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BOTH VICTIMS AND VILLAINS: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SHIFTING PORTRAYALS OF THE UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANT IN TWO PARTISAN NEWS OUTLETS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Master of Arts
Communication, Technology, & Society

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by
Andrew Moore
December 2018

Accepted by:
Dr. Travers Scott, Committee Chair
Dr. Erin Ash
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ABSTRACT

This research was designed to examine how two examples of partisan news media contribute to America's collective understanding of unauthorized immigration, and more specifically, the immigrant himself/herself. After tracing a general history of discourses of the unauthorized immigrant in America through a review of relevant literature, these understandings of immigration were then used as a point of reference and comparison for current journalism on the topic. More than 500 articles about unauthorized immigration were collected, derived from left-leaning *Slate.com* and right-leaning *Breitbart.com.* Then, using a discursive analysis in the tradition of poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault, emergent patterns of power within the portrayals of immigrants were compared and contrasted, not just along ideological lines, but also along temporal ones, so as to show the evolution of immigration discourses from earlier coverage to those represented in the sample.

This analysis suggests that, despite ideological differences inherent in the competing immigration discourses, both *Slate* and *Breitbart* imposed their discursive will upon the immigrant subject, cultivating subject positions in their respective bodies of coverage that do not extend immigrants agency to define themselves or contribute to a better understanding of who they are. This analysis further suggests a need to reconsider and rearticulate America's expectations of journalism, more specifically to take up standards rooted in ethical and consistent position-taking, rather than false balance and artificially imposed objectivity in the name of fairness.

Keywords: Immigration, discourse, Foucault, journalism, media bias, partisanship

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my wife, Lesley Moore, who has tirelessly supported me in every single stage of my career. You have been a constant source of strength and encouragement for me as I pursue my professional goals, whether as a journalist or an academic. Thank you for your love, your patience, and your insistence that I believe in myself, despite my obstinate refusal to do so at times. You have been and continue to be my best friend.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

TITLE PAGE i

ABSTRACT ii

DEDICATION iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iv

LIST OF TABLES vii

CHAPTER

INTRODUCTION 1

I. REVIEW OF LITERATURE 3

Discourse 3
Journalism 7
Immigration, Borders, and Nationhood 20

II. RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN 27

Paradigms and Assumptions 27
Discourse Analysis 28
Data Collection 29
Data Analysis 31

III. FINDINGS 34

Descriptive Differences 34

IV. ANALYSIS 39

The Immigrant Criminal 39
The American Victim 42
The Immigrant Victim 45

Table of Contents (Continued) Page

The American Citizen as Shepherd....48
Discursive Changes....51

V. DISCUSSION....53

Limitations....56
Implications....57

REFERENCES....60

ENDNOTE....66

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	A 10-point scale of showing ideological placement of news sources' audiences	30
2	This FBI poster *Breitbart* used as a visual Aid in a an April 15, 2017 article	40
3	A stock photo providing visual aid for a *Breitbart* article reporting on a sexual assault perpetrated by an unauthorized immigrant	42
4	A family photo providing visual aid for a *Breitbart* article reporting on the murder of a U.S. citizen at the hands of an unauthorized immigrant	43
5	This family photo of an American woman accompanied a *Breitbart* article reporting on a drunk unauthorized immigrant who caused the fatal collision that killed her	44
6	This screen grab from a *Slate* article from 2017 paints a portrait, both textually and visually of the immigrant victim	45
7	A screenshot from a *Slate* article documenting the plight of immigrants who had fallen victim to a growing bureaucracy in light of restrictive executive orders	46
8	A teen immigrant waits to be processed by border agents in a photo from a 2017 *Slate* article from 2017	47
9	Protestors decry Trump's executive order limiting immigration from mostly Muslim countries in this *Slate* photo	49
10	This photo showing Americans providing legal aid to immigrants and foreign travelers accompanied a story published by *Slate* on Trump's travel ban	50

INTRODUCTION

On June 16, 2015, Donald Trump kicked off his campaign for President of the United States by reviving the debate into unauthorized immigration, specifically targeting Mexico for its apparent infringement on America's sovereign borders. As he slowly descended an escalator inside a New York City skyscraper bearing his name, Neil Young's 1989 rock anthem "Rockin' In The Free World" played in the lobby—a song sardonically hinting at a "kinder, gentler" nation in the tradition of former President George Bush—(Kole, 1989; Lerner, 2015).

"When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best," Trump said. "They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us" (Lee, 2015, paragraph 1).

Currently there are at least 11 million unauthorized immigrants[i] living in the United States (Pew, 2016). Throughout US history, the topic of immigration has repeatedly captured the attention of the American electorate, influencing decisions as to whom will govern the country. Perhaps the most notable recent example would be Trump's election as president in 2016, in which the immigration issue was crucial in generating support for his campaign (Collingwood, Remy, & Valanzuela, 2017).

Like most other political issues today, conversation regarding unauthorized immigration takes place in a highly mediated environment, with a myriad of news organizations across various platforms generating information on the topic for consumption by eager viewers, readers, and listeners. *Breitbart* and *Slate*, both online

news organizations, provide reporting on the issue of immigration, and do so in service to fundamentally different readership groups, with Breitbart popular among conservatives and Slate popular among left-leaning readers.

This thesis presents a discourse analysis in the Foucauldian tradition of these two partisan media outlets and their contributions to discursive constitution of the unauthorized immigrant as a subject of knowledge and power. My guiding questions were:

RQ1a: How do partisan media outlets contribute to discourses on unauthorized immigrants?

RQ1b: How do discourses on unauthorized immigrants found in partisan media organizations compare to past discourses on immigrants as described in the literature?

CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To contextualize my research, I examined the literature pertaining to the issues and institutions germane to my topic. This literature review first lays out the conceptual groundwork for my research, discussing the theoretical concept of discourse. Then, I go on to provide a look into the literature and discourses surrounding journalism, its relationship with democracy, and immigration in the United States.

Discourse

This study examined discourses on unauthorized immigrants as disseminated by two partisan outlets. I used a Foucauldian understanding of discourse. This approach demands more than mere examination of linguistic practice, but also of the shifting connections between language, institutions, and social practices (Foucault, 1998).

Foucault (1970) asserted that power creates knowledge, and vice versa, and that historically situated bodies of knowledge—or "epistemes"—had the effect of restricting what could and not be known. One cannot operate outside of discourse, nor escape from the limits of "power-knowledge." A study in discourse is not merely a study of conversational or linguistic units, but of the power flowing through all discursive elements in a given time pertaining to a specific body of knowledge. "Discourse" here refers to the boundaries of what a society knows or understands about a particular topic at a particular time and place. "Discourse" as a term recognizes that social knowledge is not fixed and stable, but has been "controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed" (Foucault, 1972, p. 216).

Discourse and power bear upon each other by, not just what can be known, and therefore said, but also what can be said by whom. These prohibitions, preclusions, and allowances as to who has the power to contribute to society's understanding of a topic are highly interrelated and complex, and they are constantly subject to modification as power relations change and paradigm shifts develop (Foucault, 1972). Therefore, examinations of power should consider its mobility, reversibility, and fluidity (McKerrow, 2011).

Furthermore, discourses contain moments of intertextuality, or direct awareness and responsiveness between texts. Social understandings of an issue—discourses—exist, not in isolation, but in connection to other dynamic fields of knowledge (Fairclough, 2003). Within and through interconnected discourses, the power-knowledge produced creates "subject positions." These are the social understanding of specific roles that come about due to the body of understandings created by linguistic and social practices (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011). A subject position is a socially understood ideal, such as "father" or "immigrant," against which individuals are positioned and also take up corresponding positions.

Therefore, discourse is not merely reflective or descriptive, but constitutive, deserving analysis as more than "groups of signs (signing elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Within discursive consideration are respective individuals' and populations' subjectifications, or the processes by which they regulate themselves so as to adhere to contemporary social practices or norms (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011).

There exist various critiques of the Foucauldian approach to discourse. Perhaps one of the most prominent among them comes from those see his poststructuralist treatment of power as too depoliticized to have emancipatory potential. If power, as Foucault argued, is multidirectional, complex, and impossible to discursively transcend, then it has little political utility to Marxists, traditional critical scholars, and many feminists.

"There is no agreement among feminists about the usefulness of Foucault's work for feminist theory and practice" (McLaren, 2002, p. 14). Feminist thinkers have accepted and rejected Foucault along lines of both value and utility for social justice. Liberal feminists, whose scholarship revolves around achieving equality of the sexes through legislative means, have found Foucault lacking because what they perceive as a more or less a defeatist attitude, in which he does not encourage resistance to power, since power is regenerative in the face of that resistance (McLaren, 2002). Radical feminists, whose work open proposes large-scale social change to address the vast differences between men and women, hold disdain for Foucault's clearly stated position against essentialist conceptions of human identity, including sex, although they may share Foucault's belief in the power of language and discourse to construct systems of power. Marxist feminists espousing the view that intersections of economic systems and female subjugation must be key considerations have been at odds with Foucault, who was wary of the strict economic determinism inherent in the Marxist position (McLaren, 2002). However, both Marxist and socialist scholars have acknowledged some usefulness found in Foucault's

approach, due to his considerations of social practice and norms as they pertain to topics such as surveillance, imprisonment, discipline, and power.

