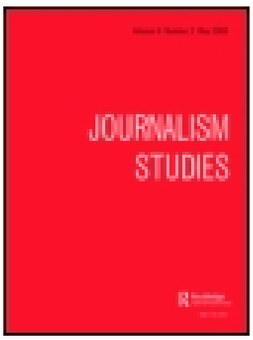

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JOURNALISM AND THE "SOCIAL SPHERE" Reclaiming a foundational concept for beyond politics and the public sphere

Kristy Hess and **Robert Gutsche Jr.**

This article realigns the field of journalism studies to acknowledge within itself the multiple dimensions of social life and, as well, to provide greater clarity on the social and cultural forms and functions of journalism. It reclaims the importance of the "social sphere" as a key foundational concept for journalism studies with its links to collective identity, sociability, social honour, and soft coercion. We argue the relevance of the social sphere has been subsumed over time by the dominance of the "public sphere" and, most recently, has been considered synonymous with the rise of social networking platforms and tools. Here, we recommend that scholarship shifts from the dominant influence of political theory in explanations of journalism's societal function to the value of critical cultural sociology, which reconciles power with the basic human desire for social order within individual–institutional–cultural interactions informed by and through journalism.

KEYWORDS collective identity; common good; myth; public sphere; ritual; sociability; social capital; social order; social spheres

Introduction

When homeowners plan extensive renovations in Australia, there is a term surveyors refer to as "re-stumping." It is where the structural footings of a building are assessed and work is needed to remove or strengthen supports that have rotted or weathered. The rationale for re-stumping is clear: there is no point in advancing the structure's integrity without a solid foundation. When it comes to understanding journalism's relationship to social life—or, indeed, social order, as this special issue seeks to address—we argue that foundational work is required to provide a stronger foothold for scholars in this space. Specifically, we excavate an integral key concept for journalism studies: that of social sphere(s).

Our call for evaluating—or re-evaluating—the role of social spheres in journalism studies might seem superfluous given the increased attention to "the social" that scholars have applied to advancements in journalistic uses and influences of social media (Garcia de Torres and Hermida 2017; Goode 2009; Hill and Lashmar 2014; Phillips 2012; Singer 2015). It is our contention, however, that the real potential of social spheres as a foundational concept has not been fully illuminated by those well placed to light the scholarly runway for journalism studies. In fact, we argue, the flurry of scholarship that emerges in massive progressions of media technologies and alterations to business models sustaining news all leads to diffused understandings of just what is occurring in practical and theoretical developments of journalism. In this movement, ironically, the richness of what the "social sphere" offers journalism studies has become slighted.

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Social sphere(s) are not new. As we highlight, the concept is as old as social theory itself (Arendt 1958; Bourdieu 1989, 1990; Durkheim 1958; Sennett 1977, 2012; Weber 1947, 1968). Yet, theoretically speaking, our full appreciation of the "social" has largely been subsumed by a term that has become almost synonymous with journalism: the *public* sphere. A key argument in this paper is that the dominance of the public sphere in journalism studies—with its emphasis on political action and participation, democracy, deliberation, and public opinion—overshadows the importance of the wider social sphere. Habermas (1974, 49) himself, for example, reminds us that the public sphere is just *one dimension* of the social—"a realm of social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed."[1]

Misunderstanding or equating the political and social realms, we know, is not restricted to the journalistic field alone. Across disciplines, confusion relating to the delineation between social and public worlds "is as old as the translation of Greek terms into Latin and their adaption to Roman and Christian thought" (Arendt 1958, 28). This article, therefore, is designed to realign the field to acknowledge within itself the multiple dimensions of social life and, as well, to reaffirm the social and cultural forms and functions of journalism. In turn, we define social spheres as the realm of our everyday within which our social lives help us make sense of who we are as individuals and ultimately as collectives. It is within these spheres where we construct connections to others beyond our intimate lives and where appropriate, meaningful behaviour and practices are negotiated.

