent extremists can reach across borders. Violent extremists are increasingly using social media for the distribution of propaganda, recruitment, target selection, and incitement to violence. Through the Internet, violent extremists around the world have access to our local communities to target, recruit, and radicalize like-minded individuals and on a global scale (Sanborn, 2020, February 26).

For example, neo-nazis used the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a means of recruitment across Europe. Even as Russian President Vladimir Putin pushed a false narrative that the Russian invasion was a result of the neo-nazi presence in Ukraine, neo-nazis capitalized on this narrative in order to recruit white nationalists from across Europe to fight for Ukraine. As reported in *The Washington Post*, "Their goal is not to defend Ukraine as we know it — a multiethnic, democratically minded society led by a Jewish president. Some neo-Nazis simply see this new war as a place to act out their violent fantasies" (Katz, 2022, March 14).

Such reporting is delicate, without question, given that it provides legs to a false narrative being used to rationalize war. Hence, it makes sense that organizations like the FBI and FRA would be reticent to define their terminology. In the two public statements on hate groups, discussed here, the 2019 statement by the FBI is specifically labelled "white supremacy" and yet never explicitly discusses the term. While certainly white supremacy reflects "racially motivated violent extremism" it is fair to consider the degree to which such terminology obscures the reality of what is faced—the vast majority of such extremism is, of course, in regards to white supremacy. In other words, the challenges in definition making by even expert sources would seem to face similar challenges as those faced by newsrooms. If journalism's impulse is to lean on sources in order to accomplish the difficult definition making, then it would seem as though little can be accomplished with the definitions in play.

Conclusion

The release of the Year in Hate & Extremism 2021 report from the Southern Poverty Law Center shared a deeply disturbing finding: hate group activity had decreased in the US, but it decreased because "hate and antigovernment extremism have gone mainstream, infecting the national and political dialogue" (Year in Hate, 2021). According to the report:

> With far-right extremists finding safe haven in online networks steeped in hateful ideology, the number of documented active groups … has coalesced into a broader movement that is … threatening our democracy (Year in Hate, 2021).

Susan Corke, the director of the Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Project, argues that the United States finds itself at a precipice, with extremism and hate threatening to upend many of the essential values of the country. The January 6th U.S. Capitol siege did not occur in a vacuum, she argues. Rather, it reflects decades of works to radicalize right-wing whites in the country. Next steps? Corke argues that groups will seek to rewrite the history of the siege and diminish the violence (Year in Hate, 2021).

The SPLC report from 2021 details a state of white supremacy in the US more akin to the nature of hate groups in Russia, where white supremacy is built into the political infrastructure. In a prior report on hate activity in Europe, the SPLC notes that in the US white supremacists often look to Eastern Europe for guidance and collaboration. As the host of anti-Semitic radio show "The Political Cesspool" put it, Russia and Eastern European countries may be the "key to white survival" (Hate in Europe, 2018). France similarly increasingly finds guidance in the policies of Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, on using border control issues and conspiracy theories to marginalize groups in country. In February 2022, a popular presidential candidate encouraged police to act as "hunters" towards Muslims—which he regards as a separate people and he argued that sharing the country peacefully was impossible (Sanaullah, 2022).

The Year in Hate & Extremism 2021 report details specific policy recommendations to combat white supremacy, but it begs an essential question relevant to this chapter: is it possible to be neutral if one of the essential political parties in your country increasingly reflects the views of white supremacy?

Taken together the efforts of groups like the SPLC, FBI and FRA to undertake the definition making reflects the challenges posed to digital journalists. Naturally, the process of

undertaking such metajournalistic discourse would be slow and painstaking—certainly working against the time-crunched norms of digital journalism. Delegating the function of definition making to expert sources isn't just the most expedient solution but it's a solution with a long history within the field.

Yet the definition making as currently undertaken—and as reflected here—poses numerous challenges.

First, is the question of who is proposing the definition. When news organizations outsource definition-making they're relying on the credibility of those entities to some degree. As was demonstrated in the case of the Southern Poverty Law Center, some cases don't have the built-in integrity to withstand scrutiny on their processes. Certainly, the Southern Poverty Law Center would seem to be genuine in their aim to combat racial injustice—but it nevertheless muddies the message that the organization profits substantially if their hate group map seems to increasingly show worse news, to the moral outrage of funders and the growing pockets of the organization itself.

As noted in our chapter on audience-orientation, allowing sources to self-define is a perfectly acceptable practice in other forms of reporting, yet in reporting on hate this poses an obvious problem: the sources have an obvious rationale to lie and deceive. Hence, what would seem to be a *humanizing* process of allowing sources some ability to define themselves ends up misleading the audience in regards to the audience. This then leaves the option of journalists defining hate actors and this would seem to be the most difficult, if most reasonable option. This requires digital newsrooms to undertake the hard work of researching groups and presenting a picture of who they represent to (1) fellow journalists through the collaborative process of metajournalism (Perreault & Meltzer, 2022) and then to (2) the public. While this is certainly the most difficult option, this would also seem to be the option that is normatively implicit in journalism.