Another key critique of Foucault's work comes from those who see his approach as neglecting materiality. Material feminism represents a body of scholarship has argued that language has been delegated too much power, and that the actual referent made of matter, bodies and other material has become somehow a secondary consideration (Warin, 2015).

Attempting to integrate discursive and materialist positions, Karen Barad (2003), has harnessed the complementarity in the work of theoretical physicist Neils Bohr, generating a lens through which one could study discourse without divorcing it from that which is represents. She did this by collapsing the difference between discourse and materiality–effectively rejecting the chasm as a false dichotomy. Discourse, she posited, is not language, as representationalism holds. To study discourse is to study not just discursive statements or words, but the social situations that set parameters on utterances and bodies of knowledge as they come to be. This "agential realism" perspective views discourse as performative, and not just a step in the sequential process of constructing meaning, in which a group of signifiers collectively represent thoughts and ideas. Barad (2003) writes that "things do not have inherently determine boundaries or properties, and words to not have inherently determinate meanings" (p. 813). This perspective allows us to consider discourse and material as ongoing phenomena each continuously entangled in their ongoing processes of co-creation (Scott, 2014). Therefore, the social and cultural are not separable from that which is material.

Discourses on the unauthorized immigrant bind together all who find themselves within America's physical borders, regardless of legal status. We are all subject to the discursive power-knowledge constituting us as "American" or not, and, in addition, we take up positions within or in relation to that same constituted subject. This understanding of discourse is particularly appropriate for examining the topic of immigration, as the discursive construction of nationhood and who may be a party to it via immigration law speaks directly to Foucault's critique of modern discourse, in that it functions to produce "rules of exclusion" (Foucault, 1972, p. 216).

Journalism

On one hand, journalism can be considered to be the process of "producing and disseminating information about contemporary affairs of general public interest and importance" (Schudson, 2003, p. 11). While this understanding is still the most commonly circulated denotative meaning of journalism, the idea that journalism's sole purpose has always been to dispassionately transmit information is an assumption. The reality of news in America has often been one of bias and ulterior motives (Kuyper, 2014).

Models of Journalism in a Democracy

Journalism's relationship with democracy has been marked at various points in United States history by an oscillation. Journalism as an institution has, at times, had direct bearing on and enmeshment with the organizing social ideology of democracy, but also, at other times, maintained a more casual connection with it. Habermas (1989) developed the concept of the public sphere—various forums marked by their shared

opportunity for deliberation and debate, such as cafes, taverns, and other public spaces. These spaces serve as locations for public input and discussion of issues marked by commonly held concerns. The free social environment of the public square began to be reflected in newspapers and pamphlets, and, because of the public's reliance on and expectation of printed media as sources of expression not tainted by governmental power, the newspaper became the "preeminent institution" of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989, p. 181). By the end of the 18th century, the news media had grown into a critical tool with which citizenry could potentially escape tyrannical surveillance, sponsorship, and control of public discussion (Schudson, 2003).

This evolution transformed news media from a conduit of public expression into an institution unto itself. Journalism's modern conceptualization as, not just a practice, but as an institution, is in keeping with several working definitions of it. Journalism can be understood as, not only a form of mass communication, but also as an institution with an organizational function of "social coordination" (Schudson, 2003, p. 11). This coordination is theorized and based on three functions of media in a society: The surveillance of the environment in which we operate, the correlation of components in society, and the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage (Lasswell, 1948).

There are a variety of ways to understand and categorize the ways journalism "should" work. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) developed four theories of the press, describing an authoritarian model that featured a strong central government exerting control of the press, a Soviet model that featured subsuming the press into the government itself, a libertarian model that embraced free speech and detachment from

government interference (but subsequently a detachment from ethical considerations, such as enmeshment with corporate influence), and a social responsibility model that demanded a press operate freely, so as to serve as a watchdog for citizenry and hold power to account. This social responsibility theory became entrenched as an ideal for news media in particular in 1947, when the Hutchins Commission reported that the media had a direct link to democracy itself, and that journalists have a moral obligation to consider the needs of the society in which it operates (Knowlton & Parsons, 1995). This duty to society was divided into five main moral mandates, according to the commission: Truthful and comprehensive reporting of current events, establishment of a public forum in which to voice commentary and criticism, facilitating the free and open exchange of ideas, clarifying and presenting the values central to the nation's identity, and reaching every member of society with pertinent information as much as possible. The commission, however, coupled its findings with the caveat that it had "no idea that these five ideal demands can ever be completely met" (Knowlton & Parsons, 1995, p. 218).

Ostini and Fung (2002) were among more recent scholars to revise and alter theories of the press, submitting that journalism in different countries could be understood not through single, rigid models, but by treating systems of news dissemination along an axis of "liberal or conservative," and "authoritarian or democratic." Japanese media, for instance, may enjoy a democratic system, but have a generally conservative media, whereas American media may enjoy a democratic system, but be perceived as relatively liberal.

Another model divides journalism into "mainstream" and "alternative" media. While mainstream media operate on normative assumptions about its readership's social standing, power, and class, alternative media could be defined by their contrast to that status quo (Atton, 2001). In other words, alternative media embrace a specific sensitivity to giving voice to disenfranchised groups who may otherwise not have had a respected position within the public sphere. From dissident immigrant presses to socialist, feminist, and populist media outlets disseminating information at odds with contemporary orthodoxy, American journalism has always held a simultaneous appreciation and disdain for partisanship and non-mainstream media (Kessler, 1984). Atton (2001) wrote that, while many mainstream and traditional media forms tend to overtly blame various social ills on groups that are unable to offer counterpoints in the context of the entrenched media apparatus, those with more established financial and social resources enjoy opportunities to have their views, opinions, and thoughts sought out and reported. "By contrast, other groups are marginalized and disempowered by their treatment in mass media, treatment against which they generally have no redress" (Atton, 2001, p. 16). The word "alternative" connotes, not only a basic deviation in content when compared to mainstream press, but also a fundamental commitment to representing the interests of and giving platforms of expression to populations who are not otherwise heard, which could be considered a form of bias. However, alternative media are not always partisan, and partisan media are not always alternative, as alternative press' defining characteristics extend beyond the mere challenging of widely-held beliefs.

The modern journalistic age has required a fundamental reconsideration of what the practice is, and who can do it. Instead of acting as strictly gatekeepers, journalists found themselves acting in a network in the tradition of Castells (1996), in which numerous influential actors within the system were capable of both disseminating and receiving information, eschewing the dated model that saw unilateral, one-way flows of communication from centralized points of power to a captive audience.

The age of digital media ushered in an era of algorithmic news, in which data and online behavior intersected with, confronted, and bore upon the norms society had traditionally associated with journalism as an institution. Algorithmic news, which takes into consideration metrics measuring click-rates, readership, social media engagement, and the like, have a mediating effect on, not just how journalists do their job, but what makes a journalist a journalist. Rules are "never static. While implicit 'rules' such as journalistic objectivity and professional ethics endure, the meaning of these 'rules' change" (Bucher, 2018, p. 147). The roles and expectations and very definitions of "journalist," "publisher," "news," and "newsworthiness" continue to evolve by creating new genres, practices, and understandings of what journalism is (Bucher, 2018).

However, the difficulty in defining journalism and those who practice it is not new. In fact, creating a typology of who "counts" as journalists has long been difficult. If we take as a baseline the general idea that journalistic practice revolves around the collection and dissemination of information, then, it stands to reason, "the claim that anyone counts as a journalist is fair, given free press guarantees" (Slattery, 2016, p. 14). Generally, professions set parameters and exert institutional authority through licensing

processes and government enforcement against unauthorized practitioners, but the First Amendment of the Constitution, which guarantees free speech and free press, is in a general sense antithetical to such definitions. “Because new technology has made publishing easy, the definition of a journalist is difficult to articulate” (Slattery, 2016, p. 14). Instead of worrying about whether or not citizen journalists, bloggers, partisan web sites, such as *Breitbart*, or mainstream reporters should be counted among those “doing” journalism, Slattery (2016) instead suggests that, rather than categorizing and typing people as “journalist” or “non-journalist,” in today’s technological milieu, we should focus on assessment of how they are practicing *ethical* journalism.

As the re-articulation of journalism continues to unfold, norms about fairness also come into question. Whereas objectivity has often been paired with fairness, and fairness subsequently seen as a type of neutrality, some scholars insist that such an understanding actually undercuts the news media’s mission, if such a mission is in fact to report in an ethical way. If objective reporting is conflated with centrism, then truth and fairness are sacrificed for it (Boudana, 2016). The truth does not often reside in the middle, and achieving balance for the sake of balance can actually introduce bias if artificially imposed. Instead, journalists should be asked not to achieve a central position in reporting, but to seek out a position of consistency, where the lens of reporting and interpretation of facts are consistent from one object of journalism to another. Essentially, there exists a growing journalistic model based on consistent position-taking (Boudana, 2016). “Denunciation of partisanship as favoritism is reductive” (Boudana, 2016, p. 603). That is to say, Boudana views accusations of unethical bias toward journalism that seems

to favor one political camp over or another to be simplistic, as facts in the field demanding coverage often do not actually fall neatly into the ideological center.