Certainly, these actions appear in an array of social environments and situations, including those that are mediated through journalism. News media plays a distinct role in establishing social norms which function as forms of social control and order, maintaining approved standards of daily life, institutional structures and practices, and dominant explanations of the world around us. Indeed, as Goffman (1959) argues, journalism serves as a "front stage" in which social norms are presented through setting and performance and addressed by audiences through the reflectivity of internalized norms and expectations for behaviour. Therefore, to explore the multifaceted context of social spheres further, we suggest scholarship shift from the influence of political theory in explanations of journalism's societal function to the value of critical cultural sociology and theory (Lichterman 2016; Turner 2009), which reconciles power with the basic human desire for social order within individual–institutional–cultural interactions and to complicate issues of social class, honour and disadvantage.

Underpinned by the battle to uphold a common good rather than a "public good" (see Hess 2017), the social sphere becomes a permeable shell through which journalism scholars can better probe ideas of collectivity, virtue and vice, ritual, myth, sociability, social honour, and control. Such existing scholarship in journalism studies appears scattered within rank-and-file debates about methodology, empirical inquiry, and town-and-gown divides between scholars, practitioners, and citizens—divides that will continue to occur until addressed through integration with critical and cultural theory. As a result, the public sphere as a foundational concept is not entirely equipped to build understanding around such dimensions of journalism and journalistic influence. A complementary construct that rotates on a broader philosophical axis is needed.

To position our arguments, this paper is divided into two main sections. We begin by highlighting the importance of salvaging "the social" from the tsunami of scholarship on digital tools, connectivity, and social media. We argue that in an era when social networking and social media are now part of the everyday lexicon of both journalism practice and

studies, there has never been a more important time to reassess the notion and value of the "social."

Our next challenge is to separate clearly and distinguish understandings of the public sphere from social spheres. It is not our intention to discount the importance of matters political and participatory from journalism studies, rather we wish to ensure there is an accessible complementary framework for scholars exploring the social dimensions of news. We tease out the significance of the social sphere through four key dimensions: the common good, collective identity through performance of ritual and mythical practice, sociability, and social coercion and control.

Subsuming the Importance of the Social in Journalism Studies

In journalism studies, dominant understandings of the social is shifting into dangerous territory. Increasingly, the idea of the social is considered synonymous with social media and social networking, in which the public writ large is engaged (or is invited to engage) in a mediated sphere of public meaning (Dutton and Dubois 2015). Terms such as social journalism (Hermida 2012), social news (Goode 2009), and the sociability of news (Phillips 2012) have been coined to explore how social networking is shaping journalism, from its celebrated fifth estate function (Jerico 2012) to audience and journalistic engagement and participation, and perceptions of digital platforms (Holton, Lewis, and Coddington 2016). Phillips (2012, 669), for example, positions "sociability" in journalism as news produced in a form that is capable of spreading virally. Others, such as Correia (2012, 99), seek to clarify the conditions for an effective public sphere in relation to online journalism, emphasizing the desire for "reason without coercion" and "reciprocity between participants in collective debate."

It is our contention, however, that the significance of structure/agency over rational action, the role of subtle and/or blatant coercion in digital journalism practice, and its relationship to power deserve attention. What is often overlooked in studies that examine the relationship between journalism practice and social media tools is the very significance of the social and cultural life worlds that drive demand for these new platforms.

We acknowledge that inroads have been made in exploring the relationship between social media and journalism in mobilizing collective action and challenging established political institutions that reinforce social order. Events such as the "Arab Spring"—dubbed the Twitter revolution—demonstrate the way in which media systems and communication networks have complexly conditioned and facilitated such uprisings (Cottle 2011; Issawi and Cammaerts 2015). Yet still, a focus on historical revolts and their relationship to journalism inadvertently sidesteps the significance of our everyday social practices around news media that reinforce moral norms and shapes social order (see Goffman 1963).

The importance of balancing journalism's power to shape social order both in moments of political and apolitical crisis and in negotiating the banality of the everyday is what renders the social sphere necessary to journalism studies. Too often scholarship addressing news platforms and processes of participation in digital spaces emphasizes the desire for a utopian "public sphere" of involvement and open and free communication guided by a media-centric and politically literate engaged and empowered citizenry. The public sphere—which "comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble [freely] to form a public body" (Habermas 1974, 49), is one of the most widely

accepted, discussed, and critiqued concepts in journalism studies (i.e. Allan 2005; Lunt and Livingston 2013; McNair, Flew, and Harrington 2017; Simpson 2014).