Furthermore, given the 2021 Year in Hate & Extremism Report from the SPLC, it also seems relevant to consider that this definition making potentially could jeopardize the perception of journalistic neutrality. Hence, it should be journalists developing this definition.

Second, is the definition itself. Digital journalists would seem to feel the pull to some degree to represent their audience in their definition making yet research suggests that this is not an ideal approach in that (1) as discussed in the prior chapter, journalists may not be completely clear on who their audience is and (2) their audience may differ in the definition of hate from journalists or the public more broadly (Perreault et al., 2022b).

A key, if under discussed aspect of metajournalistic discourse, is that it is by definition led by journalists. In other words for definition making to be successful in the ways journalists would like it to be, digital journalists need to be prepared to demonstrate leadership and make the research-based, bold choices in defining their sources. That's process that, as evidenced in Perreault and Meltzer (2022) needs to be transparent—yet one that runs against the affordances of the speed-orientation of digital journalism. Nevertheless, effective definition making requires nothing less.

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Conclusion: A Modest Proposal for Boring Journalism

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Abstract This chapter argues that the solution to the problem of covering hate in digital journalism resides in tactics that have been key to legacy journalism's normative success: slow, painstakingly careful reporting, comprehensive interviewing and adherence to Associated Press style guidelines. These keys to legacy journalism's past success have been in many ways the antithesis of what has been successful in digital journalism and, hence, this chapter argues the solution to the problem that hate groups pose does not lie in "digitization" but in "journalism." This proposal is not meant to ask digital journalism to shed its digital practices in all situations—indeed it would be financially dangerous and technologically counter-intuitive to do so—but rather to treat reporting related to hate groups as operating in a different category entirely; a category that demands the best of digital journalism's normative legacy.

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In Canadian journalism, *The Narwal* is a symbol of the promise of digital journalism. As an investigative-focused, non-profit journalism outlet that emphasizes clear-cut reporting as well as explicit—and transparent—advocacy of the topic of climate change. Indeed, as *The Narwal* triumphantly reflects on its website,

> Our team of investigative journalists dives deep to tell stories about Canada's natural world you can't find anywhere else.
> We have just two rules: 1) Follow the facts. 2) Tell it like it is.
> We're tired of false dichotomies and business-as-usual perspectives. We're not shy about the fact we think Canada's greatest assets are our people, our lakes, our rivers, our forests. We tell stories Canada's big news outlets miss and hustle to help our readers make sense of complex (sometimes downright messy) issues (About Us, 2021).

The Narwal's rhetoric isn't just rhetoric—they have numerous awards to show for their commitment to the hard work of investigative journalism. As one would expect in coverage of climate change, it draws a certain amount of hate mail. Ontario bureau chief Denise Balkissoon is used to it, even as she knows it shapes the nature of the field person-by-person:

> The type of targeted harassment that journalists face today — especially racialized women — is not classic snarky feedback. It's ugly, and it's meant to scare us away from our jobs. And it works. It's one of the reasons that women of colour in senior positions in this industry are so scarce (Ligeti, 2021, Oct. 12).

Balkissoon's perspective reflects in part the cause of so much of the hate she'd received at the time. On Sept. 22, 2021, populist Canadian politician Maxime Bernier encouraged his 160,000 Twitter followers to "play dirty" and shared the emails of journalists who (correctly) connected his party with far-right groups. And while Twitter did eventually suspend Bernier the emails continued circulating in white supremacist chatrooms—causing an influx of hate to the inboxes of *The Narwal*, as well as *Global News, CTV News* and *The Hill Times* (Ligeti, 2021, Oct. 12).

The Narwal penned an editorial noting the problem with such hate: that it scares diversity out of the industry and threatens the legitimacy of a free press. Their solutions for the situation? Plans to combat it in the future? There were few options to share.

Indeed, once hate groups have been activated online, there's not much journalists can do aside from keeping themselves safe, keep moving, and provide/receive support from colleagues. Research reflects that journalists increasingly turn to "disconnection to mediate organizational social media policies to prevent trolling and harassment and to protect themselves from the negative effects of institutional support for professionalized social media practices" (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2022). That said, there is more digital journalism can do to cover hate more effectively before it enters our inboxes and that has been the purpose of this book.

Throughout this book we have, up to now, elaborated primarily on the problems posed by digital journalism—problems that leave the field vulnerable to being leveraged by hate groups. This last chapter boldly suggests that the solution to covering hate in digital journalism resides in tactics that have been key to legacy journalism's normative success: slow, painstakingly careful reporting, comprehensive interviewing and adherence to institutional guidelines. These keys to legacy journalism's past success have been in many ways the antithesis of what has been successful in digital journalism and, hence, this chapter argues the solution to the problem that hate groups pose does not lie in "digitization" but in "journalism." Hence, what is proposed here is not meant to ask digital journalism to shed its digital practices in all situations—indeed it would be financially dangerous and technologically counter-intuitive to do so—but rather to treat reporting related to hate groups as operating in a different category entirely; a category that demands the best of digital journalism's normative legacy.