American Media's Tradition of Partisanship

The journalistic ideal of objectivity—the idea that the news media should dispassionately tell important stories to the public like Walter Cronkite, speak truth to power like Edward R. Murrow, or uncover government corruption like Bob Woodward, and in a manner entirely independent of any political affiliation—has been so widely adopted in the United States it has been almost axiomatic. But America's actual journalistic legacy is rooted in a tradition of initial disinterest in politics altogether, followed by a century-long love affair with partisanship (Bennett, 2003).

From the late 17th century to pre-Revolutionary period in the colonies, America's embryonic press was not a site of political discourse. Publishers typically avoided overt political controversy, opting instead to disseminate information about what amounted to local gossip, advertisements, and news reports from Europe (Schudson, 2003). Pieces based on intelligence, policy points, or topics of import for locals were far outweighed by more inert, innocuous information, an early tradition that became more deeply entrenched, due to Britain's imminent threat of monarchal force, should dissent creep into colonial reporting. The stories printed and distributed in the colonies were subject to loose re-telling in the taverns and communal settings of the day, meaning the information was subject to alteration and embellishment. "A grass-roots news-reading culture (think back to taverns) took whatever information existed and made it interactive, immediately

taking it out of the hands of the elites, much the way Internet bulletin-board news sites function" (Kuyper, 2014, p. 19).

But, beginning in the 1740s and gaining steam into the pre-Revolutionary War rhetorics of the 1760s, opinion-laden pamphlets and news items began to inundate discourse throughout the colonies. Objectivity was not an option—a colonial had to choose a side between remaining a loyal subject to the crown or a dissenter in favor of attaining sovereignty. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* is the most well-known of such journalistic artifacts, which shifted American discourse from trivial minutiae to controversial content. This shift accompanied a similar pivot with political powers governing free speech, as fear of dissent in the early 1700s based on British sedition laws transformed by the 1780s into forced compliance with treason laws passed down by state governments with no tolerance for loyalist sympathies. This culminated in the passage of The 1789 Sedition Act, which consolidated the power of the infant American government and expressly forbade any criticism of it, should the information be deemed misleading or false (Schudson, 2003).

The Revolutionary period cultivated the tradition of harnessing the power of the press, not as a free entity operating with fidelity to truth, but as a tool to be wielded by partisan factions as each group enjoyed their respective periods of dominance (Shudson, 2003). This tradition, while perhaps contradicting our casual understanding of an objective press, still bears on American journalism today. As communication technologies, such as radio, television, and digital platforms, became more powerful and ubiquitous, the public sphere Habermas detailed expanded and multiplied. Customization

and tailoring of political discourses based on personal preference did not eliminated the public sphere, but splintered it into smaller spheres gratifying different publics (Bennett, 2003). In one manner of thinking, news dissemination as a practice cannot avoid the addition of bias, as even established gatekeepers of the present and yesteryear have proven incapable of exerting control over a story once it had entered the public sphere

Partisanship and markets. The early 19th century reinvigorated partisan journalism along federalist and anti-federalist lines, but, as the century progressed, new economic and commercial considerations suggested a shift in the industry. By the 1830s, advertising-supported "penny papers," so named because of their economical price tag compared to the standard six-cent price and even more expensive subscription publications, formed a marriage between the democratizing potential of journalism and the forces of capitalism (Schudson, 2003, p. 76). The scene that has so dominated period pieces in cinema and captured contemporary imagination, with newsboys selling the latest issue with promises of earthshaking or provocative information, owes its creation to this period. No longer being mere weapons of inculcation, news outlets began to become aware of their potential as machines of profit. But while partisanship had to begin to share the stage with financial opportunism in this age, the papers of the Jacksonian 1800s still frequently demonstrated a fidelity, not to consumer response, but to political effectiveness (Schudson, 2003). In fact, by the 1850s, anywhere from 80 to 100 percent of newspapers in the nation were considered partisan (Kuyper, 2014). "Thus, at the time that 'newspapers' emerged as a driving force in American political life, they had little to do with objective news" (Kuyper, 2014, p. 22).

As competition jumpstarted new growth in American journalism, partisanship also took the form of new dissenting press organizations. In the Antebellum and Civil War United States, more than three-dozen Black papers circulated, exclusively in the North, joining forces with other radical abolitionist publications that broke, not only from the southern Democrats, but also from more moderate Republicans who sought reconciliation (Kessler, 1984).

Overall, most journalism became dominated by commitment to, not partisanship for ideology's sake, but for profit. Media giants, such as William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, ushered in an age of "yellow journalism" marked by sensationalism rather than objectivity, and circulations soared. The 1800s, from the Antebellum period to the Spanish-American War, were known for a razor-thin line between politics and journalism. Partisanship continued to shape public discourse, even if underlying motives were more personal enrichment than political ideology (Schudson, 2003).

Partisanship and journalistic professionalization. Over time, the development of a culture specific to news led to professionalization and the adoption of the ethics and standards we know today. The early 20th century brought with it a desire on the part of news reporters to affiliate themselves, not with mindless partisanship, but with science, reform, and facts. The interview, which had not been widely used as a journalistic tool, was developed into a staple. Groups, such as the Associated Press, adopted standards exalting impartiality and accuracy (Schudson, 2003, p. 82).

Further entrenching these norms was the development of propaganda and public relations. As President Woodrow Wilson sought to generate support for World War I,

elements of journalistic-style storytelling began to be used in official capacities for the government. This necessitated a more formalized culture for news professionals independent of any political ideology, as journalists saw how vulnerable their profession was to imitation, control, or colonization by governmental and business powers. Striving for accuracy and objectivity became a way for the press to differentiate itself from the parajournalisms of propaganda and public relations, while also augmenting public trust and shielding itself from legal hazards, such as libel suits (Schudson, 2003).

The adoption of various codes of ethics among journalists into the mid-20th century was met with a rise in their popularity among citizens and politicians. However, social changes of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Civil Rights struggle and the Vietnam War, forced journalists out of a place of comfort and popularity that many media professionals had enjoyed during World War I and World War II (Schudson, 2003). Sensitive topics such as war, voting rights, and the political forces at play in both made coverage decisions laden with moral and practical implications. In 1971, *The New York Times* published the "Pentagon Papers," which revealed the level of hopelessness of the conflict in Southeast Asia, and also put the press at legal odds with the U.S. government. A year later, *The Washington Post's* famous coverage of a burglary at the Watergate hotel led to the downfall of a president—inscribing all media with a sacred task of being separate from and sometimes hostile to strict political ideology and even its own government (Schudson, 2003). In this sense, journalism became the "Fourth Estate," tasked with a necessary check and balance to governmental power.

Partisanship and media law. Several policy points and ethical considerations fundamentally changed journalism in the latter part of the 20th century. In 1987, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) put an end to the Fairness Doctrine, a longstanding FCC rule that had required radio and television broadcast licensees to devote airtime to controversial issues of public concern and, furthermore, to allocate time for opposing views to be heard on such matters. Beginning with talk radio and then moving into cable television, news-like programming gained popularity that framed itself more as opinion and commentary, along often partisan lines, with little or no effort at journalistic balance or objectivity. President Barack Obama officially had the Fairness Doctrine scrapped from the FCC rules and regulations entirely in 2011, after not having been used for more than two decades. This officially sanctioned and normalized polarization in news (Matthews, 2011).

Also in 1987 came the official adoption of the Society of Professional Journalists' (SPJ) code of ethics. This document specifically codified and expressed the values that had more or less become expected and practiced by journalists by this period. The SPJ code echoed the sentiment that journalism as an institution had a social responsibility to provide information to the public, and that the press, in order to perform this necessary function, must remain free to operate without government intrusion. The SPJ further stipulated that journalists should carry out their duties ethically by protecting confidential sources, abstaining from accepting bribes or rewards for information, refusing to plagiarize, and maintaining accuracy and objectivity– specifically that partisan

commentary should be clearly categorized as opinion and not bleed over into hard news reporting (Knowlton & Parsons, 1995).

Additionally, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 provided for massive deregulation of broadcast journalism outlets, allowing for widespread consolidation and corporatization of mainstream media across multiple platforms, such as television, radio, print, and digital (FCC, 1996). In addition to corporate editorial influence in the newsroom, this led to underfunding of news. Ideals of objectivity and fairness had typically trumped concerns about sheer profitability, but now news sources saw their budgets cut deeply. These cuts occurred not in the face of financial peril as we see today, but instead at a time of tremendous opportunity for conglomerates to cash in on the public's appetite for distraction and entertainment.

> In the 1980s and certainly by the 1990s news media were cutting back on reporters and resources. They were doing so when they were flush with money, because it was the profitable thing to do in the short term, and in the long run we will all be dead. (McChesney, 2008, p.123)

This resulted in fewer reporters, less serious investigation, and more "infotainment" in the news media.

Partisanship and digital news. The democratizing force of the Internet re-actualized the colonial milieu, facilitating partisan media as normative, and mainstream media are no longer privileged as the sole purveyors of discourse. With the development of the Internet, journalists' duties became more time-sensitive. While print journalists viewed timely reporting as stories for publication the following afternoon or morning,

"real news" in the digital age meant reporting and updating a story as it was developing in real time (Usher, 2014, p. 88). And yet, the digital age also had the effect of devaluing timeliness in reporting. The Internet's speed imposed demands on professional journalists that were difficult to achieve while maintaining quality, while its accessibility enabled more people and outlets to compete. "Everyone now shared the same capacity to distribute content at the same time. The Internet meant these news organizations were equalized" (Usher, 2014, p. 88). In an ecology where the perception of time was reduced by the prevailing communication technology, and where the dominant platform was more universally accessible than radio, television, or printing presses, voices previously on the margins became more within earshot.