A review of scholarship in two leading journalism journals (*Journalism Studies* and *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*) highlights that the "public sphere" along with "politics" have been among the 10 most-frequently adopted keywords in discussions about journalism between 2007 and 2013 (see Steensen and Ahva 2015). Since the appearance of Habermas' major texts from the 1960s (for full discussion, see Hansen 2014), the public sphere has been both adopted and challenged as a framework to discuss the relationship between media and democracy. That the social sphere in journalism studies has been overshadowed by the more politically oriented idea of the public sphere is of no surprise. Propagated by Western ideals and socio-political globalization, journalism is celebrated for its democratic, Fourth Estate function, for lubricating wheels of democracy, keeping the powerful accountable, and serving as a conduit of information that helps people connect and deliberate about public affairs.

While it is not our intention to provide an extensive review or critique (see especially Fraser 1990) of the public sphere, we recognize that its dominance—coupled with the emergence of social media—increasingly obscures the conceptual significance of the social and its relationship to journalism studies. Inherent in these realms are challenges to sovereignty of collectives and individuals to operate freely in society without mandated compliance with dominant social norms and expectations of behaviour.

(Un)masking the Social: Excavating Foundations of Social Spheres

Our emphasis on social spheres complements and extends scholarship that reinforces the importance of the social and apolitical dimensions of the news media (Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham 2007; Couldry 2012; Dahlgren 2009; Ettema 2005; Hanitzch and Vos 2016). While scholars tease out the mediated role of everyday thoughts, conversations, and activities, they are not always explored specifically through a journalism studies lens and the objective is often to examine the preconditions for effective democratic politics. Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham (2007), for instance, lay solid foundations for journalism and social spheres in their research on the "mediated public connection," which highlights the importance of theoretical models beyond deliberative democracy to detail the mediating role of everyday thoughts, conversation, and activities that may, under certain conditions, bridge the private and public spheres (Livingstone 2005).

At the root of much work on social life, Bourdieu's (1989, 1990) work on *social spaces* or *fields* can explicate how journalism both shapes and is shaped by society and embodied practices associated with news (i.e. Benson and Neveu 2005; Hess and Waller 2017; Robinson 2017). Journalism studies scholars—even Bourdieu himself (see Bourdieu 1998)—often focus on the relationship between journalists and other elite actors or the internal logics of the journalistic field (Benson and Neveu 2005; Schultz 2007; Willig 2012). While Bourdieu's reference to capital, habitus, and practice serves as a complementary set of tools to examine social spheres (beyond that of sites of competition), there remains limitations within his articulations when it comes to analysing intersections and relationships between news and everyday audiences.[2]

In advocating for social spheres, we also move beyond the "grand dichotomy" between public and private spheres explored in wider scholarship where the focus is on the blurring of boundaries between the world of family, intimacy, and personal life

versus the public and the political. Some social theorists (Arendt 1958; Hansen 1997; Lii 1998; Wolfe 1997) and media scholars (see especially Papacharissi 2010) contend that the emergence of the social is neither private nor public and that there are problems and gaps created when the public and the private are treated as exclusive dimensions of the social world. Papacharissi (2010) suggests the value of studying the "trichotomy" (see also Wolfe 1997) when exploring questions about society and digital media—our aim here to emphasize the significance and rebuild the social as a key foundational concept for journalism studies.

Of course, the importance of social spheres stretches beyond contemporary discussions around the technological distortion of public–private boundaries. From Durkheim's (1958) functionalist account of the reproduction of social structures to Weber's (1968) emphasis on symbolic domination in social life, early philosophical thought has perhaps always positioned the social sphere as something distinct from the political. Notions of collectivity, community, ritual, and myth were explored, albeit critically, by Habermas himself (see also Bertland 2000), but take a backseat in journalism theory to political participation in the public sphere.

An important distinction between the social and public sphere to journalism is that while the public sphere tends to emphasis reason and language in its operation, the social sphere stresses sense, body, time, and performance (Lii 1998). The social sphere, in this articulation, represents a shared living context in which sensual perceptions of each individual member of a collective are articulated and from which a social fabric among members is developed. The role of performance (as a presupposition to practice), for example, enables individuals to advance and reassess what journalism is and stands for, particularly in the digital age, by both expressing, affirming, reproducing, and transforming it (Warde 2015).