Digitization vs. Journalism

Following the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, white nationalists saw an opportunity for indoctrination. "Dank One," a pseudonym used for a white nationalist cited in a 2018 *Buzzfeed* piece, noted that the Disqus comment management system provides an ideal way to promote their message (Warzel, 2018). He argued in the piece, that over the course of years he'd perfected ways to work around the Disqus's comment AI—largely this remained effective given that Disqus promotes comments with more engagement. Hence he would employ "sock puppets" to upvote his "white pills":

> Breitbart readers desperately need a pro-White perspective, and many reading the comments are now getting it," the Dank One wrote. "I've been working those comments under various socks for over 2 years (Warzel, 2018).

Disqus doesn't solely serve Breitbart—the platform has been adopted at TMZ, RollingStone and the Southern Poverty Law Center among others, and is integrated into the framework for both Blogger and Tumblr. As a digital tool, it is easy to understand the appeal of Disqus. It's flexible,

simple for users (both commenters and comment moderators), and has recognition in terms of the organizations it already serves. Much of content moderation is digitally outsourced. Digitization here would seem to fulfill all of the essential traits that could be hoped for. Yet as we see in this example, far from mitigating white nationalism, it served as a tool for it.

As Charlie Warzel (2018) details for *BuzzFeed*, the strategy employed by "Dank One" wasn't exactly hidden. He was more than happy to share in the piece, because there appeared to be little evidence of traction against it. Disqus, like many similar types of software, operates with an algorithm that promotes responses that gather more engagement—which largely encourages more engagement. This occurs by sorting comments, instead of from "most recent" to "least recent" or "first" to "last," by "most engaged" to "least engaged." Taken in abstraction, the algorithm presents a reasonable way to encourage engagement: by pushing the comments that cause most responses closer to the top this would encourage other readers to react in kind. But research seems to suggest that this simple operation ends up amplifying more controversial, fringe—and perhaps unhinged—responses. "Dank One" games the Discus software through the use of what he terms "sock puppets"—dummy/troll accounts that exist only to enter the comment thread and engage with whatever comment he has posted.

One digital journalist, a gaming journalist, said in an interview that many times in his niche, the key indicator of such accounts will be the use of the term "social justice warrior"—a derogatory implication from white nationalist gaming circles—in relation to a trending game or game-related topic.

> It's those comments, those people. Like there's a bunch of troll accounts on Twitter who will just make videos of headlines of controversial things and say "This person is a [social justice warrior], is doing all this crazy stuff, is talking about trying to change the world and ruin gaming and doing all this stuff." The hate groups really rally on controversial topics and ganging on people and when like I said reviews are another big thing where they'll go after someone for giving a game they were really anticipating a score not what they wanted I think that's really where you see a lot of those things.

In October 2021, similar regarding algorithmic bias was revealed in regards to Facebook. While the social media software has long allowed "likes" on posts, in 2016 they introduced emoji to provide a larger array of reactions: "love," "haha," "wow," "sad" and "angry."

> Behind the scenes, Facebook programmed the algorithm that decides what people see in their news feeds to use the reaction emoji as signals to push more emotional and provocative content — including content likely to make them angry. Starting in 2017, Facebook's ranking algorithm treated emoji reactions as five times more valuable than "likes," internal documents reveal. The theory was simple: Posts that prompted lots of reaction emoji tended to keep users more engaged, and keeping users engaged was the key to Facebook's business (Merrill & Oremus, 2021).

After implementing this change, internal documents at Facebook revealed that engineers had misgivings about the algorithm in 2019—noting that this seemed to provide an avenue to game the algorithm simply by posting outrageous comments. They weren't wrong. In Chapter One, this book reflected on the array of definitions of digital journalism noting throughout the tension between "digital" and the "journalism." What this text argues most acutely is that the solutions to

the problem of hate will not be less likely to be found in the "digital," as opposed to in "journalism."

Journalism's failings, in particular its ability to draw financial funding, have perhaps obscured its successful normative traditions.

Journalists have struggled to connect their expectations for digital with their normative expectations: how to use mobile journalism for hard news reporting (Perreault & Stanfield, 2018), how to conduct digital journalism in legacy newsrooms (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020), and how to manage the workload of digital journalism in line with their institutional expectations (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2022; Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021). Such dissonance is natural and perhaps reflective of the rapid growth within digital journalism—the expectations continually changing, the tools continually changing. And while the implications are less acute in many forms of journalism, they are quite acute in reporting on hate. Based on such considerations, this text would like to offer a few basic suggestions on how digital journalism could operate in regards to coverage of hate:

1) Turn off the comments
2) No live shots
3) Heavier reliance on official, authoritative sources and facts
4) *Storytelling* removed from associated rallies and events

A Proposed Solution to Hate in Comments

The solution to the problem of hate remains seated in journalism's normative traditions: verification, careful and sensitive interviewing, and thoughtful synthesis. In short, they would reflect the very nature of "old school" journalism that the field has grown out of in the past few decades: a result of financial pressures as well as pressure from the audience. In large part, legacy media has had to adapt to the digital transition and taken the shape of the digital landscape (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020). However, journalists aren't able to implement those evenly (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021), hence some tasks—such as content moderation have found themselves outsourced and with disastrous results. White nationalist groups have been able to leverage journalism online in particular through an increasing emphasis on using mainstream news comment sections as a vehicle for hate (Wolfgang, 2021b).