America's preeminent public institution has returned to its partisan roots, and consumers of news are increasingly attracted to factional reporting less encumbered by neutrality, as evidenced by the seemingly impregnable perch atop the cable television ratings enjoyed by two diametrically opposed organizations—Fox News and MSNBC. While advertiser responses to more vicious partisan episodes in the news cycle have been seen, such as at Fox News after Laura Ingraham's attacks on a school shooting survivor, the fact remains that perceived centrist outlets still sag in ratings compared to their partisan counterparts. "As much as people want to agonize over political division, there is becoming little interest in the balance of old that continues to be championed by CNN" (Leah, 2018, paragraph 11).

Immigration, Borders, and Nationhood

Public talk and political thought surrounding immigration has focused on differences between naturally born American citizens and "the immigrant other" (Councilor, 2016, p. 140). Throughout America's history, ethnic and racial considerations have permeated discourses that bear on policies dictating who we deem either American enough or useful enough to live and work in our country.

> Through these racialized categories, the nation has engaged in such acts as the internment of thousands of Japanese Americans in the 1940s, the deportation of over a million Mexican/Americans in the 1950s, the militarization of the U.S./Mexico border in the 1980s. (Flores, 2003, p. 382)

And yet, a nation is more than a geographic border. As one of the most dominant public institutions in western culture, journalism is an institution through which populations of varying ethnic and demographic constitution socially construct the *idea* of a nation (Anderson, 2006; Habermas, 1989). Whereas organizational controls imposing social order in the 18th century and prior were derived from monarchical, dynastic, and religious establishments, it is the nation—a discursively built, "imagined political community"—that has assumed power in today's society (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). The media have a unique ability to enact nationhood, establishing semipermeable discursive borders that both exhort and decry immigration depending on the characteristics of the migrant population in question (Anderson, 2006).

Nations are an imagined community because, through popular processes of information dissemination, individuals come to view other citizens of a given country as being in a communion of sorts with each other under a unified banner, despite never truly knowing them. One is likely to know and care about an infinitesimal fraction of a nation's millions of inhabitants, and yet consider them bound together as a community of citizens, many of whom are willing to kill and be killed in war on the nation's behalf because of the horizontal, fraternal framing of this relationship in popular national discourse (Hague, 2011).

The United States has a long legacy of political discourse that quite intentionally frames a group, a nation, or practice as an adversary to our national identity. Heavy-handed rhetoric centered on dichotomous propositions of good vs. evil have been used to justify sweeping public policy changes and often even war (Ivie, 2005). Dating back to the Revolutionary War, America has been susceptible to rhetorics of "enemyship" meant to compel national unification against what has been deemed a common enemy (Engels, 2010). The relationship between national discourse and nationhood as community can be seen as the product of reoccurring narratives American citizens recount about themselves, which position each other as victims or heroes. Americans are also presented in discourse as partisans, ironically unaware of their subject positions, who, like the roles of "hero" and "victim," are used to scaffold a more stable national identity (Mercieca, 2010). To accomplish shifts in such national narratives, Massumi (2015) conceptualizes a new type of ontological power, or "ontopower." This uses mass systems of communication to create a new operative rationale by which creating a perception of imminent threat must

be treated in the same way an actualized threat is, producing ethical justifications for powerful, even preemptive policy, law, and war (Massumi, 2015).

America was "established discursively as a white body of northern European heritage," transmitting a construction of nationhood through histories and media coverage that generalized the white individual as the normative American (Councilor, 2016, p.144). Such sentiment has, in the Andersonian tradition, been both codified through immigration law and entrenched in media discourses. For example, in 1800s, an influx of Chinese immigrants established these migrants in public discourse as economic competitors, resulting in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act buckling on immigration from Asia (Flores, 2003).

At the turn of the 20th century, as immigration from central and southern European nations increased, Americans began to discursively outline those immigrants as less biologically fit to be Americans than previous European settlers. Considered to be carriers of harmful diseases, questionable morals, and diminished intelligence, these European immigrants were the targets of considerable attacks in the public sphere (Flores, 2003). In 1916, Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* bemoaned unfettered immigration by these populations as opening up "native Americans of colonial descent" to the possibility of extinction (p. 263). Similarly, Lothrop Stoddard's 1920 work *The Rising Tide of Color* pointed to biological differences between the immigrants of the early 20th century and those who originally colonized America, yet still reserving special disdain on grounds of biological inferiority for the decidedly non-white populations of Asia and Africa (Fleegler, 2013). Years of alarmist posturing on

immigration patterns culminated in the Immigration Act of 1924, establishing immigration quotas based on nation of origin (Fleegler, 2013). Justifications of such restrictions included the common refrain rooted in biologically essentialist discourses that described migrants from non-western European populations as "hopeless cripples and mentally deficient" (Stockwell, 1927, p. 745). Meanwhile, Mexicans, while viewed as uneducated and inferior to white American natives and western European immigrants, were not restricted due to their capacity for performing difficult labor (Flores, 2003).

The 1930s and 1940s saw competing public discourses in response to the previous eugenic, racial framings. Led by anthropologists such as Franz Boaz, who sought to fight against the kind of racial rhetoric at the forefront in Nazi Germany, more Americans became open to the idea of that immigrants could contribute to American society. President Franklin D. Roosevelt specifically praised immigrants for the bravery of their journeys, and the inherent soundness of their decision-making to choose America as their new homes (Fleegler, 2013). But, as empathy for European immigrants grew, attention turned toward Mexicans as a threat. While desired for their abilities as workers, vestiges of previous discourses revolving around sickness and immorality began to shift onto Mexicans working in America. When some areas of the American southwest saw new births of Mexican workers outnumbering new births of white natives, anti-Mexican discourse spiked, including news media serving as quasi-agents of the state, delivering threats via newspapers threatening such immigrants with deportation should they not leave on their own volition (Flores, 2003).

Anti-immigrant discourses and government policy became imbricated atop one another in the 1950s, with "Operation Wetback" delivering a military-style, heavy-handed sweep of Mexican-American neighborhoods. More than 1 million people were deported, some of whom were legal workers and citizens who were ethically Mexican—establishing wetback as a pejorative term for Mexican immigrants, and also providing an exemplary illustration of the racial underpinnings of the idealized American (Chomsky, 2014, p. 58).

Discourses competing for and against immigration and quotas on the basis of nationality continued well into the 1960s and 70s. Ellis Island, the symbol of immigration in America, closed in 1954, and was incorporated with the Statue of Liberty as a national monument by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, serving as a literal closing or restricting of immigration policy while simultaneously celebrating America's migrant heritage through symbol (Fleegler, 2013). In that same year, the Immigration and Nationality Act was passed, abolishing strict quota limits for immigration from European nations, instead imposing new restrictions on Mexican immigration while allowing admittance for work visas on the basis of specific skill sets. "U.S. immigration law is based on a system of quotas and preferences" (Chomsky, 2004, p. x).

The discourse of illegality was weighed over the subsequent decades against the practical considerations of arming America's agricultural industry with labor. The concept of illegality took another shift in 1986 with the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which reaffirmed Mexicans' roles as the primary targets of discourse and policy in

America, as unauthorized immigrants and workers were given an opportunity to regularize their status (Chomsky, 2014).

Today, how America weighs its sovereignty with its purported identity as a nation of immigrants continues to be negotiated in our institutions of media and government. The DREAM Act, which sought to provide an avenue for legalization of young unauthorized immigrants, was hotly debated and failed to pass (Lee, 2006). President Trump has announced an end to the Obama-era policy of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which provided young unauthorized individuals paths not for citizenship, but for maintaining legal residence in the United States (Kopan, 2018).

Discussions of immigration discourses should be held, however, with the consideration that there exists no fixed immigrant identity based on race or nationality. For example, Anzaldúa (2007) explained the varying identities at play in her own experience as a lesbian Latina, and drew on the differences in worldview and identity between groups that may be seen by others as more homogenous, such as Chicanos, Tejanos, and Aztec ancestry. These ideas speak in a general way to the scope of this research–who, using what social practices, are constructing identities for whom?

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

Paradigms and Assumptions

This research espouses a qualitative paradigm to examine immigration discourses in partisan media. Qualitative inquiry is an appropriate approach for examination of the issue of immigration, as it is this kind of research uniquely equipped to "help people understand the world, their society, and its institutions" (Tracy, 2013, p. 5). Moreover, Tracy (2013) also noted a methodological trend toward utilizing qualitative approaches to study mediated contexts. My qualitative approach operates under some specific philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge. Balancing an interpretive lens with empirical evidence, my research assumes that reality is socially constructed rather than objective or provable, and likewise reflects an epistemological commitment to the idea that knowledge is subjectively produced (Tracy, 2013).

As a critical study, my research explores how the social constructions of being and knowledge produce and perpetuate power disparities (Campos, 2009). Realities are subjective and multiple, so my methodological philosophy is concerned with uncovering and understanding the specific dynamics at play among those constructed realities in the locus of study (Creswell, 2013). This understanding of research offers an alternative to the philosophical rigidity of the positivist or post-positivist tradition, which see reality and knowledge as stable, provable, and objective.

