

Reporting Conventions: Journalists, Activists, and the Thorny Struggle for Political Visibility

Sarah Sobieraj, *Tufts University*

This article draws upon 134 in-depth interviews with activists and journalists in an effort to reconcile the extensive activism taking place in the shadows of presidential campaigns with its near invisibility in the news. In his classic work, Todd Gitlin (1980) demonstrated that activists become newsworthy only by submitting to the “implicit rules of news making” (p. 3). This research supports his finding, but demonstrates that unbeknownst to activists, coverage of political outsiders is governed by a set of rules quite different from (and often diametrically opposed to) those employed in routine news-gathering. Taking cues from news creation practices that go on daily between journalists, parajournalists, and subjects, activist groups work assiduously to prepare members to fit the needs of political reporters. They bend over backwards to be media-friendly, which they perceive as professional, quotable, and credible, but ironically these studied attempts to conform to the norms of routine political reporting make them less appealing to journalists. While journalists may attend eagerly to elected officials’ press conferences and official statements, they demand authenticity, particularly in the form of emotion and spontaneity, from outsiders—the very attributes activists work to erase in their media trainings. In the end, the activist groups fail to obtain coverage, not because they can’t conform to the rules of news making, but because they are following the wrong rules. This article maps the contradictory sets of norms at play in the negotiation over news, and shows how they work together to create nearly insurmountable cultural boundaries for political outsiders. Keywords: news, journalists, presidential campaigns, voluntary associations, social movement organizations.

During the 2000 Republican National Convention in Philadelphia, a network of activists from across the country used human blockades reinforced with PVC piping and steel to close down five major traffic arteries for nearly two hours during rush hour. As I observed, a school bus filled with police officers in combat gear arrived, a gas truck rolled in, and loud, low-flying news helicopters hovered overhead while officers worked to dismantle the human roadblock. Activists who were not part of the blockade filled the streets facing their peers, dancing, drumming, and playing other makeshift musical instruments. Some entertained with outrageous political street theater. Still others threw confetti and offered familiar chants. The classic activist refrain, “The whole world is watching! The whole world is watching!” was imbued with a new layer of meaning, coming from the mouths of activists brandishing camcorders, indicating to the police that any brutality would be documented. A handful of reporters crouched in front of the conjoined activists, posing questions and taking notes. Others watched from the sidelines, peering around bystanders who filtered through, despite police efforts to disperse the crowd.

Riot-gear clad police, marching rhythmically in long lines with near military precision, worked to contain the boisterous crowd. The marching officers transitioned seamlessly into

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2008 ASA annual meetings in Boston, MA. The author wishes to thank Paula Aymer, Chris Bobel, Ryan Centner, John Conklin, Jim Ennis, Bill Gamson, Charlotte Ryan and the members of MRAP at Boston College, Dave Grazian, Ron Jacobs, Paul Joseph, Frinde Maher, Julie Nelson, Susan Ostrander, Anna Sandoval, Rosemary Taylor, and the anonymous reviewers for their generous feedback on this manuscript. She also thanks Elizabeth Kulik for her extensive work on the news archive. Direct correspondence to: Sarah Sobieraj, Department of Sociology, Tufts University, Eaton Hall, Medford, MA 02155. E-mail: sarah.sobieraj@tufts.edu.

Social Problems, Vol. 57, Issue 4, pp. 505–528, ISSN 0037-7791, electronic ISSN 1533-8533. © 2010 by Society for the Study of Social Problems, Inc. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Rights and Permissions website at www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo/asp. DOI: 10.1525/sp.2010.57.4.505.

four rows, took the shape of a square around the intersection, and then turned to stand shoulder to shoulder, physically enclosing the protesters and supporters in the intersection. Over the course of a tense hour and a half, police detached the activists one at a time, binding their wrists with plastic handcuffs and dragging them to a school bus despite passive resistance. By the end of the long, disruptive standoff, the police had arrested over 400 people.

Amidst the turbulence, this moment felt historic. Yet, I soon discovered that the drama in which I was immersed had slipped under the radar. *The New York Times* gave the event a single 640-word story in the paper's late edition. The account was descriptive and accurate, but never mentioned what compelled so many people to do something so dramatic. A group named Disrupt¹ had planned and carried out this complex, illegal action because it felt it had something vitally important to say that was relevant to the convention. That "something" went unheard.

Presidential elections create moments of liminality that propel many diverse activist groups to mobilize in hopes of shaping mainstream debates about national issues, priorities, and interventions (Sobieraj forthcoming). This research explores the struggle over news that takes place between activists and journalists outside key campaign events in an effort to explain the patterns and characteristics of coverage. Listening carefully to journalists and activists reveals a substantial disjuncture between journalists' expectations for activists and activists' sense of what will gain them standing in the news. Activists strain themselves to be media friendly, bending over backwards to be professional, quotable, and credible, yet, ironically these studied attempts to conform to the norms of *routine* political reporting make them less appealing to journalists. While journalists may attend eagerly to elected officials' press conferences and official statements, they demand *authenticity*, particularly in the form of emotion and spontaneity, from activists (the very attributes activists work to erase in their media trainings). This article maps the two contradictory sets of expectations at play in the negotiation over news, and shows how they work together to create nearly insurmountable cultural boundaries for political outsiders.

The Mediated Public Sphere(s)

Although mass media are crucial facilitators of public discourse in general—expanding discussions of matters of common concern beyond their geographical and temporal boundaries—they are particularly salient for publics whose concerns and/or viewpoints fall outside the mainstream. When marginalized groups aspire to promote understanding, inclusion, or change, they need an opportunity to present their arguments to larger publics for consideration. While "subpublics" or "counter-publics" may attempt to circulate their ideas by other means (e.g., canvassing or working with churches, schools, and citizen groups), ignoring or being ignored by the mainstream news media dramatically limits their efforts to shape broader discourse. This is particularly true for groups that are less affluent or smaller in size, which face sizable constraints in their attempts to shape public discourse via other mechanisms. This marginalization also impacts the mainstream, because being open to new ideas and questions is critical for a healthy and legitimate democracy. As Iris Marion Young (2000) articulates:

Unless multiple public spheres are able to communicate with and influence one another, however, they are only separatist enclaves with little role to play in a process of solving problems that cross groups, or problems that concern relations among groups. Inclusiveness in democratic processes, then, suggests that there must be a single public sphere, a process of interaction and exchange through which diverse sub-publics argue, influence one another, and influence policies and actions of state and economic institutions (p. 172).

1. Because several associations in the sample engaged in illegal activities, the names of all subjects and the organizations with which they are affiliated have been changed.

Young resists the implication in Jürgen Habermas's (1989) early work that a singular public sphere is the ideal, but argues that communal space is essential as an arena of exchange and cross-pollination. The news media are the institutional spaces best able to provide this service, because other publics, such as religion, education, and public spaces in the physical sense are more exclusionary. In this vein, Myra Marx Ferree and colleagues (2002) depict the public sphere as comprised of many discursive fora (e.g., scientific communities, religious communities, and social movements), but present the mass media as a "master forum," an arena that groups and individuals can enter as claims makers, as well as listeners and critical discussants.²

Alongside abundant and often well-founded critiques of the mass media in general, and the news media in particular, lie a set of heavily normative and ultimately hopeful visions of what the mass media can and should be in democratic societies.³ In this literature, even when the mass media's shortcomings are presented alongside the counterfactual ideals, optimism triumphs. It must, for in order to conceive of a public or a set of overlapping publics that is democratically viable, communication among community members is required. This is hard to envision without the mass media, except in the very smallest of communities.

Optimism about the media as a viable democratic space of exchange is often pinned to a belief that specific circumstances, such as crises, elections, moments of elite conflict, or periods of mobilization, create moments when what is understood to be an exclusionary mass media skew toward inclusion/access/dialogue (Bennett et al 2004; Gitlin 1980; Habermas 1996). A U.S. presidential campaign is precisely this type of occasion; combining the election process, elite discord, and windows of popular mobilization (Sobieraj 2006). What do we see when we examine the news media during presidential campaigns? Activist groups like Disrupt clamor for inclusion, but to what extent do the news media serve as a master forum during these pinnacles of political engagement and mobilization? Disrupt's dramatic efforts to shape political discussion around the convention culminated in a shallow visibility, but I will show here that most groups active around key campaign events, even those that aggressively pursue the media, receive *even less* attention from the press than Disrupt. In spite of a crescendo of activism around elections, the impact of outsiders' attempts to influence mainstream political discourse is minimal.

This is puzzling. Unlike national nominating conventions of the past, in which delegates gathered, battled it out, and ultimately anointed a presidential nominee, contemporary conventions are relentlessly choreographed infomercials for the major political parties, offering little in the way of substantive political news (Panagopoulos 2007; Pomper 2007). The nominees are predetermined. The speeches are crafted, vetted, and circulated in advance. And delegates serve a symbolic rather than political role as extras on set, micromanaged by staff who ensure perfectly coordinated signs are waved at the appropriate moments. Quadrennial objections come from journalists who decry them as pseudo events amounting to free advertising for the major parties. This objection was most infamously expressed in 1996, when Ted Koppel and his crew walked out on the grounds that there was simply no news to cover.

In light of this, if we imagine a split screen with this well-coiffed pageantry on one side and a cacophony of rather dramatic and often creative political expression from outsiders on the other—Disrupt was one of dozens of groups active in the outskirts of the convention—it seems entirely plausible that the press would *prefer* to cover the activists, gravitating toward the less predictable, more colorful set of events and organizations clamoring for attention in

2. Groups and individuals can also enter this master forum involuntarily, when they are the subject of others' discussion. For example, consider dialogue about minority groups that have not shaped or initiated the discussion (e.g., immigrants, nonwhites, the poor) or discourse about communities that wish to be enclaved (e.g., the San Angelo, Texas "polygamy raid" in April 2008).