Below, we examine the role of "the social" within journalism in the following sections which express (1) journalism as a custodian of the common good, (2) the function of journalism in forming notions of collective identities, (3) journalistic processes of sociability, and (4) the action of journalism as soft coercion.

Curating the "Common Good": Journalism as Moral Compass

In journalism studies, the public sphere has largely been aligned with understandings of the public good and public interest. It is our contention that the social sphere is underpinned by the common good (Hess 2017). Here, morality and civility take a much more pronounced position along with the battle over "good versus evil," right from wrong, notions of "community," virtue, and collective identity (Drakard 2010; Gutsche and Salkin 2016). The common good—a universal idea constantly challenged and re-negotiated in certain social contexts—offers a deliberate shift from normative democratic models of journalism (Hutchins Commission 1947; Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1956) and categorizes aspects of society beyond issues of politics and governance, towards ideas (and ideals) of justice, social life, liberty, and culture (Hollenbach 2002; Riordan 2008).[3]

Habermas argued that individuals within an ideal public sphere could rise above oppressive forms of social and political power to reach or debate a "common good." A key distinction here is to align understandings of the common good with Bourdieu's position on universalism. Here our understanding of journalism moves beyond rational action and deliberation to contend that society expects certain individuals and institutions to

reinforce powerful *doxic* attitudes, placing those who are seen as central to generating and negotiating their meaning in given contexts in a position of symbolic power, such as journalists (Bourdieu 1990; Hess 2017). When it comes to producing everyday news, for instance, reporters work according to core values and pressures from within the journalistic field, but when core values in society are threatened, journalists switch to presenting a cultural narrative that moves the public mind back towards the dominant cultural order (i.e. Nossek and Berkowitz 2007).

The rise of new digital media spaces and the emergence of "fake news" highlight the importance of certain institutions which society expects to perform the role of monitoring and mediating acceptable behaviour, language, and values in social life. Journalism as performance is never fully determined by accumulated history but is the re-appropriation of a habitus and a cultural repertoire in a new and uncertain situation (Rao 2010). Performances of "journalism" can be judged correct or incorrect in that they are assessed in terms of their acceptability within society.

Consider the contentious relationship between Facebook, Google, and traditional mainstream journalism. As competition to control the social intensifies, the newer players on the block now face regular criticism by the press for failing to take moral and social responsibility for content, especially in "good versus evil" discourse around terrorism, paedophilia, and prostitution. Headlines and editorials such as "Time for Facebook and Google to Act Against Terror," "News Blasts Facebook," and "Fighting Evil in Cyberspace" increasingly appear in global mainstream news content. In this way, news media adopt the performative role of civic custodian as a point of distinction—not just in terms of individual ethical practice but in what the very essence of journalism represents and stands for in regards to a perceived common good. Cultural arbitration is a resource of power and, in this analysis, serves in direct opposition to the "objective" bystander role widely adopted in journalism practice. We acknowledge that dominant cultural standards of any social order are fundamentally arbitrary and stem from the activities and interests of particular elites who possess the power to shape reality (Schwartz 1997). This means we must also place greater emphasis on reflexivity in journalism practice—encouraging those in the media to interrogate their own social location and disentangle how issues of power shape their individual and professional interpretations of a situation being covered in the news (Behar 1996; Hobart 2010).

Journalism and Collective Identity: Boundaries via Myth and Ritual

The ability of people to create a shared common world through news media should not be narrowed to the deliberation of matters of political concern; rather, this ability depends on members interacting with each other through various forms of performance, meetings, and everyday practices, ultimately creating a social fabric (Lii 1998). This, we contend, is exemplified through boundary work and understandings of news myth and ritual.

Constructions of "community" and of collective identity (for both journalists and audiences) are largely perceived within journalism studies as a public resource. But these notions of togetherness do not evolve in the public sphere, instead they are formed within the realm of the social. Habermas is frequently criticized for his theories relating to community being constructed according to an unduly narrow construal of legitimate argumentation and democratic participation (Elliott 2009). Also there remain tensions

between interpretations and articulations of collectivity, functionalism, and the maintenance and expanding of organizational power, especially in the context of media (Couldry 2003a; Curran 2002). Ideas of community and collectivity are socially constructed and "imagined" (Anderson 1983) or powerful attitudes that news media is well documented as serving an integral function.