I believe an exploratory approach that avoids an adamantine paradigm is appropriate for an inquiry into news media's role as a key contributor to our national

understanding of the immigration issue. I fear more quantitative methods—which have been conducted widely in journalism studies—may tyrannize discourse by relegating it to the status of mere data for the purpose of measurement and categorization.

Discourse Analysis

Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2011) described the study of discourse as "an expansive and diffuse field of qualitative research concerned with the analysis of language and text" (p. 2). As a method, Foucauldian discourse analysis is hostile to strict formalization, and implements an approach more fluid and adaptable to the specific bodies of knowledge being probed. Generally, the method begins with selecting a corpus of texts that illustrates or is representative of the relationship between statements and systems of prevailing knowledge (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011). Selecting a corpus for analysis is done with the following considerations:

- Problematizations, sites of discursive practice that have become problematic and visible and illustrate power dynamics
- Technologies, practical forms of rational knowledge as put into practice by governments or individuals upon themselves to regulate conduct
- Subject Positions, the complex roles to which each individual is assigned, limiting and producing potential within each respective discourse; and
- Subjectification, or the selected systems of knowledge, understanding, and practice individuals use to seek improvement, modification, or regulation of themselves. (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011)

There are various types of discursive artifacts that can be studied: Spatiality and social practice, political discourse, expert discourse, social interaction, and autobiographical accounts. (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011). Because my research examines media discourses on immigration as found in partisan outlets—which are, by their nature, overtly political—my corpus is that of political discursive artifacts from the realm of partisan journalism. The scope of my discourse analysis fits Alvesson and Karreman's (2000) description of a Grand Discourse approach, noting use of dominant language to build an assembly of discourses that have been integrated together, analyzed, and presented as an organizing force of our reality.

Data Collection

The Washington Post reported on Pew Research findings that *Breitbart.com* and *Slate.com* can be considered the furthest on their respective political extremes when considering the ideological placement of their readers (See Fig. 1), based on survey responses (Blake, 2014).

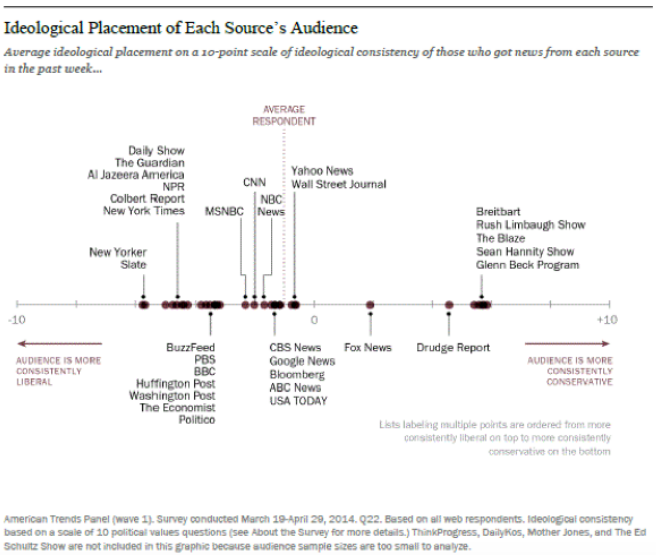


Figure 1. A 10-point scale of showing ideological placement of news sources' audiences. From *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/10/21/lets-rank-the-media-from-liberal-to-conservative-based-on-their-audiences/?utm_term=.caeef3ff1786

My research began by selecting my corpus from the news websites *Breitbart.com* (right-wing), and *Slate.com* (leftist). I utilized Google's customizable search engine, using advanced tools and settings to search within respective site, conducting a search for the terms "immigrant," "DACA," "Dreamer," "Wall," and "Border" (using a * to denote a "wildcard," or more inclusive search that may include variations of the key words, such as both "immigrants" and "immigration") and then using these parameters and controls to organize the information:

1. I charted the stories from each site from January 20, 2017 to April 29, 2017. I chose this time frame because it corresponds with the first 100 days of Trump's presidency. While my research is not overtly about Trump himself, his candidacy harnessed the polarizing power of the

immigration issue to great effect. The first days of his term in office served as convenient temporal parameters for my research.

2. I excluded articles not specifically covering U.S. immigration
3. I developed an archive. Using Zotero software, I curated 570 articles, and saved them on my laptop while backing them up on my Zotero online library.
4. I produced a separate document to include observations and notes, and also exported my index of articles into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Data Analysis

I implemented a process derived from Foucault's approach of genealogy, which explores the evolution of knowledge and understanding on given topics. This first involves comparing one era of discourses on a topic to another, so as to ascertain the differences and similarities. This provides a temporal framing of what a society knows at a given time by uncovering

> bodies of learning, philosophical ideas, everyday opinions, but also institutions, commercial practices, police activities, mores—all refer to a certain implicit knowledge (*savoir*) special to this society. (Foucault, 1998, p. 261)

Originally known as "archaeology," Foucault refined this process to what he called "genealogy." This seeks to build upon the archeology of knowledge—or the study of the transition and discontinuity of knowledges–through mapping the processes by which one set of discursive formations gives way to another. Such discursive shifts are then

examined as extensions or manifestations of power—essentially, exploring in what ways these discursive changes are linked to institutions of power (Carr, 2009).

Although typically Foucault (1978) would seek to exhaustively examine an entire given archive of knowledge on a given subject before rendering analysis. In this case, I conducted a more condensed examination of contemporary moments in discursive instability, competition, and transition that I subsequently compared to an archaeological assessment of earlier discourses on immigration as represented in the review of literature.

My process began with identifying elements of discourse and copy significant examples based on the following lines of inquiry:

1. What term(s) does the artifact use to describe the unauthorized individual or population in each article?
2. How does the article define or explain the descriptive term used?
3. How does the article describe immigrants vis-à-vis Americans? Each other?
4. Are there value judgments related to immigrants suggested in these artifacts? This could include good, bad, victim, criminal, weak, strong, American, un-American, etc.
5. What metaphors, allegories, or other figurative devices are employed to explain who immigrants are, and what they are doing?
6. What intertextualities exist among the sources? Do these news organizations move beyond crafting competing discourses and into the realm of directly acknowledging awareness of each other?
7. Additionally, what is the authors' ascertainable demographic information?

I then made note of the general narrative of each piece and sought to understand how discourses and competing discourses on immigration have been rendered by these stories, and how they contribute to our understanding of this issue.

Next, I assessed what subject positions had been developed within each discourse. These findings were contrasted, not only with each other in terms of ideological difference, but also with previous immigration discourses as described in the aforementioned literature.

After detailing the specific ways each article contributed to immigration discourses, I then examined the power relations between the statements and institutions of power, asking:

1. What portraits of the immigrant have developed by which outlet?
2. Who benefits from each discourse, portrait, and subject position? Who suffers?
3. Has the evolution of these discourses over time changed power relations, or reaffirmed the status quo?

CHAPTER THREE

FINDINGS

Descriptive Differences

The corpus selected for analysis, composed of 570 articles dedicated to the issue of unauthorized immigration, was dominated in volume by *Breitbart*. Of the total reporting done by both partisan news organizations, *Breitbart* published 455 stories, accounting for nearly 80 percent of the articles collected using the search parameters previously mentioned. *Slate* published 115 articles in the 100-day timeframe. Clear preferences among the respective sites regarding word selection emerged, as *Breitbart* and *Slate* predictably differed in descriptive terms employed to represent unauthorized immigrants.

Breitbart.com focused heavily on labeling those migrating without authorization to the United States or staying without permission as "illegal immigrants," "illegal aliens," or as having been guilty of the act of "illegal immigration." *Breitbart* used such descriptive terms in 254 of its articles on the subject, or roughly 56 percent of all of its coverage. Even more specifically, the right-leaning outlet used "illegal" descriptive terms in 101 of its *headlines*—an average of roughly once per day in the sample period, and just shy of all immigration stories published by *Slate* in total.

The most noticeable deviation from "illegal" verbiage was when *Breitbart* reported on Trump's controversial executive order to freeze immigration and travel from several Muslim-majority countries, and the subsequent judicial appeals process surrounding its constitutionality, with "refugee" being used in 93 articles, with

generalized mentions of "immigrants" or "immigration" rounding out much of the descriptive terminology.

Breitbart conducted extensive reporting on America's southern border, not all of which overtly labelled migrants, opting instead to report on everything from border agent corruption, to cartel activity, to migrants' suffering as they attempt to gain entry into the country. A degree of autonomy appeared to exist between this border bureau and the rest of *Breitbart's* organization.

Slate.com overwhelmingly opted to use the term "immigrants," or individuals and groups participating in "immigration," using such terminology in 92 of its 115 stories. The left-leaning site only described immigrants as "illegal" when referring to other outlets' labels of them. Overlapping with the characterization of "immigrants" in *Slate's* coverage were specific descriptors like "unauthorized" and "undocumented," which accounted for roughly half (47 stories) of the total "immigrant" mentions.