3. These visions abound in theories of the public sphere and in work on media and democracy more generally. For some examples, see Bennett (2007), Curran (2002), Entman (1989), Gurevitch and Blumler (1990), Keane (1991), and Young (2000).

the wings. Yet, this is not the case. Why is there such little news about these groups and their activism, and why is the news that circulates prone to exclude political content?

Methods

This article is part of a larger study of mobilizations around the key campaign events of the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, specifically those activities that coincided with the Republican and Democratic National Conventions (in 2000 and 2004), and three televised presidential debates (in 2000). The groups examined in this research are diverse. Some are social movement organizations, but the sample also includes civic associations, trade unions, religious clubs, etc. As a result, the comprehensive term “voluntary association” and its sibling “voluntary organization” most accurately honor their varied forms and uniting principles. I use these terms to refer to intentional, nonfamilial groupings that are formed without state coercion or market incentive. While some voluntary associations yield economic benefits for their participants (e.g., a trade union or an organization promoting tax reform), members are not compensated for their participation. I use these terms frequently, but in the interest of readability, I also take the liberty of using quasi-synonyms that are overly broad (e.g., “groups”) and overly narrow (e.g., “activist organizations”). In all cases, these groups are nonfamilial, freely entered collectives, and do not exist as a result of state coercion or for the purposes of generating profit.

I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with one typical member and one core member/organizer of 50 different voluntary organizations with activities planned to coincide with the conventions and debates.⁴ The first interviewee was selected in person, based on suitability, rapport, and willingness to participate. The subsequent respondent(s) from each organization were recruited either via solicitation or referral. This process yielded a total of 101 useable interviews.⁵ I also conducted in-depth interviews with journalists assigned to cover events transpiring outside the convention halls and debate venues ($N = 33$). I used purposive sampling to recruit journalists who worked for both national and local news organizations. I made a significant effort to include journalists who attended or covered the activities of associations I sampled, but some covered the activities of other voluntary organizations.

This article also draws upon a news archive that includes newspaper articles ($n = 92$) referencing the organizations (and/or their events) that appeared in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, as well as the major local papers published in the host city of each campaign event.⁶ This archive reflects both the local and national print coverage of these events and

4. I traveled to each host city to conduct fieldwork and draw my sample of voluntary associations. For each city, I compiled a list of organizations with activities planned to coincide with the campaign event and then took a purposive sample, choosing international, national, and local organizations, organizations with different types of activities planned (e.g., protests, symposia, voter drives), and organizations whose concerns varied. I ultimately gathered data on 50 organizations: 25 national or international organizations and 25 local, statewide, or regional groups. Their activities included: civil disobedience, protest, debate-watch parties, a concert in an arena, street performance, symposia, a \$250-per-plate fundraising luncheon, marches, leafleting, petitioning, and a national voter education drive. They organized around a variety of issues including: the war in Iraq, the death penalty, gun control, environmental concerns, women’s rights, religion, labor issues, campaign finance reform, global justice, and school vouchers. The Appendix provides additional details.

5. In two instances, I had the sense that I was not able to get a complete picture of the organization from the interviews; in each case, I conducted an additional interview. In another instance, I was unable to interview a typical member, but ultimately included the organization, because I was able to obtain a substantial amount of information about the organization from other sources.

6. *Philadelphia Daily News*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Daily News*, *The Boston Globe*, *Boston Herald*, *Winston-Salem Journal*, *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, *New York Daily News*. While the circulation of *The New York Post* rivals that of the *New York Daily News*, I included only the higher circulating paper, as no other city had three papers represented.

organizations.⁷ I include articles published on the days of the official campaign events, as well those that appeared in the two days before and after.

Reading the Papers

The activist groups created diverse, colorful, and sometimes-dramatic events designed explicitly to woo the mainstream news media, yet, most efforts—be they outrageous or mundane—proved ineffective. Interestingly, this is belied by the initial results regarding the newspaper coverage. Of the 45 associations that hoped to attract news coverage, 29 associations or their events appeared in some manner in at least one article. In this competitive media environment, a success rate of nearly two thirds seems quite significant. Probing deeper, however, it is clear how misguided such an interpretation would be. Almost half of these “success stories” involved only fleeting, often partial-line, references, occasionally without mention of the organization’s name. Only 13 of the 29 represented groups appeared in an article that included their goal or political concerns and a participant’s quote. And only 2 of the 29 organizations (Inequality Forever from the 2000 RNC and Veterans Opposing War from the 2004 DNC) were mentioned in more than two such stories. Taken together, then, 45 associations⁸ worked to attract mainstream media coverage, but only two were covered in what might be considered a meaningful way. The National Peace and Equality Coalition, which coordinated a massive march around the 2004 RNC (over half a million people are estimated to have participated), appeared in the most articles ($n = 14$), largely in stories about their struggle with the city over permitting. Yet, even with all these articles, only two described their motives for the march and included a quote from a participant or organization representative.

Length prevents me from detailing the findings of the news analysis here, but it is critical to point out that these quantitative barometers of representation overstate the associations’ success, because counting references and quotes fails to account for the substance of the coverage. For example, many associations that get into the news appear in “local color” accounts. These stories generally begin by suggesting that the convention or debate drew a particularly diverse collection of activists, proceed to list three or four groups either by name or by issue of concern (e.g., “anti-war groups”), and then offer a few snapshot descriptions from the scene. Sometimes these accounts attempt to capture the diversity of voices; at other times the selections highlight and implicitly ridicule the most unusual activists on the scene. In both approaches, the stories most frequently depict the activists and the associations as spectacle, rather than as legitimate political actors, reminiscent of Todd Gitlin’s (1980) findings over a quarter-century ago. The associations and their members lack what Ferree and associates refer to as “standing.” When a group has standing they are “treated as an actor with a voice, not merely as an object being discussed by others” (Ferree et al. 2002:13).

In contrast, activists are taken quite seriously in stories that draw on a crime story model, presenting the activity as a threat to order (e.g., traffic disruption), or as heated conflicts (e.g., between police and protesters, or between demonstrators and counter-demonstrators). This thirst for conflict has been documented by previous research (Oliver and Maney 2000; Oliver and Myers 1999), and is something journalists discuss at length. One journalist shared:

I have never understood why people say that any kind of political violence doesn’t work. If the goal is to get attention, it always works. ‘Cause the media is never not going to cover violence or

7. Although newspapers are but one medium through which news circulates, they remain the foundation of all news: Those who produce news in other venues (television, magazines, etc.) use newspapers as launching points for their own stories (McManus 1995). Analyzing televised news would have been useful as well, but logistical considerations prohibited me from doing so. In light of the fact broadcast news covers less activism than newspapers (Smith et al. 2001), this omission is significant, but not problematically so.

8. Of the 50 organizations, 48 counted as “mobilized,” and 45 of the 48 mobilized groups sought media attention.

destruction or vandalism. You know, they just aren't going to ignore that. So, I suppose one option, although I'm not saying this is a good way to do things, is to just go break stuff. You know, go riot. If people riot, we'll pay attention. We'll wanna know why they're so damn upset.

—Dustin, reporter, primary newspaper for a major metropolitan area

The newspaper articles, however, suggest that journalists actually have minimal interest in “why they're so damn upset.” In the crime model stories, activists usually receive more extended attention than those in local color stories, but these conflict-oriented articles are primarily logistical in nature. They contain extensive details about who was there, how they looked, what they did, and whether there were arrests. Often *why* the activists were motivated to act goes unmentioned. In other words, even stories that give activist groups more than a fleeting reference regularly omit the politically relevant content.

The numbers also inflate association impact because they capture nonpolitical articles in which associations appear. For example, the archive includes some stories about lawsuits over the use of public space, reflections on police behavior, and even stories on campaign fashion.⁹ Activists may be quoted on the congeniality of the Boston Police Department, but this is certainly not the issue they hoped to press into public discourse. Representation, then, should not be mistaken for political inclusion. These pieces do little to communicate the associations' issues to readers, address how readers might respond, or indicate why readers may wish to consider their views in deciding how to vote.

In sum, a fair number of groups are given a nod, but beneath the numbers there is remarkably little substance. Readers are left with a sense that some activity is going on outside the convention or debate, but told little about why, and rarely hear participants' voices. Furthermore, articles that mention the associations most often depict them as threats to law and order, bizarre outposts of the culture, or passersby commenting on the scene. Virtually no articles present activists as legitimate political actors, including their perspectives as part of an exploration of substantive issues. When the stories treat activists as thoughtful contributors, it is almost always in a context of contention (or litigation) over the use of public space and free speech, rather than in the context of debates about their substantive political issues.¹⁰

What Shapes Coverage?

Could it be possible that despite their vibrancy and drama, activism such as Disrupt's civil disobedience simply was not seen as “newsworthy?” Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester (1974), Lester (1980), Gaye Tuchman (1978), Michael Schudson (1978, 2000), and Gitlin (1980) call attention to the idea that newsworthiness is not an objective quality somewhere “out there” to be identified; rather, it emerges through a social process. Research points to several factors that contribute to the likelihood that a story will be covered, including the organization of news production, the routines of news work, the characteristics or “news value” of an event itself, and journalists' ability to transform events into meaningful narratives.

The organization of news production leaves fingerprints on what emerges as news. Research repeatedly demonstrates that news making is state centered: Beats are designed to cover the actions and statements of government and the public officials, who are deemed ideal and fully legitimate sources by virtue of their positions (Bennett 2007; Bennett and Paletz 1994; Entman 1989; Fishman 1980; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Gans 1979; Patterson 1993;

9. These are politically important topics, but none of the groups were active because they hoped to force issues of public space, for example, into the news. When such issues became relevant, as in the case of Boston's profoundly restrictive protest zone in 2004, activists wished to call attention to the curtailing of free speech, but political activism about political activism was not their reason for entry.