Journalistic boundary work helps to explore the role of journalism in shaping centre–periphery relations, and the patrolling, maintenance, and changing performative nature of journalism in constructing socially constructed boundaries (Gutsche 2014a, 2014b). Too often, however, boundary work is adopted within journalism studies to provide an inward-looking approach around the norms and conventions shaping the journalistic profession. For example, boundary work is used to explore how journalists cement their professional standing from others who "claim" to be journalists (Carlson and Lewis 2015; Davidson 2013). While understanding journalists' interactions with news norms is relevant, boundary work can also be particularly useful when examining journalists' interactions with wider social spaces and the relationship to social order, especially at the intersection with the public sphere—for example, the role and expectations of journalism in shaping understandings of "us" and "them" in geopolitical and cultural contexts (i.e. journalism and the relationship to nationalism/localism in Western democracies such as Brexit and the rise of Donald Trump). Relatedly, a concept such as "community" has for too long been a taken-for-granted assumption in journalism research, especially at the local level (Gutsche and Salkin 2016; Hess and Waller 2017), as though the idea operates within single interpretations of geographic territory or a single homogenous group. In the end, this approach provides little scope to acknowledge unevenness, diversity, and contestation inherent in practices and inquiries of boundary work.

Concepts of myth and ritual position the value of time, place, and context within the social sphere (Carey 1989; Lule 2001; McDevitt, Briziarelli, and Klocke 2013). Myth and ritual are not new, grand revelations to journalism studies, but highlighting their significance is necessary in re-positioning the significance of the social sphere. Journalists draw on mythical explanations and archetypes to perform a powerful meaning-making function in which to reinforce values, beliefs, and behaviours in a given context (Gutsche and Salkin 2016) and make sense of news events and experiences that are difficult to explain (Ettema 2005). Yet at times within journalism studies, this cultural function tends to be situated in the shadows of a more widely adopted normative set of news values within professional journalism practice as applied to matters of public interest (i.e. Galtung and Ruge 1981). Habermas (1984) rightfully highlights that mythical reinforcement by social elites can impede innovative and critical thought and yet this aspect of his work has been largely overlooked in journalism studies. Consider the myth of motherhood that fails in news coverage of infanticide to acknowledge the hegemony of maternal expectations of women (Barnett 2011), the role of deviance in inexplicable hatred, such as school shootings of innocents, and racialized policing and social policies through mythical explanations of social conditions and behaviours (Gutsche 2017).

Likewise, ritual analysis—emphasized by Carey (1989) as media's role in maintaining society in time and celebrating, creating, and representing shared beliefs—enables us to tease out ways in which journalism serves as the legitimate centre of our social lives in a period of apparent digital disruption. Non-functionalist accounts of media and ritual have developed in scholarship and are particularly relevant here as they put media

power front and centre of the discussion related to social spheres (Cottle 2006; Couldry 2003b, 2012; Sumiala 2013). News media have always performed an important role in legitimating social, cultural, and religious rituals and milestones, such as the appearance of birth, death, and marriage columns, for instance, or determining who in a given social context will be remembered for their contribution to civic and social life in the "news" pages under obituaries—paid and otherwise. Yet the relationship between news and everyday social order via "banal" news items remains a largely under-explored aspect of journalism studies.

Journalism, Sociability, and Connection

Despite well-established links between collective identity and news media, the role of journalism in actively forming opportunities and guiding everyday sociability has struggled to find its place in journalism theory. The social sphere illuminates the space between the formation of social bonds that serve as a precondition for democratic, political action (Putnam 2000) and the levels of sociability (Simmel 2009) that shape our everyday encounters. Our degree and desire to be "sociable," after all, is not a new phenomenon that has suddenly emerged with the advent of Facebook and Twitter. There is significant advantage that comes to those institutions and individuals who help guide our "playful" or apolitical levels of sociability—as evidenced by the popularity of Facebook. Indeed, social networking has pushed journalism to the periphery when it comes to accessing certain types of basic information (Peters and Broersma 2017). Consider, for example, the changing nature of Facebook "buy, sell and swap" pages that serve geographic areas across the globe. Many of these pages have come to resemble digital versions of early twentieth-century newspapers (Hess and Waller 2017), providing a platform not only for individuals to sell their wares, but to feature a variety of posts from those desperately searching for lost animals and objects, to messages of thank you, acknowledging random acts kindness among strangers, or announcing births and marriages. Such "news" content is often given short shrift within the journalism academy, yet this communication highlights the value that the social dimension of news plays in our everyday lives and the role journalism might reassess or re-assert in the digitial age. "Banal" types of information (Williams and Harte 2016)—from traffic reporting to weather stories—ground basic social order via interpretation guided by dominant ideologies as a normalized function of the legitimizing and authorizing of social institutions. Positioning journalists as performing the role of social connector through concepts such as mediated social capital (Hess 2013) further provides scope to acknowledge the active connecting capacity of journalists as a resource of power.