Breitbart utilized a multifaceted approach to defining immigrants in its extensive coverage of the issue (publishing an average of four stories daily during the 100-day period). The fulcrum around which all of the site's discursive strategies pivoted proved to be the bifurcation of legality and illegality. A January 27, 2017 *Breitbart* article featuring the opinion of a woman whose son had been murdered by an unauthorized immigrant put it succinctly: "You are legal or illegal, it's one way or the other, there is no grey area on that" (McHugh, 2017a, paragraph 4). Situating American citizens on one side of a juridical fault line and immigrants on another permeated virtually all of *Breitbart's* reporting. As an example, "Sanctuary" cities and states whose local law enforcement

agencies do not cooperate with Federal interpretations of immigration law were topics of coverage in 38 articles that specifically mentioned the criminality or illegality of the immigrant. These sanctuaries were often mentioned together with harrowing acts of violence perpetrated by an unauthorized immigrant ("Sanctuary Cities Surround Area Where Illegal Aliens Allegedly Killed Woman," "Five Time Deportee Faces Fatal Crash Charges in 'Sanctuary' California," etc.). *Breitbart* tended to conflate connotative understandings of criminality with immigration status. As an example, *Breitbart* is rather formulaic in stories depicting Americans as the victims of crime at the hands of unauthorized immigrants, with more than 60 articles defining these migrant populations vis-à-vis its apparently violent relationship with Americans. Offering horrific details related to rapes, murders, drug dealing, drunk driving, and beheadings, their typically unsubtle modifiers included words like "Satanic," Criminal," "Gang Member," etc.

Conversely, *Slate's* coverage tended to define these immigrants not by status, but by the processes they undergo to live in America. A March 19, 2017 *Slate* piece, for instance, outlined the path to citizenship for victims of abuse, and how the evolution of that policy under the Trump administration left victimized migrants in limbo. Similarly, most of *Slate's* coverage documents the processes and practices governing immigration–from DACA to refugee status–situating the immigrants themselves as cogs in an intricate bureaucracy. More than 30 of *Slate's* 115 articles focused at least in some part on Trump and his policy directives, ranging from border rhetoric to follow-up reporting on the judicial response to his executive order.

Intertextuality

Both *Breitbart* and *Slate* were keenly aware of other media. As news websites, they aggregated and used news content from other outlets as part of their regular practice, providing links to stories that redirect to stories both inside and outside their own respective sites. More specifically, *Breitbart* aggressively critiqued other outlets' coverage of the immigration issue, with provocative takes such as "5 Border Horrors Establishment Media Mostly Ignore," taking on the likes of *ABC News*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and even awards shows. And yet, these two partisan outlets mostly talked around each other: *Slate* overtly mentioned *Breitbart* only six times, while *Breitbart* did not appear to directly critique Slate in its immigration reporting.

Author Demographics

There was not a substantial difference between the ascertainable demographics of writers for *Slate* and *Breitbart*. Of the more than 30 authors contributing to reporting for the two organizations, the knowable demographics of the authorship of the 570 articles yielded only seven non-white writers providing coverage on the topic in this timeframe. *Slate's* reporting featured stories written by a black man, an Iranian-American woman, a male Ashkenazi Jew, an Indian female, and a Muslim American woman, with the vast majority of reporting coming from white men and women.

Similarly, *Breitbart's* coverage was derived from a black man, an Iranian-American woman, and a Hispanic man. Unlike some of the other non-white authors on both sites, Ilfedonso Ortiz, the Hispanic male writer, was a significant contributor, offering dozens of articles on issues related to immigration and border violence. Overall,

however, the respective sites contributed to discourse on unauthorized immigration with reporting primarily from white writers.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

A nation's narratives and discourses on political concepts and issues generally exist to "legitimate the nation's existence, compel obedience, and maintain order" (Mercieca, 2010, p. 28). Reoccurring stories create portraits of the characters within them. Through my analysis of nearly 600 articles from the specific partisan platforms of *Slate* and *Breitbart*, emergent subject positions became clear:

- The immigrant as criminal, generated by *Breitbart*
- The immigrant as victim, generated by *Slate*

These two subject positions also produced two ancillary subject positions or portraits of non-immigrants:

- The American as victim of the immigrant, generated by *Breitbart*
- The American as shepherd of the immigrant, generated by *Slate*

These subject positions, while operating in opposition to each other, simultaneously worked in concert with each other in their shared contributions to strictly limiting the possible roles of unauthorized immigrants in discourse.

The Immigrant Criminal

In the selected corpus, *Breitbart* took great care to craft a portrait of unauthorized immigrants as adversaries to the law. This subject position is created and reaffirmed by Breitbart's consistent use of descriptors focusing on unauthorized immigrants' illegality, as well as a specific focus on overt criminal or gang activity by immigrants. For example, more than a dozen *Breitbart* articles in the corpus utilized headlines referencing MS-13

gang activity, implicating unauthorized immigrants in a generalized way. As an example, Binder (2017b) wrote an article entitled "Illegal Alien Criminal Gang Member Added to FBI's Most Wanted List" (See Fig. 2), accompanied by three images of the clearly Hispanic subject on an FBI poster. The obvious questions arising out of this discursive strategy would include 1) Why would an individual's official immigration status be considered as pertinent as his participation in a notorious gang?, and 2) Is this an evenhanded or honest treatment of the topic of immigration or gang activity, given that the FBI's most wanted list is consistently populated by individuals from a variety of backgrounds, including black, Middle Eastern, Asian-American, white, and Hispanic criminals? (Top Ten Most Wanted, 2018).

Figure 2. This FBI poster *Breitbart* used as a visual aid in a April 15, 2017 article. From *Breitbart.com.* Retrieved from https://www.breitbart.com/texas/2017/04/15/illegal-alien-ms 13-gang-member-added-to-fbis-most-wanted-list/

Another example of generating the criminal subject position is *Breitbart* directly quoting Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Sessions directly implicated unauthorized immigration as causing increased gang activity, described "lax immigration enforcement," and lamented that "Harboring criminal aliens only helps violent gangs like MS-13" (Binder, 2017b, paragraph 5).

Gang membership aside, *Breitbart* worked to cultivate an understanding of the unauthorized immigrant in strictly delinquent terminology, and also by bringing to the forefront crimes other than illegal entry or gang membership. One article (Binder, 2017, March 4) entitled "Illegal Alien Accused of Molesting Child in 'Sanctuary' Connecticut" (See Fig. 3), noted the lurid details of a toddler's sexual assault at the hands of an illegal Guatemalan immigrant, replete with a stock image depicting an innocent young child peeping out over the side of a crib. *Breitbart* constructed in this corpus a portrait of immigrants by highlighting their crimes, specifically drunk driving, sexual assault, weapons purchases, murder, and kidnapping.

Figure 3. A stock photo providing visual aid for a *Breitbart* article reporting on a sexual assault perpetrated by an unauthorized immigrant. From *Breitbart.com*. Retrieved from https://www.breitbart.com/texas/2017/03/04/illegal-alien-accused-molesting-child-sanctuary-connecticut

More than half of all *Breitbart* articles on the issue of immigration in the sample specifically refer to immigrants as being a criminal or illegal element of society in America. Through a combination of conflating immigrants who are "illegal" by virtue of their unauthorized entry into the country with more blatant criminal acts like murder, rape, or gang activity, *Breitbart* contributes to a subject position for immigrants that focuses less on their assumed innately inferior intelligence derived from biology, and more on their nature as overtly dangerous individuals.

The American Victim

Discourses become entangled with public policy, and policies have material effects, such as the creation of a "Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement" office to

address the highly publicized problem of criminal aliens (McHugh, 2017b). “Criminal aliens routinely victimize Americans and legal residents,” Department of Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly is quoted as saying in the article (paragraph 5). This yields another subject position: the American victim.

Figure 4. A family photo providing visual aid for a *Breitbart* article reporting on the murder of a U.S. citizen at the hands of an unauthorized immigrant. From *Breitbart.com.* Retrieved from http://www.breitbart.com/texas/2017/02/01/angel-dad-im-happy-trumps-immigration-orders/

By contributing to an understanding of unauthorized immigrants as criminals, *Breitbart* also created a subject position of Americans in this discourse that relegated them to the role of victims. Some such stories focused on providing direct voice for “angel” families (relatives of those who have been killed by unauthorized immigrants) to

air their grievances. This position allowed these victims to legitimize anti-immigration policy. "'Angel' Dad: 'I'm Happy' about Trump's Immigration Orders'" (Bindera, 2017, February 1), leveraged the grief of a man who lost his son to a violent unauthorized immigrant. The father's lamentations were accompanied by a photo of his late son (See Fig. 4)."'Instead of deporting him, they let him out like he was at YMCA camp,'" Shaw told *Fox & Friends*. 'He murdered him the same day he got out'" (Binder, 2017a, paragraph 5).

Figure 5. This family photo of an American woman accompanied a *Breitbart* article reporting on a drunk unauthorized immigrant who caused the fatal collision that killed her. From *Breitbart.com.* Retrieved from https://www.breitbart.com/texas/2017/03/08/ice-adds-alleged-drunk-street-racing-honduran-wanted/

Some *Breitbart* articles highlighted immigrant violence against law enforcement, specifying border patrol agents, while still others used border patrol stories to show how would-be unauthorized immigrants were found to be previously convicted sexual predators when they are caught before making entry. *Breitbart* carved out subject

positions for Americans as both actual (See Fig. 5) and potential victims, as these roles craft an onto power that justifies policy treating both real and potential threats as equally imminent—the targets of which are law-abiding Americans.