10. For more detailed information about the news stories, see Sobieraj (Forthcoming).

Tuchman 1978). The very absence of a “civil society beat” or a “community-organizing beat” suggests that those operating in these arenas must cross a threshold to command attention.¹¹ William Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld (1993) write “Members of the club enter the media forum through the front door when they choose . . . Challengers must contend with other would-be claimants for attention at the backdoor, finding some gimmick or act of disorder to force their way in” (p. 122.) Political outsiders must earn entry, while the state is presumed newsworthy and this newsworthiness is institutionalized in the form of beats.

News is also shaped by the routines of news work, such as deadline structures, which affect the depth of reporting and openness to unconventional sources, as well as the presence or absence of “news holes,” which impact how many stories will be written on specific topics and how long they will be. If there are 18 column inches or 90 seconds available, the story will generally be 18 column inches or 90 seconds. Pamela Oliver and Gregory Maney (2000), for example, show that when the legislature is in session, protests were less likely to be covered.¹² This is not to say that editors and producers are inflexible; on the contrary, they juggle to create room for breaking news and adjust story length to accommodate developing stories (Fishman 1980; Ryan 1991; Salzman 2003; Tuchman 1973). However, the space for news, except in highly extraordinary circumstances,¹³ is finite and the play is limited.

There is also research that locates the roots of coverage in event characteristics. Objective characteristics of protest activities and “civil disorders,” such as size, disruption, police involvement, location, and the presence of counter-demonstrators, have been linked to coverage outcomes (Amenta et al. 2009; Myers and Caniglia, 2004; Oliver and Maney 2000; Oliver and Myers 1999). Findings on event characteristics as predictors of coverage have, however, been inconsistent, with characteristics other than event size not always proving significant (e.g., McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996).

Others attribute coverage patterns to more subjective characteristics, such as Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge’s (1965) classic listing of news values, which includes uniqueness, size, negativity, etc. Far from seeing these as objective qualities that demand coverage, sociological accounts attribute coverage to compatibility between event characteristics and the journalists’ assessment of what is newsworthy, as embedded in a larger field of professional assumptions, expectations, and standards (Benson 2006; Schudson 2003; Tuchman 1972, 1978). Good “news judgment” is not as much an individual attribute as it is a reflection of the degree to which a journalist (or editor/producer) has adopted widely shared professional standards as communicated via journalism schools, professional organizations, awards, and feedback in the workplace. The question, then, is not whether an event *is* newsworthy, but whether an event is *interpreted* as newsworthy. Some of the interpretive work is conscious, news workers assess the attributes of an event against established criteria for inclusion, and some is more subtly linked to news workers ability to transform events into narratives or stories (Darnton 1975; Jacobs 1996; Manoff 1986).

Researchers share differing opinions about which factors are most influential in shaping news content, but few conceive of one particular force (e.g., event characteristics, news routines, etc.) as the sole determinant. Instead, it is most useful to understand these varied forces as working together, and interacting with broader political-economic, historical, and cultural circumstances to shape what ultimately emerges as news (Amenta et al. 2009; Gitlin 1980; Schudson 2003).

11. Gitlin (1980), drawing on an interview with Ben Bagdikian, describes three hurdles faced by news outside of regular beats: the editor’s decision that a setting or event is potentially newsworthy, the reporter’s decision about what in that setting is worth noting, and the editors’ decision about what the final story should look like and where it will be placed.

12. Importantly, the political context shapes organizations’ media strategies as well. See Rohlinger 2006 for an insightful example.

13. In extraordinary circumstances, primarily crises—the attacks of September 11th, the Columbine High School shootings, etc.—news preempts scheduled programming and expands exponentially.

This literature sheds light on the complex exchanges I found transpiring between journalists and activists. Both journalists and activists treat coverage of activist events as nonroutine, approaching it as episodic and contingent on activist groups' doing something that is perceived as newsworthy. This shared understanding that the burden of earning coverage falls upon the activists yields an environment in which the associations I studied work diligently to win journalists' attention, while reporters approach them with skepticism, attuned to the fact that they will need to use their "news judgment" to determine whether their efforts warrant attention.

Following the Rules Breaks Them

Gitlin (1980) argues that movements "become 'newsworthy' only by submitting to the implicit rules of newsmaking, by conforming to journalistic notions (themselves embedded in a history) of what a 'story' is. What an 'event' is, what a 'protest' is" (p. 3). I concur, and show that these implicit rules are misrecognized and mistakenly perceived as the same rules in place for routine political reporting, when in fact they are not. Edie Goldenberg (1975), for example, urges resource poor organizations seeking news coverage to become more like established businesses and government agencies in their presswork. Similarly, Jason Salzman (2003) advises groups to adopt practices such as creating sound bites, rehearsing answers, and writing quality press releases in an effort to communicate effectively with reporters. In general, the message seems to be that the path to inclusion requires two things: (1) activist groups doing something that journalists will interpret as newsworthy and (2) then demonstrating their credibility and reliability through the use of professional caliber media work in keeping with the media work done by public relations agencies, communications departments, and spokespeople.

And this is exactly what these groups attempted to do. Taking their cues from the news-gathering and dissemination procedures that go on daily between journalists, parajournalists, and subjects, the organizations held elaborate media trainings during which members could practice techniques to prepare themselves to work effectively with the news media. These media trainings varied, but generally involved some subset of the following elements: holding mock interviews on camera and then reviewing the recordings to evaluate the performance, creating and using sound bites, strategizing about ways to stay "on message" when imaginary reporters attempt to divert their focus, designating media spokespeople, and discussing how to steer inquiries to spokespeople without losing journalists' attention. Many associations also sent out press releases and worked to cultivate contacts in the press prior to their campaign-related activities.¹⁴ They worked carefully to guide their members' behavior and construct events they believed would be newsworthy. Most organizers were aware of the allure of compelling visuals, for example, and strived to create inviting photo opportunities. Yet, contrary to what one might initially expect, these careful media trainings aimed at engaging reporters and photographers often failed to produce tangible results. In fact, it appears that they undermined them.

I watched, time and time again, as reporters gave voluntary associations following standard industry practices the cold shoulder. In many respects, those organizations that followed the rules most judiciously were the least attractive to the news workers they were courting. Journalists accept press releases, press conferences, and spokespeople in their routine political reporting, but their coverage of activism was governed by a very different set of rules and practices, which in many ways were diametrically opposed to those employed in their routine news-gathering. When associations attempted to conform to journalists' model for routine news-gathering they failed, not because they didn't conform to the "implicit rules of news making," but because they were following the wrong rules. Table 1 lays these two sets of expectations side-by-side.

14. However, far fewer had nurtured the long-term relationships with journalists, such as those described by Ryan, Anastario, and Jeffreys (2005).

Table 1 • Norms for Reporting on Political Insiders vs. Norms for Reporting on Activists

<i>Norms for Political Insiders</i>	<i>Norms for Activists</i>
Conditions of Inclusion	
Structured into routine journalistic work through the assignment of beats, etc.	Nonroutine, conditional, no “community organizing,” “civil society,” or “activist” beat
Players are actively pursued by the news media	Players must actively pursue the press
Acceptable Events	
<i>Good events are reporter-friendly:</i>	<i>Good events are authentic:</i>
Often overtly constructed for the media (e.g., press conferences), and guide reporters to the official story	Do not appear to be soliciting the press, as real activism is about political zeal not calculated media work
Predictable, routine	Original, innovative, unexpected
Can be held where organization/office sees fit	Should be held in public, preferably outdoors
Acceptable Sources	
<i>Good sources are legitimate as established through:</i>	<i>Good sources are authentic as established through:</i>
Professional status	Amateur status
Institutional authority or credentials	Moral authority or personal proximity to issue raised
Rational, provide reasoned evidence	Emotional (but not too emotional), share feelings
Prepared remarks, even reading scripts is acceptable	Natural remarks, scripts/hints of scripting unacceptable
Speak on behalf of organization/office	Speak as individuals, share personal narratives
Can discuss common good/vision	Avoid publicly minded speech
Acceptable Politics	
<i>Acceptable politics may be visionary:</i>	<i>Acceptable politics are reasonable:</i>
May address individual issues or broad concerns	Address one concrete issue, avoid broad concerns
Issues are reasonable, not radical	Issues are reasonable, not radical
Raising issues in need of address is acceptable	Should present plausible solutions to problems
Nature of the Articles	
Generally treat subjects and sources with respect	Often belittle subjects and sources
Generally include a quote from a key, informed source	Often do not quote group representatives or participants
Balance is essential to the article, journalists seek comment from subjects of criticism	Balance is unnecessary, journalists rarely seek comment from subject of criticism

Rules for Radicals (and Anyone Who Might be Mistaken for One)

While activist groups were clamoring to appear legitimate, which they worked to achieve largely through an aura of professionalism, journalists were seeking authenticity. The concept of authenticity has been used in analyses of other cultural phenomena. Examples include David Grazian’s (2003) work on the search for authenticity in the Chicago blues scene, Richard Peterson’s (1997) exploration of the construction and performance of authenticity in country music, Gary Alan Fine’s (2004) research on the ways in which self-taught artists are deemed authentic and imposters weeded out, and Dean MacCannell’s (1999) interrogation of tourists’ attempts to find the authentic and the tourism industry’s attempt to construct it. But what is authenticity? Grazian (2003:10–11) argues that authenticity refers to two phenomena. First, it is the ability of a place or an event to conform to an idealized representation of reality, a set of expectations regarding how a thing should look, sound, or feel. Second, discussions of authenticity refer to a performance’s credibility or sincerity and its ability to come off as natural and effortless to observers. Peterson (1997) includes an additional component: originality.