One digital journalist framed this issue in relation to reporting on the killing of George Floyd by a US police officer.

> When you have a voice talking about George Floyd or people talking about the issues we're dealing with in our society you're always going to have those people coming in there saying racist words and racist epithets and just terrible stuff. That's why you have a good team of mods there ready to handle things and good people trying to block that out and not give those people air.

In *BuzzFeed*'s expose of this phenomenon (Wartzel, 2018), the interviews were kept anonymous, but self-identifying white nationalists who were frank about the utility of the comment threads. According to one Disqus user,

> This strategy of taking over the top comments with fact-based comments seems to have been paying off as we've picked up support along the way from people who might have been on the fence... or just completely unawares (Warzel, 2018).

Another suggested using fake, sock-puppet Disqus accounts to flood comment sections.

> If you had 20 guys with 10 socks each, you could dramatically force the narrative in the correct direction and also distract the mods and regular posters using various methods," they observed (Warzel, 2018).

In Wolfgang (2021a), he reflects on research regarding a newsroom that does the unthinkable: comments turned off for stories that would seem to be controversial. At the *Daily Chronicle* in the US Midwest this decision was the result of five years of policy work, attempting different solutions. At first, the newsroom attempted to allow anonymous commenting. Second, they switched to Facebook commenting—with the intent that the Facebook integration would hold users accountable. During this second stage, the audience engagement editor began to explicitly post comment expectations: "There was nothing really saying to commenters here is what we want to see from our comments… so I said what if we told people what we want? We've never made that really clear" (Bridget, 2015 qt. in Wolfgang, 2021a). Finally, the newsroom turned comments off all together. The intent was two-fold: (1) to decrease journalists' workload in feeling responsible for monitoring comments and spotting the "sock puppets" and (2) to decrease the prevalence of hateful content online, which seemed largely to be aimed at controversial op-ed content. Wolfgang (2021a) reported the results as mixed, with journalists themselves having a diminished role in relation to the audience and perceiving content moderation as a task that existed outside the realm of professional journalism.

In the more specific light of the topic of white nationalism, I would argue that these results represent perhaps the best we can hope for in order to cling to the values to which we ascribe. If comments are turned off, journalists may perceive themselves as having diminished contact with the audience—perhaps perceiving that they know their audience less—but coming back to Nelson's (2021) findings its only that: perception. It's true that turning off commenting on a story related to white nationalism may mean actual members of the audience lose one mode of access to journalists, but it also means that potentially 200 "sock puppets" lose the ability to sway those audience members. Also worth pointing out that if comments are the *only* means with which to access the audience this perhaps evidences a larger problem. In their conceptualization of *relational journalism*, Paul Ellis and his team (2021) call for reconsidering how journalists engage with their audience to focus on community building, collaboration and facilitating public discourse. Efforts to engage the audience outside of reporting white nationalism could pay dividends and earn trust when these particular stories bar comments (Ellis et al., 2021).

All of this to say, that what Wolfgang (2021) reflects here represents a model appropriate to the needs of digital journalism's handling of white nationalism in comments.

A Proposed Solution to Live Hate

In the days following the attack on the U.S. Capitol by an array of white nationalists, Trump supporters, and Christian nationalist, journalists did an internal, metajournalistic reckoning on their own coverage. University of Minnesota professor Danielle Kilgo offered her thoughts into this reflection with a contribution to *NiemanLab.* As Kilgo (2021) put it:

> Footage carried live by cable news and clips and photos shared across social media were jolting. One image showed a man who had broken into the building sitting in a chair, foot on desk, in House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office. A video clip showed a crowd chasing a police officer as he retreated up the stairs.

> Typically news coverage pays more attention to disruptive tactics than to the aims of protesters, especially when it comes to anti-Black racism protests or action that radically challenges the status quo (Kilgo, 2021).

Kilgo (2021) argues, in a sense, that the typical approach to live protest coverage was flipped: protest coverage often silences historically marginalized communities but those tactics proved less effective. But "this was different" for precisely the reasons Kilgo (2021) offered.

From the lens of this text, I would add that this coverage was different in a sense because what was happening was easily discerned. As one journalist put it in reflecting on the coverage of the killing of George Floyd:

> I was covering the protests that were sweeping the nation after George Floyd's death, we had a lot of protests…as well, and just seeing, on ground, the amount of tension between white and black communities here in our town was pretty eye opening.

The journalist went on to describe a situation where a white man shouted a racial explicative, waving a confederate flag and the tension erupted with police and counter protestors all responding at once. In many cases that involve hate, getting a sense of what is happening in the chaos is quite a bit more difficult (Perreault et al., 2021) with journalists torn in several directions—police, protestors, anti-protesters, organizers, the community. Journalists know that reporting on these situations is challenging reporting (Perreault et al., 2022). That said, it seems reasonable to consider that the added pressure for social media of "going live" does more harm than good.