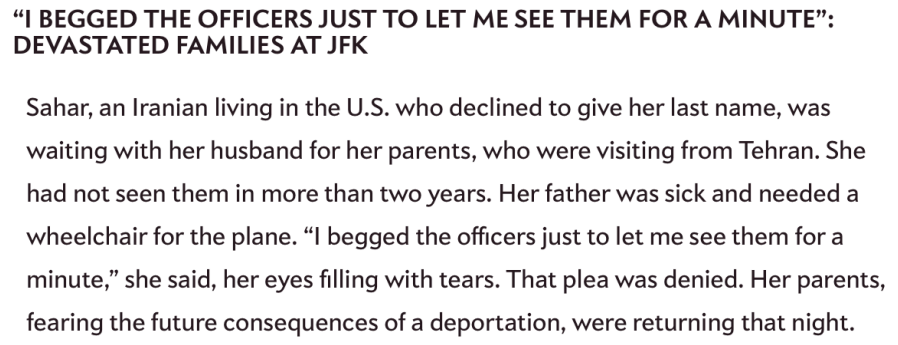
The Immigrant Victim

Slate's coverage during this timeframe predictably featured a different knowledge of unauthorized immigrants. Rather than forced into discursive roles as criminals, *Slate* writers crafted stories that generally pointed out the particular vulnerability of the immigrant subject. Nora Caplan-Bricker contributed to this sympathetic viewpoint through her story on a policy change that stripped certain protections from unauthorized immigrants reporting crime while in the country. Focusing on immigrants who were specifically victims of abuse, *Slate* provided a glimpse into the world of those who must choose between possible deportation or remaining in an abusive relationship (See Fig. 6).

Figure 6. This screen grab from a *Slate* article from 2017 paints a portrait, both textually and visually of the immigrant victim. From *Slate.com*. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/cover_story/2017/03/u_visas_gave_a_safe_path_to_citizenship_to_victims_of_abuse_under_trump.html

Another article focused its attentions to the Indian population in America, which, despite having mostly assimilated in America, has become fearful of having its unauthorized members deported in the new crackdown against illegals.

Still another quoted immigrants' plight as they go through the process of trying to enter the country via the country's airports after Trump's executive orders had severely restricted immigration from certain countries. Describing a sort of legal triage center at JFK airport, where immigration attorneys and DHS officials grappled over the right to determine whether or not certain travelers would be able to enter, Grabar (2017) painted a picture of chaos and grief in the face of a new bureaucracy. Some immigrants were allowed to join family members into America, while others were denied, after having freshly labelled as unauthorized when the latest executive order was handed down as they were in transit over the Atlantic (See Fig. 7). "I begged the officers," said one interviewee about her family being sent back home in the piece. "Just let me see them for a minute" (Graber, 2017, paragraph 1).



"I BEGGED THE OFFICERS JUST TO LET ME SEE THEM FOR A MINUTE": DEVASTATED FAMILIES AT JFK

Sahar, an Iranian living in the U.S. who declined to give her last name, was waiting with her husband for her parents, who were visiting from Tehran. She had not seen them in more than two years. Her father was sick and needed a wheelchair for the plane. "I begged the officers just to let me see them for a minute," she said, her eyes filling with tears. That plea was denied. Her parents, fearing the future consequences of a deportation, were returning that night.

Figure 7. A screenshot from a *Slate* article documenting the plight of immigrants who had fallen victim to a growing bureaucracy in light of restrictive executive orders. From *Slate.com.* Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/cover_story/2017/03/u_visas_gave_a_safe_path_to_citizenship_to_victims_of_abuse_under_trump.html

Within the selected corpus, Slate focused primarily on unauthorized immigrants' vulnerability and victimhood. One article by Sarah Salvadore reported on vulnerable pregnant teens who were victimized by violence and cartels in their homeland, and also faced with capture and deportation at the border. Rape, extortion, and murder faced these individuals in Central America, while dangers lurked for those daring to enter Trump's America (See Fig. 8).

> There was so much violence around. I felt so alone. I wanted to see my mother. I decided to come to the United States when my friends were coming here. My mom didn't know I was planning to migrate with my brother. At that time, I was five months pregnant. (Salvadore, 2017, paragraph 15)

Figure 8. A teen immigrant waits to be processed by border agents in a photo from a 2017 *Slate* article from 2017. From *Slate.com*. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/ articles /double_x/gender_and_migration/2017/01why_are_so_many_pregnant _and_parentingteens_appearing_at_the_u_s_mexico.html

The American Citizen as Shepherd

Slate acknowledged Americans' subject position of relative power vis-à-vis the vulnerability of unauthorized immigrants. This stands in direct opposition with *Breitbart*'s competing discourse, which treated Americans as victims. *Slate* envisioned a different American identity marked by principled heroism and advocacy on behalf of immigrants. Americans in many of *Slate's* stories served as protectors tasked with shielding the true victims from an overreaching and prejudiced administration. They were protestors openly criticizing anti-immigration policies, lawyers operating pro bono on behalf of immigrants battling deportation, ACLU observers at detention proceedings at airports, and lawmakers seeking more humane treatment of migrant populations (See Fig 9).

Protesters at New York's JFK airport, Jan. 28.

Lisa Larson-Walker

Figure 9. Protestors decry Trump's executive order limiting immigration from mostly Muslim countries in this *Slate* photo. From Slate.com. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/jurisprudence /2017/02/how_badly_did_cbp_treat_visa_holders_read_these_horror_stories.html

Just as often as immigrant victims were heard through reporters' words or their own, Americans were seen in *Slate* attempting to shepherd immigrants from danger in one capacity or another. Articles featured protests at Dulles and JFK airports on behalf of unauthorized immigrants, as well as legal maneuvering in defense of them. Levin's (2017) article on a 12-year-old Yemeni girl stuck in procedural limbo that left her abandoned without her family in Djibouti, for instance, quoted American immigration attorney Katy Lewis as calling Trump's so-called Muslim ban "fundamentally unfair" (paragraph 5), and further quoted U.S. Rep. Jim Costa in speaking on behalf of the family. Another such article described a short-lived judicial victory in which the

American actors were Washington solicitors and federal judges who agreed that Trump's executive order was discriminatory and unconstitutional.

The scene at Dulles airport outside Washington, in Dulles, Virginia on Monday.
Mark Joseph Stern

Figure 10. This photo showing Americans providing legal aid to immigrants and foreign travelers accompanied a story published by *Slate* on Trump's travel ban. From *Slate.com.* Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/jurisprudence/2017/01/at_dulles_airport_trump_s_customs_and_border_protection_officers_are_accountable.html

Another *Slate* article published in February of 2017 was little more than a marketing piece linking an immigration attorney's new website that aimed to provide assistance to visa-holders seeking to travel to America from one of the countries specified in the travel ban.

In sum, the subject positions constructed by *Breitbart's* and *Slate's* discourses were ideologically different, yet striking in their thematic congruence – *Breitbart's* insistence on immigrant criminality yields an American subject position as victim, while *Slate*'s insistence on immigrant victimhood yields an American subject position as savior. Somewhere in their respective discourses, these outlets made the unauthorized immigrant

the subject while simultaneously working together to deny agency to the immigrant as a dynamic human being capable of being more than a villain or a victim.

Discursive Changes

The aforementioned portraits of unauthorized immigrants demonstrate a discursive shift when compared to the subject positions described in the literature. Whereas contributors to the discourse on immigration, such as Stockwell (1927) and Stoddard (1920; as referenced in Fleegler, 2013) pointed to immigrants as being undesirable based on biological inferiority rendering them unintelligent or maladaptive to life in America, *Breitbart* instead contributed to a subject position of the immigrant as an existential threat. Flores (2003) noted that, on top of biological essentialist tendencies, past immigration rhetorics have also focused on the immigrants' competitiveness vis-à-vis Americans in the job market because of the cheap labor they provide. Similarly, while Breitbart did not ignore entirely the financial implications of immigration, the outlet spent the vast amount of its time in the corpus portraying immigrants as violent criminals, not economic hurdles.

Meanwhile, while Fleegler (2013) demonstrated that pro-immigrant discourses competing against nativism tended to revolve around contributionism, or the idea that immigrant populations can contribute critically important elements to American society, from skilled labor, to culture, to religious and philosophical beliefs, thereby assisting in the cultivation of the nation's social fabric. Political activists and religious leaders alike were among those praising immigrants for their contributions to the bourgeoning superpower throughout the early 20th century in response to anti-immigrant rhetorics. The

pro-immigrant discourse as represented in my selected texts, however, indicated a shift away from focusing on immigrants' contributions, and one on their need for protection against Trump and his allies.