Much like newsworthiness itself, authenticity is a mirage. It is a construct that emerges out of our presumptions, beliefs, and imaginings in the absence of direct knowledge or lived

experience. MacCannell (1999) illustrates this, arguing that we may disparage “touristy” attractions when traveling, seeking out authentic experiences, which may themselves be constructs that have been carefully built to conform to our expectations. In the case of country music, Peterson (1997) demonstrates that authenticity is fabricated; artists and their labels work to ensure that markers of authenticity are presented to the audience: use of rural southern accents, playing specific instruments (e.g., fiddle), recitation of band members’ hometowns, and being “down to earth.” Taken together, this body of research demonstrates that authenticity is actively sought and deliberately constructed in a variety of cultural arenas. It is negotiated between those seeking to present someone or something as authentic and those searching for this “realness.”

As I listened to journalists, it became apparent that authenticity figures prominently in distinguishing the newsworthy from the unworthy in the realm of outsider politics, but it has gone unrecognized as a critical element in constructing this type of news. It is invisible in lists of news values that are generated via content analyses of news, such as the Galtung and Ruge (1965) assessment. *Looking only at the news, we are unable to see what goes unreported, what is unnoticed, and what is dismissed.* In order to fully understand what becomes news, we must also be able to see what does not. This ethnographic account of news coverage of activism offers that insight. The hunt for authenticity is visible in the news-making process, if not in the news itself.

Authentic Activist Events

Most journalists I encountered spoke more of the *inauthentic* than the authentic. For them, inauthenticity was viewed as a form of manipulation and contrivance and they prided themselves on being able to identify it, as suggested by Jerry, a reporter for a secondary newspaper for a mid-sized city:

You ask somebody in the street why they just put their arm in a lockbox and they’ll give a very pat sound bite, “I’m here to put my body on the line and face damage because the environment can’t stand up for itself,” or some kind of sound bite like that that will be nice on TV or as a pull out quote in the paper . . . There is a conscious effort of the part of organizers, telling people how to do this. They have workshops on how to deal with the corporate media and what to say and how to not get off message . . . It’s pretty savvy. They teach them how to dodge issues of violence and vandalism. They had whole workshops on this. So, I think they even train these people to sort of keep an eye out for the cameras and to almost perform. Sometimes, they’d be just sort of standing ‘cause they’d all be pooped and the police would be all nice behind the barricades . . . If a news camera pulls up, they get out their little buckets and drum things and they start dancing around and chanting and trying to make it look as if there is all action, all the time.

This reporter “saw” and rejected the sound bites not because of their substantive content, but because they were created to attract to news workers, to fit with the templates of reportage. Embedded in his recognition of this as a performance was the assumption that it was a charade. It was the activists’ very savvy-ness that frustrated him. The media work—the workshops, the trainings, the organizers’ “conscious effort”—undermined their success by violating the authenticity imperative. Following the commonly understood norms of news making (e.g., condensing arguments into succinct sound bites), which in fact apply only to political insiders, unknowingly breached the norms that journalists use when reporting on political outsiders.

The antithesis of the event that Jerry disrobed is the authentic event, which journalists witness as intrepid voyeurs rather than as audience members. Authentic association events are interpreted as “real” rather than as disingenuous performances designed to lure journalists.

I saw a helicopter in the air, and I followed the beam and . . . I got to St. Mark’s Church and there were thousands of bicyclists there and hundreds of cops and the cops were making many, many arrests, and seizing bicycles, and it was a very tense stand-off type of thing. I thought it was real news,

it was real opposition and real conflict that wasn't some cooked-up press stunt. They didn't even pay attention to me.

—Aiden, reporter, primary newspaper for a major metropolitan area

Aiden, like Jerry, juxtaposed real news with press stunts. Real news happens and skillful reporters root it out, the implication being that a press event by its very nature is inauthentic and thus without news value. Activist groups that openly sought media attention or attempted to shape news coverage were interpreted as inauthentic and, when possible, discounted.

At some level this is counterintuitive, because public relations personnel, “spin doctors,” media consultants, and the like are a standard part of routine news production (Schudson 2003). In fact, most news comes from planned, intentional events, such as press releases, press conferences, and scheduled interviews. These reporters would be unlikely to dismiss a press statement issued by the Justice Department or an invitation to The White House Easter Egg Roll as inauthentic on the grounds that they had been designed for the media. And they would be unlikely to ignore a pithy statement made by an elected official because it felt like a sound bite. This should not be mistaken for irony; the dominance of this micromanagement media culture in routine news work may be the very foundation of the journalists' skepticism regarding organizations outside that realm. Journalists are used to being relatively powerless in the face of information gatekeepers, so they may use their greater leeway in covering political outsiders to apply their own standards to activists and their behavior.

The burden of proof required to establish authenticity may be higher than normal in the context of campaign events because these “outside events” were spaces where reporters believed they could escape the scripted, painstakingly engineered, and ceremonial nature of the conventions themselves. Some journalists addressed this directly:

The real story is gonna be in the streets. I mean really, the convention is, it's only important 'cause it's the president and the presidential election. I mean it's a totally stage managed, there's nothing spontaneous in these things anymore, there's nothing newsworthy, there's no brokered convention . . . It's his [G.W. Bush's] second term, so the vice president's already known, the cabinet's in place. So, I've been saying, look, the real story is gonna be in the streets.

—Aiden, reporter, primary newspaper for a major metropolitan area

The stifling lack of spontaneity in electoral politics emerged in other interviews in less direct ways. In one revealing conversation, a journalist who reported from the convention hall and from the streets described his reaction when Al Sharpton broke from his script during the 2004 DNC:

I actually wrote some stuff about the Al Sharpton thing 'cause I kind of said, you know, “Holy shit, this is big stuff, this is actually sort of substantive—it's not—hasn't been vetted. This is real, authentic [sic] reactions he's getting!”

—Dustin, reporter, primary newspaper for a major metropolitan area

Dustin is excited by Sharpton's unexpected transgression, but also by that of the audience—which is implicated in these events as an essential element of the performance—clapping and cheering in earnest enthusiasm, not only dutifully during applause breaks.

Fed up with the slick PR of electoral politics, many journalists approached their reporting outside the conventions and debates as an opportunity to tell an unscripted story. As a consequence, they often found the associations' diligent impression management tedious:

[Choice!] always has like a spokesperson and they always speak like they've been told exactly what to say . . . And a lot of times in politicians you get that. But like you'd hope that in something that's supposed to be more real and human and an expression of outrage or whatever that they'd be expressing something from the heart rather than something they downloaded from the official Web site . . . You don't have to be a journalist to know when someone's giving you the company lines.

—Lucy, reporter, secondary newspaper for a major metropolitan area

The convention was covered regardless of its (literal) scriptedness, but many activist groups staged events that were not covered because they did not reach the journalists' authenticity test.

In order for an activist event to be authentic, it also needs to be outside. The Northeast Union of Part-Time Professionals organized two events during the debate in Boston in 2000. The first event was a moderately sized, mildly disruptive rally in downtown, for which they described receiving some light news coverage: a short news radio piece. Their second event was a teach-in series co-sponsored by Students for Change, which received no coverage. Harry, a core member of the union, commented:

The *Globe* almost covered us [at the teach-ins], but decided not to. The *Globe* said, "When there's some conflict, call us." Typical journalist kind of thing. We did have press releases, but they didn't cover it. They don't want to cover political education, right? That's not a story! But, they [the teach-ins] were all of very, very high quality . . . It wasn't just a bunch of people who wanted to be idiots and run out into the street and make noise, or a ruckus, you know? We had a large group of students, and others, sitting around and talking seriously about how to confront these pressing social issues. The media doesn't want that. It's very sad really, that in order for the disenfranchised to get press they have to break the law. The story could have been, you know, "Youth not apathetic after all" or "Progressive social issues still matter" or a dozen other things. I could come up with a list of angles.

When voluntary organizations held "indoor events"—teach-ins, symposia, debate watch parties, and the like—they routinely became what Mark Fishman (1982) calls "nonevents," events that are irrelevant to a reporter's scheme of interpretation. Fishman sees nonevents as those occurrences that are not part of the routine functioning of the institutions that reporters are assigned to cover, but the nonevent concept is useful for understanding the political outsiders' experiences as well. Editors' and reporters' expectations of newsworthy political activities draw heavily on images of protest and rarely encompass community meetings or intellectual discussions.¹⁵ In fact, many reporters were literally assigned to cover "protest," "action in the streets," or "outside events," narrowing the boundary of what counts as a newsworthy response to the campaign events. This suggests that the editor and newsroom routines, such as the ways in which staff are used, define the scheme of interpretation, as much as a more micro-level sense of what counts as relevant.

Perhaps indoor events are simply less visible than outdoor ones and lose out in the competition for news coverage. I don't think this is necessarily the case. In fact, some reporters who were assigned to cover extra-convention happenings wrote incredibly esoteric stories. One journalist I spoke with in 2004, for example, wrote a feature about "where Republicans could find sand in New York." The news environment is competitive, but the fact remains that association events lacking dramatic flair do not interest most news workers. When asked about the process of determining which events to check out and which to skip, Shane, a national news magazine reporter, explained:

It's a tough call, but generally for me, and most journalists, they look for events that are going to involve a lot of people and that are going to have some sort of controversial edge to them or, sort of sadly, some sort of sex appeal to them. So, if you have a bunch of Hollywood stars at a Ralph Nader rally, that's going to draw folks, but also if you've got a thousand angry ironworkers who are protesting that is going to draw me more than a thoughtful symposium on whether to open the Alaskan wilderness. I mean, I look for action, energy, and I, I think most people are looking for something where real people are involved where there is some sort of real folks out making some noise, doing something.