In veteran broadcast journalist Philip Seib's (2002) book about live shots in electronic journalism he offers "live coverage is attractive…because it gives electronic journalism a competitive edge" (p. 37). He adds a bit more nuance that provides important context in relation to news coverage of hate:

> Speed is assumed to compensate for superficiality. That may be a dangerous notion, but it has some resonance among electronic news professionals, who frequently hear their product dismissed as a headline service. The format…is marked by its terseness and brisk pace, which means that background and analysis are often squeezed out…It is seen as a technique that can bolster audience interest and thus ratings and revenue (Seib, 2002, p. 37-38).

Yet here Seib (2002) identifies precisely the problem of going live amidst hate group activity—the background and analysis are what can make it clear which ideas are wrong, and which are dangerous. So in a similar manner to comment threads, it is worth considering that no journalist should be doing live shots in the midst of hate group activity. First, this is putting journalists in dangerous situations that can have long-standing repercussions on their emotional and mental health (Perreault et al., 2022); given the explosivity of the groups that gather for hate group events, it is fair to consider that a live camera provides an impetus for performance which can be more dangerous than beneficial.

As Nathan Damigo, founder of the white nationalist Identity Evropa movement, put it "When we're doing activism ourselves we have to understand that taking actions that create strong emotions and dramatize the situation is far more effective than facts will ever be" (Identity Evropa, n.d.).

Second, is the danger of misleading the audience, which without the proper background and analysis could have trouble discerning what it is they are hearing. Not all events are as cut-and-dry as the January 6th riot. There is value in journalists having the time and ability to review their footage and data collected through reporting.

A Proposed Solution on Sourcing

This text detailed several issues related to sourcing in regards to digital journalism on hate. Central to these issues are the essential definitions and terminology presented in the story, that aim to create a shared understanding. As reflected in chapter 2, there are essential issues with burdening the audience with that responsibility—even more so if that audience would like to mislead. In chapter 4, we reflected on the similarly problematic possibility of entrusting that solely to *expert* sources.

Early chapters detailed the problematic controversy in digital journalism, the GamerGate controversy. As noted, it created a discussion about journalism ethics. Jenni Goodchild's blog about Gamergate collected the charges from anonymous posters: that gaming journalists were not transparent about their personal and professional connections to game developers, that gaming journalists were pushing a social justice agenda (Goodchild 2014a), that academics involved in the Digital Games Research Association were conspiring with journalists to shift the agenda (Chess & Shaw 2015; Goodchild 2014), and that gaming journalists on a private mailing list were colluding to shape game coverage (Goodchild 2014). The charges of collusion seemed to have some support among critics when, from August 28 to 30, 2014, numerous news organizations, including *Kotaku, Wired, The Guardian, and Polygon,* published articles arguing "gamers are dead" (Massanari 2015). The charges of an academic conspiracy and institutional collusion were dismissed in large part, although discussion of the other charges continues in GamerGate circles.

This aspect of GamerGate would seem to bear similarities to the issues raised with the Southern Poverty Law Center: where central figures in the controversy (in this case, victims) would normally be sources cited for information about the controversy. This raises important questions for the digital journalists: how should it be sourced? It would seem reasonable to focus on digital forums like Reddit, 4chan, and 8chan, but it quickly appeared clear that they "exhibit the tendency to view women as either objects of sexual desire or unwelcome interlopers or both" (Massanari, 2015, p. 8). Gjoni, the jilted ex-lover of *Depression Quest* creator Zoe Quinn made his initial post in the Something Awful forums, charging Quinn with using intimate relationships with gaming journalists in order to obtain better coverage (Kaplan, 2014)—these charges later moved to other forums (Chess & Shaw, 2015; Massanari, 2015). Chess and Shaw (2015) noted that Baldwin's "190k plus followers quickly helped the hashtag spread, which then spawned Web sites, reddit subthreads, additional 4chan and then 8chan threads, and a sustained online movement" (p. 210). Journalists often used such tweets and online comments on these forums, even as it also amplified the voices of these actors (Perreault & Vos, 2018). As a result of this amplified attention the online harassment only expanded. Quinn, game developer Brianna Wu and gaming critic Anita Sarkessian received death threats and had their personal information, such as address and phone number, published online (Golding, 2014).

In short, gaming journalists made a poor call in their approach to sourcing and in handling the controversy altogether, but they were also unprepared for how to handle a hate group (Perreault & Vos, 2020). Rather than emphasizing various perspectives of the controversy and granting attempts to balance, it would have been wiser to focus on official sources: the newsroom questioned, the game development company spokesperson and—in the case of the death threats—police officials. Again, these suggestions push against the expediency bias of digital journalism—the sources would not necessarily be digital—however, this approach would be less likely to play into the hands of bad actors.