Of course, there are times when our level of sociability and connection with strangers is required in the interests of immediate social order, such as in times of natural disaster. In the lead up to Hurricane Irma, which devastated parts of the United States in 2017, there were reports of dozens of "fake news" stories on social media providing misinformation about the storm, highlighting the increasing importance of and need for legitimate channels to guide our actions during times of crisis (Rannard 2017). Social actions of individuals and collectives—the where to go and what to do in times of disaster—coupled with stories of survival and hardship may be mistakenly positioned within the public sphere. Yet, as Lii (1998, 117) argues, the public sphere "rises above any private view in order to reach a common mind" while the social sphere creates a shared living context in which the sensual perceptions of individual members are

articulated and a "social bond amongst strangers is formed." A sense of place and *communitas*, the latter well noted by social scientists, often occur in human societies during times of natural disaster where people consciously ritualize and mythologize their actions through media, creating an expanded sense of self, and a purpose that can leave may survivors with a sense of undergoing a profoundly meaningful experience (Jencson 2001; Turner 1969). Journalist's ability to reinforce and appeal to sense of place was evidenced by BuzzFeed in the wake of Hurricane Irma with the story "The Only Place Worse Than Florida is Everywhere Else," where reporter Orin Heidelberg wrote: "among those who can leave but choose not to, most do so out of a very Floridian mixture of hubris and sense of place. There is a deep sense of pride among us Floridians … Floridians would rather go down with the ship than have to live anywhere else" (Heidelberg 2017). Such moments of confusion, contestation, and clarity, however, also become trademark moments of meaning-making for journalists to align audiences with institutional authority and explanation (Robinson 2009; Schudson 1995). We discuss this element of social spheres in relationship to journalism next.

Soft Coercion in Journalistic Construction of Reality

It is the social sphere—not the public sphere—in which our lives are characterized by informal rules and fluid negotiation, as compared with the more formal legal and political structures of the public. Sets of collective and approved social beliefs and behaviours expressed through journalism function as hegemonic tools of maintaining the status quo (Bourdieu 1991; Goffman 1963).

There are variables at play when it comes to journalism's role in reinforcing acceptable behaviour. One variable is the notion of social honour and approval (Goffman 1963), a form of soft coercion that reinforces moral codes and social rules against which approved acts receive applause while others are cast as sinister (see also Bourdieu 1991; Weber 1947). In Durkheim's view, for instance, the social realm provides a space for private people to concentrate together, often for celebration—a view that resonates with Carey's (albeit functionalist account) of media and ritual. News media, with its established symbolic power to shape and determine "what is good" or worthy of applause, creates in the social sphere a "type of consciousness which supersedes the isolated, private individual" (Lii 1998, 129). Consider news media's tendency to place "centre stage" those who exemplify virtuous behaviour in its many forms—from stories of everyday heroes, courage, to random acts of bravery or celebrating the commitment of long-serving volunteers. The flipside to this, of course, means certain individuals are always subconsciously excluded or made "invisibile" in given social contexts.[4]

The other variable at play in the function of order via journalism is the consequences for individuals and collectives of failing to uphold the rule (Goffman 1963). In the very same crime reporting that depicts particular acts as devious, journalists juxtapose rules of law against which the crime (and criminal) is judged. For example, the practice of media shaming—the performance of a powerful cultural practice of publically ostracizing individuals for intolerable social or cultural behaviour—positions news media as the modern-day symbolic pillory (Noelle-Neumann 1993; Petley 2013; Waller and Hess 2014). While ordinary individuals are now armed with mobile phones or other devices and quick to expose the wrongdoings of others—a process known as souseveillance (Gutsche 2017), journalists continue to perform the role of "arbiters of shame" (Heo and Park 2017; Hess and Waller 2017).