"Action" in this sense means physical action; debating public issues such as the Alaskan Wilderness simply is not compelling to journalists. Many of the reporters' quotes here have been about protesters. This was not an oversight or coincidence. When I asked journalists questions

15. Such images may be effective in another setting. For example, we can imagine journalists including these types of events in coverage of, say, the Iowa Caucuses.

about voluntary associations, indoor activism disappeared completely. There were groups doing civil disobedience, but organizations of all stripes were active around the campaign events, many of which were labor unions, religious groups, and conventional national mailing-list citizen groups doing decidedly un-radical things from sponsoring symposia to petitioning. Listening to the reporters, it is as if every association activity around the debates and conventions was a protest or a march, because the others were simply nonevents.

Since journalists virtually never mentioned indoor activities, I asked about them. The reporters indicated little interest in such events. Here one journalist offers advice for associations trying to capture media attention:

Shut down a highway, I don't know. I think getting angry won't help. Maybe having a forum and generally handing out information that is educational and really says this is why we are here, this is why this is a concern, this is why it should be your concern. That would maybe be effective at drawing media, but on the other hand, we didn't cover that type of stuff tonight and if someone shuts down a highway, that would definitely get your attention. The problem is then you are going to tick off a lot more people. I don't know if the media would so much go for a forum, but it would be effective. I don't know. It's sort of a catch-22.

—Kris, reporter, primary newspaper for a mid-sized city

Kris proposed that if an association is disruptive, the news media are more likely to be interested; yet, she questions the effectiveness of this type of activism, suggesting it alienates outsiders. In her mind, the type of educational, informative event that would be most effective is strikingly similar to the teach-ins that Harry described. Yet, neither she nor Harry expected that such an event would be covered.

In an effort to attract media attention, many organizations held substantial indoor events including a debate-watch party in a movie theater to promote youth political engagement, a concert featuring pop stars to benefit pro-choice candidates, and informative panels featuring elected officials, community organizers, and researchers discussing topics from the Supreme Court to the environment. But these events fared poorly with journalists. The directive to association leaders is unclear. While the disruptive events are more likely to be covered, journalists write about the disruption itself, the element of the activity they interpret as newsworthy, and rarely cover the issues that gave rise to the event.

Disrupt, United for Change, Boston Resistance, and the National Peace and Equality Coalition—two organizations holding large permitted marches and two engaging in civil disobedience—all achieved significant quantitative representation in the news archive articles. Each organization appeared in at least ten different stories. Even so, these stories very rarely included the motives behind the groups' activities or quoted their members. United for Change, for example, appeared in 11 articles, but not a single one included a motive and a quote, and 9 of the 11 articles never addressed the reason for the march. While reporters determined that the events held by these four associations were newsworthy despite their staged nature, there was a catch-22 for those that effectively negotiated newsworthy status without meeting the authenticity criterion. Naomi described the dilemma as follows:

I did try quite hard to get the issues out that people were protesting, but there definitely—I felt like there was a double message because a lot of the protesters would say that they really wanted the press to cover these issues, but then they were also very clear that they were precipitating these events that were “quote unquote” newsworthy. So, I do need to write about the news they create, you know, and I do worry that what I write gets read. So, you sort of try to balance between the arrests and things like that which people really seek out and then the issues that people were getting arrested for and they chose to get arrested, so it's wasn't—They knew that that was newsworthy and got themselves into that bind . . . They staged the event to get publicity and then they don't want you to write about the event that they designed. I don't know. They tie my hands and then blame me for it. It's frustrating.

—Naomi, reporter, national news magazine

Naomi described a zero-sum game in which conflict or disruption pushes information about the motive(s) behind the action out of the story. Yet, in all but the shortest articles, it is difficult to make a convincing case that such pertinent information could not also be included. She imagined her readers as interested in arrests, but it is equally plausible that readers might want to know *why* so many people felt compelled to close down a street.

Further, the absence of violence or conflict does not magically free space that journalists use to address the event's political substance. On the contrary, the press has such a powerful interest in reporting conflict and violence in articles on activist organizations that when these groups are peaceful the story often becomes *about the absence* of violence or conflict, or about the logistics of protest, or both. Conflict does not steal the spotlight; it owns it.

I contributed to a lot of stories, but one story that I played a bigger role in was how the protesters tried to police themselves and control divisions and tensions within a group so that their message didn't get kidnapped by sort of tension with police . . . Because anytime there was a flare up between protesters and police, that became the story, and secondary was exactly what these people were protesting . . . It diminished all the thought and time they had put into what they were protesting as soon as there was a confrontation with police because that became the story. So, I worked on a story, and it got in, about how protesters control themselves and police themselves.

—Juan, reporter, primary newspaper for a major metropolitan area

He shared this experience without a hint of irony. What exactly *was* this group protesting? Omitting the “why” is the standard practice of reporters, but this omission has more to do with a history of journalistic apprehensiveness around objectivity than it does with word count.¹⁶

Authentic Activists

Journalists evaluate *events* as authentic or inauthentic, and also evaluate *sources* in these terms. As journalists evaluate informants, they interpret anything that seems too tightly controlled as manipulative. Wanting to avoid being tricked by people who aren't being “real,” they generally disregard these perceived imposters. One journalist made the following comment about an anarchist collective that was active during the 2004 DNC in Boston:

They had some sort of spokesman. Some of the other people were kind of reticent to speak with us . . . I find it a little heavy handed. I think it's—I think the protesters are like any other organization in the sense that they want to centralize and streamline their message. And I'm really conscious of not wanting to get spun, of wanting honesty and spontaneity and to um, I guess characterize an organization as I see it . . . They see the media more as a tool that they can use as they want.

—Liam, reporter, secondary newspaper for a major metropolitan area

Liam perceived the group's official statements as deceptive. He was wary of the spokesperson whose message he interpreted as a staged performance designed to mislead him.

In sum, prepared statements are welcome from those in positions of power, but rejected when they come from those in more marginalized positions. If the district attorney gives a statement a reporter feels is contrived, they may attempt to find additional sources, but are unlikely to exclude the district attorney's statement or to opt not to cover the event. Public officials are perceived as central to quality reporting on such issues; journalists do not have the power to ignore the district attorney's position. This professional norm heightens the power of elected officials to shape news and limits journalists' perceived ability to exercise discretion by shrinking the available pool of appropriate sources. The small number of legitimate spokespeople and larger number of journalists disadvantages reporters who must bring official statements to editors in order to have complete stories. This power dynamic is reversed when a

16. There is a circulating belief that including “why” amounts to conjecture about causality, and reporters maintain a commitment to approximating (the appearance of) objectivity.

story is more amorphous, such as being assigned to cover “action in the streets” on the eve of a debate, and potential sources are abundant, eager to be interviewed, and seen as interchangeable. Journalistic autonomy is far greater when covering political outsiders, particularly if many of them are available.¹⁷ In fact, perhaps what is unusual here is not that journalists are skeptical of association representatives, their statements, and their activities, but that they are able to exercise less discretion when covering public officials’ activities.¹⁸

This poses an interesting problem for both activists and reporters. For activist groups, the problem is that in an effort to shape their public performances to conform to prevailing journalistic norms, such as shorter stories and a visual orientation, organizers incorporate these norms into their media trainings and then work very hard to manage their members accordingly. Ultimately, however, this preparation may damage the groups’ ability to get their desired messages into news stories, as suggested by this journalist’s reflection:

There was one young woman who had clearly gotten some press. I think she was with the Young Communist Party or something like that and she was . . . very polished, and I think she mentioned she had been in some other articles. You do kind of try to stay away from folks like that who are used to the attention and very polished . . . but then you had this guy who lost his son. I don’t think he even spoke much English. So there, not very polished at all, but obviously very eloquent and heartfelt in his comments . . . and you want to get what his story is.

—Jessie, reporter, secondary newspaper for a mid-sized city

Jessie defined “polished” not as informed, but as inauthentic, and subsequently rejected the well-prepared woman as a potential source. This was complicated by the fact that the young woman was the spokesperson for her organization. As part of her association’s media strategy, other group members, fearful of being misrepresented, were unwilling to talk with journalists, and repeatedly directed reporters to the spokeswoman. As a result of the interplay between the association’s media strategy and the reporter’s skepticism, the voices of association members and ultimately, the organization’s message, were excluded from the story.

Several reporters described a process of shopping for informants based on their expectation that activist statements should be natural, sincere, and authentic:

Well, I was pretty focused on just trying to get a few quotes to send in [to the writer] and, seriously, the first four or five people I spoke with gave me these crappy, memorized sound bites. It was like a bad telemarketer, you know [laughs], where you can practically hear the typed script through the phone [laughs]. I could completely envision them going over these things at their meetings, again and again. I mean, I totally understand, you know. They are trying to get their concern out, but I just want something real, not a walking press release. So, fine, whatever, get it off your chest, but I’m not sending that in . . . I just stuck with it and kept working the crowd.

—Molly, reporter, wire service

This impasse proved consequential. In effect, sensing inauthenticity propelled journalists to keep foraging for a source until they found someone they interpreted as genuine. The paradox is that most of the organizations had been so diligent about media training that the respondents the journalists eventually determined to be authentic were often quite marginal to the association or they would be “on message” too.

17. This power dynamic can shift when a specific organization is highly sought out. For example, journalists were clamoring for statements from the leaders of the organization that coordinated the massive march around the 2004 RNC, looking for responses to decisions made by the police, projections for attendance numbers, etc. This shifts the power dynamic, affording activists greater control over the flow of information—who will speak, what they will say, when, and to whom.

18. Gans (1979:140–41) describes beat reporters as being forced to be more polite to their sources, as they must establish and maintain rapport in order to complete their work, while general assignment reporters, who source “strangers” often cannot only forgo such niceties, but can also press them with more challenging, provocative, and leading questions.