In some cases, as with the New Zealand terror shooting, journalists find themselves drawn to the white supremacists' manifestos left behind and tend to use those as sources, which should be seen as the equivalent as giving the microphone to the white supremacist. As Joan Donovan, director of the Technology and Social Change center at Harvard University put it:

> Instead of journalists picking and choosing between different topics that they could cover within the story they tend to focus on the manifesto and then focusing on the manifesto some of them are inadvertently or as a consequence of it spreading and explaining that ideology to their either readers or audiences (PBS Newshour, 2019, August 4).

When white nationalists are sourced, either through interviews or manifestos, Donovan recommends they be highly paraphrased and contextualized. Better, instead of sourcing those materials would be putting the focus on the community and/or victims.

> Journalists should often try to tell an impact story and understand what is the long term impact of violence like this on a community or on victims so that we don't narrow our focus to the message that the attacker was trying to spread and instead journalists should think about what other parts of the event are newsworthy (PBS Newshour, 2019, August 4).

A Proposed Solution to Reporting Roles

The phrase *storytelling* has a mixed history in journalism studies. For journalists, the term denotes an essential aspect of the journalistic process aimed at providing context and background. For audiences, the term tends to lower trust in journalists (Calfano, et al., 2022). In prior research, storytelling research was proposed as a solution to encourage journalists to engage in the context-driven reporting that is needed for reporting on issues of hate (Perreault et al., 2022).

Perhaps no journalists better ascribe to the "storyteller" role than lifestyle journalists. In an interview, one lifestyle journalist quoted Mark Twain to me, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts." The journalist pointed out however, that it's not just travel: it's the readership on lifestyles in general that allows for this. Readers have the opportunity to encounter perspectives that diverge from their own. Hence, one would think lifestyle journalists would perhaps be the *least* likely to encounter issues of hate. However, in research on lifestyle journalists and hate, it was found that journalists perceived hate in two different ways (1) as something they found in their reporting process or as (2) something that occurred to them as a result of their reporting (Perreault & Miller, under review). As a result, they responded differently depending on the presentation of the hate. When lifestyle journalists spotted hate in the process of reporting, they felt a

responsibility to dig into it for the sake of their audience; by contrast, when journalists received hateful emails, messages or harassing behaviors, they instead felt obligated to grin-and-bear it (Perreault & Miller, under review). These findings appear conversant with what this text has reflected in regards to digital journalists more broadly. Intuitively, digital journalists' commitment to the audience would seem to indicate that the presence of hate in a story would drive digital journalists to report on the topic, whereas they may be willing to bear the brunt of it if it were only directed at them.

Cheruiyot (2022) examined journalists in South Africa and Kenya and his findings reflected these impulses—three of the manners digital journalists responded to digital hate reflect manners of storytelling:

1) **Consolidation**- these approaches defend journalistic discourse in order to evade challenges to journalistic authority. "In consolidating journalistic discourse, journalists discredit critics, dismiss criticism and shield the news media and themselves from blame" (p. 10).
2) **Filtering**- approaches that involve undercutting hate actors to minimize risks, with the goal being to "clean up" journalistic discourse. This is done by cancelling critics (ignoring them and encouraging others to do the same), and demarcating criticism (by providing an explanation of what kind of criticism is appropriate, promoting positive criticism)
3) **Rationalization**-approach that goes beyond explaining failures and errors and demonstrating them as necessary in journalism practice. Here "journalists look beyond the toxic discourse and hostile rhetoric in a digital discursive ecology, while acknowledging digital media criticism as a risk of digital publicity" (p. 13).
4) **Counter discourse**-journalists show openness to criticism, while pointing to reformed journalistic practice. While journalists promote their openness to criticism here, as much so they use the space to counter negative discourse.

Only one of these methods of response included some form of disconnection—filtering (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2022). Consolidation, rationalization and counter-discourse all offer different modes of employing the storytelling role. The context provided just changes: additional context about the bad actors for consolidation and rationalization, and additional discourse about their own work in counter discourse (Cheruiyot, 2022). What Cheruiyot (2022) presents here are phenomenal suggestions for how journalists could undertake a *storytelling* role in these circumstances.

In chapter 3, it was noted that journalists suggested *storytelling* as a means with which to avoid being leveraged in in-person reporting. But beyond the storytelling role another role worth considering in digital journalism is the *adversarial* role—*adversarial* in this case to white nationalists explicitly. As journalists correctly noted, there is no journalism if white nationalists have the opportunity to shape the world in the way they would like. Furthermore, as a moral imperative, white nationalists challenge central foundational beliefs shared throughout journalism: in particular the belief in an open and inclusive public sphere. This is a role with substantial history in legacy journalism that has found increased acceptance in digital journalism. Undertaking this role in digital journalism may be the solution that requires pushing against the norms of the field the least.

A caveat is that adversarial journalism can at times present as *first-person* journalism, when the journalist finds themselves as one of, or the primary, target of hate. As Hungarian journalist Andreás Pethó notes for *NiemanLab,* this "find your fire" approach can backfire when white supremacy is built into the political structure itself—as with, according to the SPLC, the recent nature of the US Republican Party and in many European countries.