Of course, the difficulty in this conversation is examining the degree to which something is truly "right," "wrong," or "virtuous." As these moral codes fluctuate across collectives and over time, operating outside the judgement of a single moment's sensibilities, journalism serves not only to position social acts within an analysis of sensibilities but within an overarching, dominant ideological system of mores. This power can be too intense for some journalists and yet is rarely discussed in textbooks on "how to practise" journalism. One American reporter, for example, in a reflexive piece for *The Guardian* wrote "Why I Quit: Local Newspapers Can Needlessly Ruin Lives for Empty Clicks" (Pauli 2017). She continues:

> As the sole crime reporter at a daily paper in Butte, Montana in charge of putting out the daily blotter, I found the process for deciding which poor residents of my city to shame completely arbitrary … we blow small crimes out of proportion and ruin people's lives for pennies, all while missing the big picture. (Pauli 2017)

News practices that align conduct within social spheres function as well to banish undesirables not only from social and public spheres, but from dominant, journalistic storytelling and explanation of social and cultural life (Nichols and McChesney 2005). As journalistic values and norms of information-gathering, assessment, and production operate in conjunction with fellow social institutions of power maintenance (i.e. government, police, entertainment and popular culture enterprise, faith communities), those with counter-narratives risk being funnelled out of dominant discourse. What remains, then, in journalistic work—in part because of pressures of newswork, in part because of issues of power—are voices and perspectives of a select few who maintain acceptable social practices and positions. These voices, therefore, boost fallacies of "community" in a given context in which discourse and contestation appear, but which also exudes elite, dominant articulations of public life that represent idealistic views of journalistic functions of democratic speech and involvement.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to excavate the social sphere and to reclaim its foundational importance to journalism studies. For too long the dominance of the public sphere has cast a shadow over its philosophical bedfellow, and it is now critical to reclaim such an historically rich concept before it is accepted as some new phenomena attached to social networking platforms. It is our contention that the philosophical origins of the social realm and its importance to journalism existed long before Mark Zuckerberg and the rise of Facebook as a news and "community" platform. Peters and Broersma (2017, 13) argue that in the changing media environment, we need to study new everyday news habits, along with "de-ritualisations and re-ritualisations" if we want to understand what journalism is or, more to the point what it might be, in the changing media environment.

Moving forward, we suggest that there is much work to be conducted at the intersection between the social and public spheres, where issues of power—both the ability to suppress and emancipate—are most apparent and prevalent. Social control and surveillance are amplified, for example, where social and political power intersect. Such a layered approach also places emphasis on the knowledge-seeker or scholar-interpreter as observing and interacting from a position of power. Indeed, the frequent lack of such reflexivity

and the inward-looking observations in journalism studies scholarship that seek social justice and change through increased citizen participation and public involvement in communication hinder the ability of scholarship and journalism itself to hold open court for creating a just society.

Our intention here is to provide a foundational framework that journalism scholars can relate to and juxtapose—one that acknowledges the power of media to shape collective identity, perform boundary maintenance, guide sociability, and play a role in soft coercion as it relates to social order and our everyday lives.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

NOTES

1. Habermas (1974, 49) defined the public sphere as: "A realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed [and] access is guaranteed to all citizens. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion—that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions—about matters of general interest."
2. Scholars such as Couldry (2003a, 655) suggest that field theory does not take into account the role of "ordinary" people who do not compete for resources necessarily or belong to any particular field. He contends: "field-based research … avoids both a general account of the impacts of media representations on social space and a detailed account of media audiences. Its explanatory dynamics are located entirely in the internal workings of the journalistic field or in the specific connections between those internal workings and the operations of other fields that come into contact with it" (655).
3. In this article we do not join the debate about the specific types of virtuous practices or character traits we expect of journalists, or how a truly moral journalist might behave, rather we highlight the value of the common good as a universal idea negotiated in context-specific situations.
4. For example, couples in long-standing *de facto*, or non-traditional relationships are rarely celebrated in the news nor is the single mother holding three jobs to support a family commended for her courage in the "news."

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