While it may seem as though journalists were finding the exact opposite of what they were seeking, many had a preconceived story in mind and were looking to place people in the character positions they had envisioned. They filled gaps in their story almost by audition, waiting for someone to give the quote they were looking for, rather than attempting to develop a deep understanding of the organizations, their issues, or their activities. W. Lance Bennett (2007) describes the prevalence of formulas in newsmaking; Schudson (1982), Barbie Zelizer (1993), and Tuchman (1978) describe journalists as encountering the world as a series of stories; and Ronald Jacobs (1996) demonstrates the way narrative emplotment of an event helps determine the story's perceived newsworthiness and its eventual form. My analysis supports these assessments and suggests that journalists make sense of unfolding events by placing them into templates, seeking to populate their stories with the characters they have deemed essential to the story, even when their drive to typecast is thwarted. In other words, perhaps the fact that journalists' evaluations take them from center to margin is not undercutting their objectives at all, rather, quite the opposite: They meet the journalists' objectives, enabling them to write a story that reinscribes their preexisting expectations. They create a story that they perceive as capturing the authenticity of a moment, and it does; it captures those set idealized expectations and representations of reality so aptly outlined in earlier work on authenticity.

One of these expectations is that "real" activists are politically driven as a result of personal connection to an issue. Reporters preferred sources who discuss issues as individuals with stories to share, rather than as publicly minded advocates. This is primarily because the journalists were not looking to write about issues or about associations, they were looking to tell stories about individuals. When I asked Nick, a reporter for a prominent public radio news program, if he had initiated contact with any groups as he prepared to cover the protests surrounding the Boston debate in 2000, he curtly corrected me: "Not with groups. With individuals. I wanted to do portraits of protesters." His correction and the discussion that followed pointed to the journalists' preference for sources that speak as individuals sharing personal stories, rather than as representatives of a group.

Publicly minded speech—whether it involved expressing concern for the common good or sharing a collectively held perspective on a public issue—was routinely devalued and often discarded by reporters covering voluntary associations and their activities. In fact, journalists described public-spirited talk as the veneer they needed to peel away in order to get the story they wanted to write. Juan described this distinction:

Most of the groups had organizers. As soon as they identified us as reporters they would hand us literature, would ask us if we understood what the protest was about—really tried to make sure that we knew what they stood for and why it mattered . . . Other people seemed to have interesting takes. I found most interesting was why somebody individually would be involved. I know, let's say, corporate influence is a problem in American politics or environmental destruction is a problem in a lot of places—but why do you care about that and why did you decide to sort of steer your life toward that cause? . . . I thought that was interesting . . . talking to people about sort of what got them fired up. You don't meet a lot of people in your day-to-day life that are really sort of living a cause.

—Juan, reporter, primary newspaper for a major metropolitan area

Juan's story may ultimately mention the issues his subjects want to publicize, but for him the issues do not merit a story on their own, at least not when voluntary associations raise them. This is linked to authenticity in important ways, as activists who are truthful, forthright, and open are presumed to speak in ways that link more explicitly to their own self-interest. Sharing a story he found particularly meaningful, he later explained:

There was a march to Rampart [police] Station. A lot of people in that area have had problems with the police department . . . So, I thought that was interesting. I talked to people that actually had to sort of confront the issues that they were protesting. It wasn't abstract, but it was very concrete what they were living with.

These preferred victim-activists exist in opposition to their foil: disconnected do-gooder types who advocate for causes that do not impact them directly or who address concerns that impact their lives, but speak about these concerns as public issues.

Nina Eliasoph (1998) details a fascinating transformation from activists who speak in publicly minded ways in private settings to activists who speak in private, self-interested ways in public settings. This would be paradoxical if not for her observation, further supported by my data, that journalists ignore attempts at more publicly minded types of speech. I found that some activist groups mobilized the power of personal narratives as a strategy to engage others, but far more often I found groups resolutely determined to keep the big picture at the forefront.¹⁹ These organizations worked diligently to help their members to articulate issues in publicly minded ways. This turned off some reporters and propelled them toward those groups or, more accurately, toward those individuals, more apt to offer the type of accounts they hoped to include.

The very best sources are those willing to share their emotions in addition to their experiences. Aiden shared his approach to covering the massive march in NYC coordinated by the National Peace and Equality Coalition:

I know from experience with these types of things, what really makes it into the paper, and what we're looking for, and what we want, is a description of activities, actions, and behavior, mixed in with quotes too to get some sense of what the *individuals* within the crowd are *feeling* (emphasis added).

He could as easily have been interested in what motivated the participants, what they organized around, or planned for the future, but it is "feelings," those intimacies of human experience, that take precedence. This preference focuses the story on the personal rather than on the public elements of activism and stands at odds with the way associations have worked to professionalize their media work. Fearing they will be perceived as irrational, ill-informed, or extremist, activists often deliberately bury their emotions under a carefully erected architecture of cool, reasoned analysis. Journalists interpret this professionalism as the antithesis of authenticity. It is a fine line to walk, because fervor attracts and simultaneously repels the news media. Too little passion and the associations are inauthentic, too much and they are zealots.

The Parameters of Political Acceptability

Authenticity is not the only filter journalists use when deciding what to cover. Associations must be interpreted as politically *reasonable* if they wish to appear in print, without being ridiculed.²⁰ What does it mean to be politically reasonable? Journalists prefer organizations that tackle one issue at a time and present "plausible" solutions to "reasonable" concerns (taking issue with capitalism, for example, relegates an organization to an eye roll). Because these preferences often prove a poor fit for association concerns and objectives, they can create a communicative impasse between journalists, whose work to obtain good stories is repeatedly thwarted by association efforts, and association members, who are befuddled by the news media's unwillingness to give them the kind of coverage they want.

Part of being reasonable is providing simple, clearly articulated messages. Coalitions of diverse organizations and individual organizations raising multiple issues often troubled reporters' templates because they did not appear to have a clear message. The coexistence of multiple messages was often interpreted as the absence of *any* message, as Dick illustrates:

19. A subset of anti-war organizations active in 2004 included groups who discussed the personal toll that the war had taken on their families (e.g., parents whose children had been killed, kids who missed their parents, soldiers who had returned from Iraq sharing their stories, etc.).

20. Political reasonability has to do with the selection of targets, issues, and concerns, rather than with tactics. Tactical extremism (e.g., illegal activities such as property crime and unpermitted disruption of traffic) is quite popular with journalists, but points of view perceived as outside the mainstream are devalued and disregarded.

What was difficult for people to grasp was walking out onto the parkway that day [before the RNC in 2000] and seeing every issue under the sun being shouted about. Everything from Say No to Breast Feeding to Free Mumia to, there was even a group in support of Americans who died defending the old dictatorial South Vietnamese government. There was just weird stuff and in a situation like that, the message that they are trying to put across comes across as just garbled. It becomes hard to report coherently, readers—most of the e-mails I got after those protests—were saying, “Well, what do they want?,” “Why didn’t you tell us what they were after?” Well, I would tell you if they would have told me. They just, they were all over the map.

—Dick, reporter, primary newspaper for a major metropolitan area

In the presence of multiple organizations working together in these two marches, many reporters, including Dick, saw fragmentation and discord rather than commonality.

In other cases, confusion emerged as a byproduct of geographic proximity, with the simultaneous use of designated “free speech zones” or public spaces giving reporters the erroneous impression that unrelated groups were collaborating. Brenda, from *Stand-Up St. Louis*, felt this happened to their organization at the St. Louis debate in 2000:

They [the local paper] just kind of talked about all the groups who were out there for anything and they didn’t really make a distinction between those and *Stand-Up St. Louis*—they just started describing protesters who they ran into. There were some across the way in the pen . . . with all kinds of signs and they started talking about those protesters and didn’t distinguish them from our group and so they made it sound like people were just out there doing anything.

Similarly, United Trades organized a mass leafleting of downtown Philadelphia at the 2000 RNC with clusters of representatives in yellow t-shirts on more than 25 corners in a one-mile radius. Nonetheless, the union members felt they were lumped in with others who were also out on the busy city streets. Franklin blamed the press for not taking more initiative:

Many of the reports wrote that there were so many issues that nothing was defined. I mean that is not correct. You could have taken an interview with me or some other labor person and understood the labor reasons for being there. You could have taken the Buddhist monks and free Tibet folks and interviewed someone there, but what they did was they took the whole thing and said that there wasn’t one consolidated issue, but there are many issues in this country.

Franklin and Brenda both described their frustration with journalists who depicted their efforts as disorganized or confused, feeling that they did not take time to understand the situation adequately before writing their stories. It is difficult to know how much responsibility for this miscommunication falls on organizations that fail to streamline their messages and how much falls on journalists who do not probe deeply enough to uncover the distinctions among groups, but the outcome frustrates both.

Some associations communicated their concerns clearly, but found that broad social-structural critiques fell on deaf ears. Loren, from *Disrupt*, expressed his intense frustration with the coverage they received after their efforts at the 2000 Republican National Convention:

So much of the coverage just said things like, “Protesters gathered for a range of causes” or “protesting every issue under the sun.” Things like that give the impression that we are all out there talking about different things. They don’t get it—that these are all the same thing. It’s not fractured, you know, these problems are interrelated and so yes, some people mention the prison-industrial complex, and others are talking about corporate welfare, and then there are people talking about the death penalty and poverty and health care and everything else, but they are all tied together and that’s what the media can’t take the time to get. It’s like it’s just easier for them just to say it makes no sense, what we’re saying, than it is to explain or figure out why it makes sense . . . We don’t just want some proposition passed; we are trying to show that something is seriously, seriously wrong here. Is it capitalism or a two-party system or globalization? I don’t know, but what we are pissed off about is the fact that there is a ridiculous imbalance in economic resources in this country that is basically leading to injustice at every corner. How do you fit that into a sound bite? We have no message? . . . I don’t want to say it’s like laziness on the part of the mainstream media, but it seems

that way from here . . . It's like they ask questions and don't bother to listen to the answer, they just look for the one line that they can use and trash the rest.