> When you come under attack from political forces as a journalist, it is tempting to make yourself the center of the story. Nothing would make autocrats happier, as it would reinforce their argument that journalists are out to get them… If you act like an advocate, you should not be surprised if you become viewed as such. Sure, you may become popular in certain corners, but others will be skeptical of your work, and this will limit your audience…. I'm not saying that nobody should speak up. On the contrary, I hope that lots of people — human rights defenders, advocacy groups, or simply just average social media users — will do it. But if you are in the news business, your greatest possible contribution to saving democracies is doing your job and doing it well...We should focus on doing that as if our survival depended on it. Because in some places it already does (Pethó, 2022, June 9).

All of the proposed solutions related to roles require accommodation on the part of journalists. Happily, two of Cheruiyot's (2022) suggestions result in journalists actually doing *less* work in already stressful situations; whereas, the other two simply require journalists to adjust their existing practices to accommodate the fact that covering hate groups should be considered an *exceptional* form of reporting for digital journalists. By *exceptional* reporting, what I mean is that it is reporting which by nature should defy the norms of digital journalism and require journalists to reconnect to the normative goals of their profession.

Conclusion and Considerations for the Labor of Journalists

Sadly, what this text has no solution for is perhaps the most problematic part of this situation: that the hate itself exists. This text is of course a text by a former journalist, about journalists and for people concerned about issues of journalism, but this does not negate the very serious situation many journalists find themselves in: obligated to cover issues of hate and place themselves in emotionally and mentally precarious situations (Waisbord, 2020).

In other words, by nature, digital journalists are still expected to undertake significant emotional labor for which there are no easy solutions. Emotional work has been increasingly recognized within journalism studies (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013; Holton, Belair-Gagnon & Royal, 2021) as "personal, affective, and emotional engagement with newswork" that is central to contemporary news production (Beckett & Deuze, 2016). Journalists naturally become emotionally invested in their work and it would be easy to see how coverage of hate would easily arouse not only anger but sadness, concern and fear. Indeed, as Allison Steinke and Valerie Bélair-Gagnon (2020) found "journalists that cover social justice topics seek to guide, motivate, and inspire audiences by utilizing emotion in the stories they choose to cover" (p. 1566) and that emotions and emotional labor are central components of their news production.

This emotional labor would naturally mean that—to some degree the hate journalists experience in their profession they by extension also feel as an individual. "Journalists tend to become emotionally attached to 'their' medium" (Waschková Císařová, 2021, p. 1665) and

hence, they can root their identity in their entire career history and local media engagement. Journalists facing such personal attacks, and forced to put themselves in situations where they must endure them (Perreault & Miller, under review) would naturally manifest "frustration and anxiety around the increased but often unacknowledged, relational labor" (Bossio & Holton, 2019, page 8). As Waschková Císařová (2021) echoed, "journalists' manifest deepening contradictions in their feelings towards work, the media organisation" that employed them. Indeed, "the increasing volatility of their emotional responses has led to a general dissatisfaction and the growing importance of emotional management" (p. 1665). If journalists are indeed tasked with reporting on the growing issue of white nationalism, another consideration is the expanded need for mental health support among journalists.

In other words, if these are the situations digital journalists are being asked to undertake—and it does indeed seem as though these situations are more prevalent (Waisbord, 2020)—then it is easy to see why so many journalists might find it enticing to leave the field behind (Matthews, Belair-Gagnon & Carlson, 2021). Journalists in normal reporting conditions find the expectations for emotional and mental labor difficult to manage. Nick Matthews and his team argue that "the lack of institutional support on work-life balance and mental health paired with the institutional demands to be "all in" and always on, and the consequential lack of professional–personal life balance, led journalists to have a sense of disconnection from both their personal and professional lives" (Matthews, Belair-Gagnon, & Carlson, 2021, p. 12; see also Bossio and Holton, 2019; Reinardy, 2011). How much more so is the expectation that on top of the digital labor of journalism to enter into hostile work situations and bear the brunt of harassment?

With this I offer a caveat to the arguments of this text: we may be asking too much.

Journalism is many things, but essential among them is that it is a public service. Doesn't the public also have a role to play in this? I provide some ways to address the hate digital journalists need to report on, but that doesn't address the larger problem of hate in society. Certainly hate has roots in human nature, but the manifestations of it detailed in this book are more specific and have clear referents in societal injustice, uneven access to work, uneven access to resources. This hate requires the best of all of us, no matter what our profession and it will take all of us to fight for the world we would like our children to inherit.

In the introduction, we delineated the problem of hate facing digital journalism—reflected its increasing prominence and prevalence, and the problems faced when journalists struggle to negotiate issues of hate. In chapter one, we troubled the distinction of "digital" journalism and provided clarity regarding the ways in which I think about digital journalism in this text. Furthermore, it became clear in this chapter exactly how digital journalism may be uniquely vulnerable to being leveraged for the purpose of hate. In chapter two, we examined the first area of vulnerability for digital journalism: the audience. In conversation with Jacob Nelson's excellent (2021) text, we reflected on the possibility that digital journalism's audience isn't always who journalists think it is. As digital journalists learned the hard way, if their normative focus is in the service of the audience this could be at the expense at innumerable other values within journalism. In chapter three, we explored two related vulnerabilities within digital journalism: the problem of *churnalism* and the problem of "being first." As we reflected here, the expediency bias within journalism sometimes placed journalists in situations where

they can end up aggregating information that has not had time to be fact checked. Similarly, the speed of digital journalism reporting precludes the sort of hard-nosed scrutiny incumbent on journalists attempting to create great journalism on the issue of hate. In chapter four, we investigated the vulnerabilities of sourcing and definition making in digital journalism. Given the speed of digital journalism practice, definitions can often be left to causes and sources—the result of which can lead to their own problems in even accurately identifying what hate is.