Perhaps counterintuitively, *Breitbart* seemed to actually grant more agency and ability than past anti-immigrant discursive constructions, while *Slate*'s ostensibly pro-immigration position was marked by a shift away from portrayals focusing on immigrants' capabilities, and more so on their vulnerability.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

On a pleasant summer night in July of 2018, Mollie Tibbetts, a 20-year-old college student, set out on a run across the sprawling pastoral landscape of Brooklyn, Iowa. She would go on to encounter Christhian Rivera, a Mexican immigrant whose proper immigration status has been subsequently debated as legal, illegal, and fraudulent. Tibbetts was found stabbed to death after a four-week search, and Rivera charged with her murder (Klein & Smith, 2018). The case set off a firestorm of national discourse on the dangers of illegal immigration, with some decrying the unfairness of using the act of one immigrant to paint an entire population, while others used Tibbetts' death as a rallying cry to step up border enforcement and immigration policy to protect the nation's citizens. In that same month, in the same state, Celia Arozamena, a championship college golfer, was also found stabbed to death and discarded in a small pond on an Ames, Iowa golf course. The alleged attacker, Collin Richards, is a young white man (Haag, 2018). The murders of two young college women, in almost identical circumstances, at the hands of two very different perpetrators, underscore the way news is a dominant mode of discourse that immediately begins the work of setting the parameters of what we can know about a subject – the very act itself of covering the murders (and the editorial discretion by each outlet regarding how to do so) generates "rules of exclusion" (Foucault, 1972, p. 216). News reporting does feature collection and dissemination of information, but along the way, interpretation and packaging of that information draws battle lines for competing discourses: Was Tibbetts' murder just a

random act of violence? Or does it speak to the lurking danger of America's growing immigrant population? Was Arozamena's murder just a senseless tragedy? Or does it subvert efforts to cultivate an understanding of immigrants as being innately more dangerous than American white men? Similar lines were drawn for each and every story in this corpus. There are 570 items, and consequently 570 decisions to make as to what each story "means." These interpretations are simultaneously reflecting growing understandings of the immigrant that exist in reality, as well as discursively constructing or attempting to construct it.

As Barad (2003) points out, discourse and that which discourse is about are mutually constitutive and entangled. It is not surprising, then, that unauthorized immigrants in America occupy a discursive-physical environment that imposes force upon them and demands from them a subjectivity specifically designed to render them objects, and not contributors to discourse. While discourses have shifted from contributionism to victimhood, on one hand, and biological inferiority to criminality on another, these shifts are still remarkably consistent in their denying of agency to immigrants. In one *Slate* article entitled "Don't Dreamers Have Rights?" Stern (2017) covered the legal nightmare of Daniel Ramirez Medina, a young immigrant who had been in the country legally under DACA and was detained and scheduled for deportment by ICE anyway. In a style that was quite typical of *Slate's* coverage in this corpus, the story described the legal processes associated with Medina's case, while providing input from litigators and experts in the field about the political ramifications of the case's outcome. It did not, however, describe Medina as anything other than a person caught in the middle

of this juridical process. Other such articles used blanket descriptions of immigrants or Dreamers, describing how they have gone on to be successful in general terms. Compared to *Breitbart's* relentless coverage of the immigration issue, *Slate's* coverage came across as a half-measure, or, to put it more precisely, held on to vestiges of old journalistic paradigms that, as Boudana (2016) argues, tend to conflate artificially imposed middle ground or evenhandedness with objectivity or fairness. Whereas *Breitbart* relished its role as a partisan outlet, staking out a polemic position warning the public of the dangers of unauthorized immigration based on heinous headlines from cops and courts beats across the nation, *Slate* more methodically released information into the public sphere that was more legal, policy-driven, and, perhaps as a strategy to cultivate credibility, stories seemed to at least imply an objective rationale driving the coverage, moralistic though the conclusions may be. In other words, Breitbart can be seen as a more successful journalistic outlet within this corpus, because it seemed to more wholeheartedly espouse its role as a partisan outlet. *Breitbart*, in fact, at times extended more actual agency in its immigration discourse than *Slate* did, as the former at times reported on the criminal prowess and ruthlessness of unauthorized immigrants, while the latter relegated these individuals to primarily victims in need of assistance. Consider the ways that *Breitbart* invited readers to think of unauthorized immigrants: As rapists, murderers, drug dealers, drunk drivers—actors with agency and the ability to perform actions of consequence on their own accord, as sinister as it may be. *Slate*, ostensibly setting out to form a pro-immigrant position, first and foremost cultivated an idea of these individuals as victims: Vulnerable pregnant teens, small children left in legal limbo, and

lonesome members of families that have been split up during the immigration progress. This corpus showed a tremendous consonance among both outlets' refusal to portray immigrants as doctors, teachers, nurses, firefighters, or military servicemen. Very few times did *Slate* ever mention immigrant subjects as being capable, talented, or likely perform action of consequence. It is in this way that the competing discourses of criminality and victimhood, while fundamentally different than past discourses, still reaffirmed and maintained a key status quo: The "immigrant other" (Councilor, 2016, p. 140) remained a foreign subject to "us" in these texts–one that can be made subject to "our" power, but whose humanity still evades "us." That discursive construction reflected and reinforced realities on the ground, as unauthorized immigrants became entrapped by discourses in a milieu in which they remain voiceless, and that lack of voice contributes to new understandings of them, which they are not afforded the opportunity to contribute to.

Limitations

Certain limitations must be noted in this study. My research is based on more than 500 articles derived from four key search terms spanning the first 100 days of the Trump presidency. Because I used advanced settings and options within Google search to conduct my queries, I cede some control over to the search engine and whatever algorithmic preferences it may have as they related to received feedback. It is important to note the scope of this research. The aim here was not to submit my results as somehow being generalizable as a representative sample of all media, all partisan media, or all immigration discourses. Instead, this represents a snapshot of how *Breitbart* and *Slate*

discursively contributed to our national understanding of a controversial issue at a given point in time. This study's goal, then, has been to establish some semblance of transferability and progression toward a qualitative and textual methodology that can effectively examine a wide variety of issues that carry with them deeply entrenched understandings and assumptions about the nature of our country and those who inhabit it. In other words, the findings here could be considered limited to the specific discourses being offered by these specific outlets as this specific moment, but also as a means to spur further research on other issues using this approach of analysis.

Implications

"Representation" has long been an important concept in critical cultural studies, as well as a highly valued aim among progressives in America. In mediated discourses, however, it seems difficult to find a topic in which there is a lack of representation as stark as that which is shown in this specific body of journalism. Future research could focus on other media outlets, both "mainstream" and "partisan," to assess to what extent the subjects of discourse are being directly quoted or at least represented in the reporting. *The Huffington Post*, for instance, seems to more fully embrace its role in the partisan news ecology, prolifically reporting on immigration with categories dedicated specifically to immigration, children immigrants, and Latino voices. A variety of outlets could be examined to assess the ways partisan, traditional, and alternative media outlets are contributing to national understanding of the immigrant's place in America, and whether or not those discursive practices challenge or confirm the status quo.

Discourse analyses could also be devised to tackle how knowledge of this topic is constructed on social media – with its wide variety of multidirectional, fluid, and accessible platforms, increasingly used for rapid dissemination of news information. Furthermore, Foucauldian understandings of discourse and power could applied to other issues in a more comprehensive fashion, such as gun control, where one could surmise there exists a variety of intersections and entanglements between traditional sovereign powers, discursive powers, and the interplay between warring publics whose respective understandings revolve around resisting perceived infringement on decisions guiding their own behavior. Second Amendment advocates, for example, view gun control as an intrusion on their constitutional rights, whereas gun control advocates view theirs as a competing or resisting discourse to the codified and protected social practice ensuring deadly weapons remain available to the masses.

Furthermore, this research foregrounds the evolving landscape of journalism as the "preeminent institution" of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989, p. 181). Rather than putting our discursive tools to work to exclude or include (Foucault, 1972) individuals as being considered journalists, or delineating the performance of one kind of information collection, interpretation, and distribution as more "journalistic" than others, future research may instead look at the ethical considerations of reporting. Using Boudana (2016) as a guide, one might argue that while espousing views that are reprehensible to progressives, *Breitbart* nonetheless engages in journalism in a more ethical fashion than *Slate*, embracing its partisan role and committing to a consistency of position-taking that at least demystifies its mission and clarifies the lens through which it is reporting its

news, whereas other outlets, both mainstream and partisan, have at times obfuscated ideological sensitivities to maintain credibility in a dated news paradigm. *Fox News* long seduced its viewers with promises of being "Fair and Balanced," but has featured the likes of prominent conservative firebrands, such as Sean Hannity and Glenn Beck. *The New York Times* boasts a similarly neutral promise to deliver "All the news that's fit to print," but has been accused of being liberal. And yet, this research suggests that when one news outlet fully embraces partisanship, while another supposedly partisan one does not, the cumulative effect is the creation of a narrative uniquely capable of dehumanizing the very people on which they are reporting. Future research may be needed to produce new ethical guidelines that dispense with centrality or neutrality as objectives, focusing instead on consistency and unabashed self-reporting of ideological considerations, on top of normative expectations of accuracy.

Future models or codified expectations of journalism in America will likely need to take into account the multidirectional, Castells-derived (1996), constellation-like network of information exchange that continues to evolve as social media users, bloggers, and traditional media outlets try to solidify their positions in an ecosystem seemingly without a clear hierarchy or gatekeeper. In an environment through which meaningful discourse and matter unceasingly bear upon each other, how Americans communicate critically important social information to the public looks to be fertile ground for future research pertaining to a myriad of topics.

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[i] **Endnote**

I am opting for the word "unauthorized" in lieu of "illegal" or "undocumented" when referring to immigrants because it carries a semblance of neutrality—with both the penal language of anti-immigration hardliners and the more acquiescent connotations of the latter being absent. Furthermore, the Supreme Court of the United States has made frequent use of the "unauthorized" label in some of its official decisions related to immigration, so my choice of language signifying the referent subject at hand is codified through the ultimate juridical milieu in which the matter can be argued in this country (Arizona v. United States, 2012, p. 1). Furthermore the "illegal alien" moniker is a less faithful description in legal contexts, as unpermitted entry into America has not always been treated as a criminal infraction (Ackerman, 2014).