Jerry, a reporter for a secondary newspaper in a mid-sized city, who covered Disrupt, said he did not feel that the protesters successfully communicated their concerns, yet later, when I asked if he knew what their goals were, he mimicked the activists in a deep, mock-serious voice:

"To bring attention to the abuses of global capitalism . . ." I mean, I could be their spokesman. I know all this stuff after hearing it so much. To bring attention to the—what they say is the corrupting influence of corporate money on domestic politics and globalization in the global economy, and I think there is a million other issues. The criminal injustice system, which is also the fault of the corporations running the criminal injustice system and you know, which is also a racist system, which is how freeing Mumia fits in.

This is a respectable synopsis of Disrupt's concerns; yet, his article describes their efforts as fractured and confused.

Journalists may hear broad social-structural critiques, but have difficulty incorporating them into their stories because they are anticipating opposition groups with more focused complaints. Ed, a wire service reporter who covered the protests surrounding the debate in Boston in 2000, contrasted the disorderly approach with the one he preferred:

What seemed to be sort of lost is sort of the message . . . Like they knew how to protest, but it was unclear, sort of, why. Outside of something clear, like a clear message. Like, Nader should get in to the debate and it's unfair he's being kept out. That's a fairly clear message, whether you agree with it or not you can say, "Okay this is an argument. This is maybe a reason to protest." Some of the other stuff is just kind of so fuzzy that it just looks like the kids out there getting themselves arrested.

And another reporter offers:

"We're upset about corporate greed. We're upset about monotony in American politics. We're upset about people having too much money." When you start having like this sort of smorgasbord of issues, it gets confusing what you're standing for. So, I would have had like really issue-focused demonstrations, and I covered a few. Like, there's a Puerto Rican parade where people were really upset about the U.S. Navy in that island, Vieques, and that was very clear exactly what they were protesting. They were protesting the presence of the U.S. Navy on an island 'cause they didn't think that was a good sort of example of American sovereignty.

—Juan, reporter, primary newspaper for a major metropolitan area

The "closed debates" critique is straightforward, as is the concern about Puerto Rican sovereignty. The economic consequences of globalization are more difficult to parse, but are "corporate greed" or "economic inequality" less clear-cut complaints or are they simply more difficult to address?

Throughout the interviews it became clear that journalists expect activists to make concrete demands in the form of realistic solutions. The following remarks are illustrative:

What would they do in place of what's going on? That's the only thing . . . they could say what's wrong . . . what they don't like . . . But what sort of vision do you have, you know, for an alternative government?

—Amber, reporter, primary newspaper for a small city

I tend to take seriously a protester who says, "Look, there's a better way to do this and here's the better way." . . . I have to know why they're there and what it is they wanted. Umm, and I didn't feel like I got that.

—Dustin, reporter, primary newspaper for a major metropolitan area

Reporters often dismissed voluntary organizations that offered critiques without solutions. However, solutions for seemingly intractable social problems are not easy to pinpoint, and

in some cases when associations did offer solutions, journalists panned them as unrealistic. Rather than acknowledge the complexity of these problems, journalists blamed the associations and their members for doing things incorrectly.

Conclusions: Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Looking at the divergence between the well-documented practices of routine political reporting and reporting on voluntary associations in the presidential campaign context, several striking contrasts emerge. Many protocols, such as the norm of balanced reporting and the importance of sourcing legitimate representatives, are shelved when associations become the subject of the story. Furthermore, not only are insiders and outsiders treated differently, but the norms applied to each are often contradictory. While these two sets of rules are ideal types, and exceptions exist, they prove remarkably consistent across the data in this sample.

The activist groups were attuned to the first condition of inclusion: they do not take coverage for granted and know they must earn the news media's attention. However, the rest of their choices suggest they were attempting to follow the norms for reporting on political insiders, with deleterious consequences. Most associations were focused on demonstrating to the press that they were newsworthy, but they did so by actively working with members to construct the appearance of *legitimacy* through professionalism, which ran counter to the image of *authenticity* that is so critical to reporters. In short, voluntary associations fail when they act like organizations. Candidates raise issues, point to problems, and talk about the need for change, but activists must have all the answers, and these answers must be concrete and easily implemented.

Table 1 reveals how challenging it is for associations with political concerns to amplify them via the media in the campaign context. If they follow the unwritten rules that journalists use and successfully attract coverage, the coverage is apt to be limited to emotional, individualistic expressions of concern about solvable problems that have readily available, pragmatic solutions. But, if they violate the journalists' norms for covering political outsiders, they become, as Fishman (1982) would say, irrelevant to the reporters' scheme of interpretation and remain invisible in news accounts.

Voluntary associations, as micro public spheres, are valued because they provide communal spaces for marginalized groups to safely articulate their needs and goals, but also because they allow participants to develop strategies to amplify their voices when they enter mainstream public arenas (Fraser 1992; Habermas 1996). The experiences of the groups in this study demonstrate that while such strategizing abounds, attempts to expand mainstream dialogue via the news media are profoundly limited. When meaningful news coverage fails to materialize, the associations are left involuntarily enclaved, unable to engage mainstream audiences.

In sum, news stories about association activities are the product of elaborate, mutually dependent, and often adversarial relationships between journalists and voluntary association members. Importantly, the attention of mainstream news organizations is not simply a trophy to be won, but rather an opening to participate, to enter the "master forum" in which matters of common concern are raised for discussion, explored, and contested. Coverage is a commodity that is symbolic and instrumental—symbolic in that outside groups who enter the forum become visible, and instrumental in that challenges to existing social arrangements cannot be waged in isolation. There are other mechanisms that associations can employ to try to shape public discourse, but none that offer this type of amplification. It is not surprising, then, that the associations tether their ambitions to the press, even if doing so proves a poor investment.

This disempowers activist groups, but it also diminishes the quality of political discourse in general. For example, during the 2004 campaign cycle, John Kerry worked to counter the fear that a Democrat in the White House would make the United States vulnerable to terrorist attacks by presenting himself as tough on defense, ultimately leaving the voting public listening to militaristic rhetoric from both sides. There were some accounts of anti-war activities, but

most included information about permitting issues, whether there were arrests, and what the marchers were wearing, excluding the substantive arguments underneath the activists' anti-war position. With little coverage of political figures who challenged militarism, and virtually no issue-based coverage of the peace groups active throughout the election, mainstream news audiences were left with little exposure to alternative interpretations and arguments. While many would have found the peace groups' arguments unpersuasive, the ideas and information these groups might have been able to provide may have altered others' priorities or behavior in the voting booth. This impoverished discourse isn't simply a disappointment for marginalized groups hoping to sway the public. On the contrary, narrowing the dialogue challenges the premise that undergirds democratic elections: that of an informed public making educated decisions on their own behalf.

What is particularly significant is that this is probably about as good as it gets. Presidential elections pique political interest, draw audiences to the news, bring news workers to campaign event cities, and are the preeminent ritual of political participation in the United States. Theory suggests that elections are potentially transformative moments for the mass media, an opening for these fora to become more inclusive. Perhaps sometimes they do, but the organizations I observed were rarely included, and when they were, they were most often presented as amusing outposts of the culture or as criminals. Failure was so common that associations proceeded to define even the most meager coverage as an accomplishment; a one-line reference in which the association name was incorrect and their political concerns were avoided was sometimes viewed as cause for celebration. This is especially significant as I demonstrate elsewhere that for the vast majority of the groups in this research, capturing the media spotlight was not one of several reasons they opted to mobilize around the conventions and debates, it was the *raison d'être* (Sobieraj forthcoming).²¹ As a result of their media-centrism, the associations often substituted media strategy for political strategy, leaving them empty-handed when their efforts failed.

For their part, journalists adhered so rigidly to industry norms as to reify them. They touted their autonomy, but rigidly self-censored what they wrote. Recall Naomi's statement, "So, they [the protesters] staged the event to get publicity and then they don't want you to write about the event that they designed. I don't know. They tie my hands and then blame me for it. It's frustrating." Her hands are tied, but not by the associations. These are socially constructed norms of the journalistic field, institutionalized through journalism schools, professional associations, and decisions made in news organizations. They are cultural practices, not legal ones.

These insights contribute to our understanding of how activism evaporates from political relevance in the electoral process. Without question, these are particularly important moments for discursive permeability and democratic inclusion, but they present only part of the story. Whether and to what extent this second set of expectations shapes coverage of activist groups in other contexts is an open question. Future research that explores unwritten rules for activists in other contexts would be particularly fruitful. I suspect that while the exact emphases may shift—for example, authenticity may very well be less central in a context less contrived than a presidential convention—that in most cases the coverage of political outsiders is governed by a set of expectations and preferences quite different from those in place for routine political reporting. It would also be productive to ask whether journalists' expectations vary across different types of news organizations (e.g., news weeklies, dailies, televised news, news radio, etc.), which could be ascertained with a larger sample of journalists. In addition, these expectations are likely to differ substantially for those producing news accounts circulated via independent media and user-generated content platforms. Research that adds to our understanding of the possibilities and pitfalls presented by these alternative outlets would also further our understanding of the relationship between voluntary associations and the mainstream political public sphere.

21. Most surprising, none of the 50 organizations active in the election context mobilized in an effort to get a particular candidate elected, and less than a fifth expressed any interest in influencing the outcome of the election. Instead, hoping to communicate with outsiders via the media was the primary motivating factor.