That brings us back here. In the conclusion, I offer potential solutions to the problem of hate in digital journalism—a solution rooted firmly in the normative history of journalism more so than in digitization. The solutions seems simple but require us to practice slower journalism: first, I encourage digital journalists to disengage comments from stories related to issues of hate given that we know hate groups tend to use such forums to promote themselves. Second, I discourage digital journalists from live reporting of events related to hate given that such reporting can play into the hands of bad actors that are banking on the confusion in such cases. Third, I encourage a heavier reliance on official sources and discourage the sort of "man on the street" or even the "community member vs. hate group member" reporting that is more liable to grant play to narratives of hate than to challenge them. And fourth, I encourage digital journalists to consider classic journalistic *storytelling* in reporting on hate that privileges context—context for the bad actors, context for the hate, and even reflective context for the reporting of journalists.

Reflexivity and Avenues for Future Research

I'll admit that over the past few years of talking to journalists, more than once journalists left me in stunned silence at their experiences: there was the matter-of-fact description of a church burning, the young lesbian journalist who described *choosing* to work in a rural environment so she could help educate an audience that sometimes hated but often just misunderstood her, the journalist who had her address leaked online and then received chilling photos showcasing the way she walked to work, and the many, many journalists who confronted explicit white supremacy in their reporting but then were asked to get up the next day and grin-and-bear it.

At times the stories left me frustrated, as with many that I recounted in this book, where the very nature of how we conduct digital journalism—and frankly, the way I learned to do it—seemed to work against us. The present text, I would boldly offer, presents a helpful guide in considering how digital journalism can adapt to better manage the growing issue of hostility in our world. But I hope this is not the end of the conversation.

A few areas that deserve further exploration:

1) Journalism education and scholastic journalism in confronting hate—At the 2022 Southeast Colloquium, journalism professor Meg Heckman presented a study conducted with colleagues from Northeastern University of the experiences of harassment among student journalists (Chung et al., 2022). It was a devastating study and frustrating to realize that apprentice journalists have little opportunity to be trained prior to confronting many of the issues in this book. In the academy however, academics do have the ability to enact change. It would be valuable to understand, from the standpoint of hate groups, the experiences at college and high school

campuses. Several journalists in this study referred to stories about scrawled hate speech at schools—how do college or even grade school journalists undertake reporting on these activities when they occur? If our student journalists must confront such hate in their education, how can the academy better educate journalists for the hostility in the field?

2) One area that became clear during the interviews—and is not at all surprising—is that the experiences of women and marginalized communities in reporting on white nationalism were much more fraught than the experiences of white men reporting on white nationalism. In particular, it would be worthwhile to consider how ethnically-focused digital news sites manage this sort of reporting (such as among Black Americans, Indigenous peoples and Romani peoples where these experiences are both prolific and often underreported). Given Valérie Bélair-Gagnon and her teams (2022) argument regarding disconnection skills, it would be valuable to focus more explicitly on how digital journalists from marginalized communities and representing marginalized communities mitigate the challenges in reporting on hate.
3) Many journalists described the white nationalism they confronted on comment threads. While this book focused primarily on the "hot button" issues that would be of obvious interest to white nationalists, there seems sufficient evidence that comment threads more broadly are a part of white nationalist strategy (Wolfgang, 2021a, 2021b). Many journalists could speak specifically to examples where they had produced news about a topic unrelated to race/ethnicity and they nevertheless found themselves confronted with white nationalism in the comment threads. This demands further examination, particularly to ideal solutions given that much of comment moderation is automated or outsourced.

I'm reminded of an interview I conducted with a digital journalist. The journalist went to a Ku Klux Klan rally, spotting police presence, angry Church groups, counter protesters and there watching all of it was what the journalist described as a "relatively suburban guy there with his kid up on his shoulder." After approaching the guy, he asked him, out of interest "why would you bring your child to an event like this?"

He had an answer ready, "If I haven't brought my son to see things like this he could fall for [these] ploys."

The "relatively suburban guy" believes what I believe, and what we should all believe—that issues of hate require the proper context in order to understand them and respond to them effectively. The norms of digital journalism are not natively set up to accommodate this.

Norms can adapt and they should adapt in this instance. We must think differently if we're to challenge white supremacist hostility in our world. My modest proposal is that digital journalism view issues of hate rooted in the normative tradition of traditional journalism—the result of which will lead to stronger reporting and audience better prepared to tackle the deeper illnesses taking root in our societies.

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