Appendix • Voluntary Associations: Scope, Focal Concern, Largest Event Planned

<i>Group Name</i>	<i>Scope</i>	<i>Focal Issue</i>	<i>Primary Event</i>
ABOLISH!	state	death penalty	large permitted rally
Alternacheer	local	anti-capitalism/ anti-authoritarian	political cheerleading
American Adult Network	national	senior citizens' issues	multi-city bus tour
Bootstraps	local	civic responsibility	discourse groups
Boston Pacificsts United	regional	peace and justice	massive permitted march
Boston Resistance	local	anarchist/anti-authoritarian	bazaar/festival
Business Watch	national	responsible business	information table
Chinese Cultural Freedom Collective	int'l	relig. persecution in China	human rights exhibit
Choice!	local	reproductive rights	concert
Christians for Families	regional	human rights	large permitted march
Citizens' Campaign Watch	national	campaign finance reform	alternative conference
Conservatives for Reproductive Rights	national	reproductive rights	concert
DISRUPT!	local	costs of structural inequality	civil disobedience
Electoral Gridlock	national	oppose two-party system	small long distance march
End Contemporary Colonialism	national	peace/racial justice	bazaar/festival
Envirolink	national	environment	panel of speakers
Faith in Peace	regional ^a	peace	public memorial exhibit
Federation for the Freedom from Religion	national	sep. of church and state	small permitted protest
Feminists for a Socialist Future	int'l	women's/economic justice	permitted march
GenNext	national	youth voter turnout	concert/debate watch party
Guts Initiative	local	multi-issue progressive	progressive conference
Income Gap Attack	national	economic inequality	member trainings
Inequality Forever	regional ^b	wealth in politics	street theater/march
Jews for Justice	local	racial/economic justice	massive permitted march
Land and Life Protection League	national	environment/global justice	street theater
MassCares	state ^c	protecting the public interest	debate watch party
Moms for New Leadership	national	anti-Bush	commercial premiere
National Peace and Equality Coalition	national ^d	peace/social justice	massive permitted march
National Union of Creative Artists	national	labor	leafletting
NC Citizens for Smaller Government	state ^e	limited government	information table
NC Parents Against Gun Violence	state	gun control	small permitted protest
Network for Peace	national	nuclear disarmament/peace	float in permitted march
Northeast Union of Professionals	regional	labor	permitted rally
Pre-born Protectors	national	pro-life	billboard truck drives
Pro-Choice and Paying Attention	national	reproductive rights	fundraiser
Progressive Activists Coalition	local	broad progressive agenda	progressive conference
Radical Grandma Chorus	local ^f	peace/social justice	street theater/singing
Republican Freakshow	local	political corruption	street theater
Rights Now	int'l	human rights/global justice	large permitted march
School Choice, Family Choice	state	school vouchers/education	permitted rally
Skilled Trades Union	local ^g	labor	large permitted march
Stand-Up St. Louis	local	direct action/open debates	issues forum
Students for Change	local	students' issues	teach-in series
The Freedom and Equality League	national	multi-issue progressive	panel of speakers
United for Change	state	social justice	large permitted march
United Trades	local ^h	labor	leafletting
Veterans Opposing War	national	peace	panel of speakers/rally
Women Against War	national	peace/social justice	press conference
Wrath of Christ	local	opposing homosexuality	small permitted protest
Young Adult Voters Association	national	youth voter turnout	debate watch party

^aFaith in Peace is a national organization, but the data gathered pertain only to the activities of one regional group.

^bAt the time data was collected about Inequality Forever in 2000, it was a modestly sized regional organization, but in the years that followed it blossomed into a national organization.

^cThis is the Massachusetts state chapter of a national organization.

^dThe National Peace and Equality Coalition is a large umbrella organization, in which entire groups become members. Their large numbers of volunteers qualify them as a voluntary association as defined in this research.

^eThis is the North Carolina state chapter of a national organization.

^fThis is a local chapter of an international organization.

^gThe Skilled Trades Union is a national labor union, but the data gathered pertain only to the activities of one local.

^hUnited Trades is a national labor union, but the data gathered pertain only to the activities of one local.

References

- Amenta, Edwin, Neal Caren, Sheera Olasky, and James Stobaugh. 2009. "All the News That's Fit to Print: What, What, When, Where, and Why SMO Families Appeared in *The New York Times* in the Twentieth Century." *American Sociological Review* 74(4):636–56.
- Bennett, W. Lance. 2007. *News: The Politics of Illusion*. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Bennett, W. Lance and David L. Paletz. 1994. *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bennett, W. Lance, Victor Pickard, David P. Iozzi, Carl Schroeder, Taso Lagos, and Courtney Evans-Caswell. 2004. "Managing the Public Sphere: Journalistic Construction of the Great Globalization Debate." *Journal of Communication* 54:437–55.
- Benson, Rodney. 2006. "News Media as a 'Journalistic Field': What Bourdieu Adds to New Institutionalism and Vice Versa." *Political Communication* 23:187–202.
- Curran, James. 2002. *Media and Power*. London, UK: New York: Routledge.
- Darnton, Robert. 1975. "Writing News and Telling Stories." *Daedalus* 104:175–93.
- Eliasoph, Nina. 1998. *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Entman, Robert M. 1989. *Democracy Without Citizens: Media and the Decay of American Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ferree, Myra Marx, William Gamson, Jurgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht. 2002. *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Fine, Gary Alan. 2004. *Everyday Genius: Self-taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fishman, Mark. 1980. *Manufacturing the News*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- . 1982. "News and Nonevents: Making the Visible Invisible." Pp. 219–40 in *Individuals in Mass Media Organizations: Creativity and Constraint*, edited by J. S. Ettema and D. C. Whitney. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1992. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." Pp. 109–42 in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by C. J. Calhoun. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Galtung, J. and M. Holmboe Ruge. 1965. "The Structure of Foreign News." *Journal of Peace Research* 1:64–91.
- Gamson, William A. and Gadi Wolsfeld. 1993. "Movements and Media as Interacting Systems." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528:114–25.
- Gans, Herbert J. 1979. *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gitlin, Todd. 1980. *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goldenberg, Edie N. 1975. *Making the Papers: The Access of Resource-poor Groups to the Metropolitan Press*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Grazian, David. 2003. *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gurevitch, Michael and Jay G. Blumler. 1990. "Comparative Research: The Extending Frontier." Pp. 305–25 in *New Directions in Political Communication*, edited by D. L. Swanson and D. D. Nimmo. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- . 1996. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Jacobs, Ronald N. 1996. "Producing the News, Producing the Crisis: Narrativity, Television and News Work." *Media, Culture & Society* 18:373–97.
- Keane, John. 1991. *The Media and Democracy*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Lester, Marilyn. 1980. "Generating Newsworthiness: The Interpretive Construction of Public Events." *American Sociological Review* 45:984–94.
- MacCannell, Dean. 1999. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- McCarthy, John D., Clark McPhail, and Jackie Smith. 1996. "Images of Protest: Dimensions of Selection Bias in Media Coverage of Washington Demonstrations, 1982 and 1991." *American Sociological Review* 61:478–99.
- McManus, John H. 1995. "A Market-Based Model of News Production." *Communication Theory* 5:301–38.
- Molotch, Harvey and Marilyn Lester. 1974. "News as Purposive Behavior: On the Strategic Use of Routine Events, Accidents, and Scandals." *American Sociological Review* 39:101–12.
- Myers, Daniel J. and Beth Schaefer Caniglia. 2004. "All the Rioting That's Fit to Print: Selection Effects in National Newspaper Coverage of Civil Disorders, 1968–1969." *American Sociological Review* 69:519–43.
- Oliver, Pamela E. and Daniel J. Myers. 1999. "How Events Enter the Public Sphere: Conflict, Location, and Sponsorship in Local Newspaper Coverage of Public Events." *American Journal of Sociology* 105:38–87.
- Oliver, Pamela E. and Gregory M. Maney. 2000. "Political Processes and Local Newspaper Coverage of Protest Events: From Selection Bias to Triadic Interactions." *American Journal of Sociology* 106:463–505.
- Panagopoulos, Costas. 2007. *Rewiring Politics: Presidential Nominating Conventions in the Media Age*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Patterson, Thomas E. 1993. *Out of Order*. New York: A. Knopf.
- Peterson, Richard A. 1997. *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pomper, Gerald. 2007. "The New Role of the Conventions as Political Rituals." Pp. 189–203 in *Rewiring Politics: Presidential Nominating Conventions in the Media Age*, edited by C. Panagopoulos. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Rohlinger, Deana. 2006. "Friends and Foes: Media, Politics and Tactics in the Abortion War." *Social Problems* 53:537–91.
- Ryan, Charlotte. 1991. *Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organizing*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Ryan, Charlotte, Michael Anastasio, and Karen Jeffreys. 2005. "Start Small, Build Big: Negotiating Opportunities in Media Markets." *Mobilization: An International Journal* 10:111–28.
- Salzman, Jason. 2003. *Making the News: A Guide for Activists and Nonprofits*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Schudson, Michael. 1978. *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. New York: Basic Books.
- . 1982. "The Politics of Narrative Form: The Emergence of News Conventions in Print and Television." *Daedalus* 111:97–112.
- . 2000. "The Sociology of News Production Revisited (Again)." Pp. 175–200 in *Mass Media and Society*, edited by J. Curran and M. Gurevitch. London, UK: Edward Arnold.
- . 2003. *The Sociology of News*. New York: Norton.
- Smith, Jackie, John D. McCarthy, Clark McPhail, and Boguslaw Augustyn. 2001. "From Protest to Agenda-Building: Description Bias in Media Coverage of Protest Events in Washington, DC." *Social Forces* 79:1397–1423.
- Sobieraj, Sarah. 2006. "The Implications of Transitions in the Voluntary Sector for Civic Engagement: A Case Study of Association Mobilization around the 2000 Presidential Campaign." *Sociological Inquiry* 76:52–80.
- . Forthcoming. *Soundbitten: The Perils of Media-Centered Political Activism*. New York: New York University Press.
- Tuchman, Gaye. 1972. "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity." *American Journal of Sociology* 77:660–79.
- . 1973. "Making News by Doing Work: Routinizing the Unexpected." *American Journal of Sociology* 79:110–31.
- . 1978. *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*. New York: Free Press.
- Young, Iris Marion. 2000. *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford, UK and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Zelizer, Barbie. 1993. "Journalists as Interpretive Communities." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10:219–37.