The contextualist function: US newspaper journalists value social responsibility

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Abstract
A survey ($N = 1318$) evaluated US newspaper journalists' attitudes toward *contextual* reporting – stories that go beyond the immediacy of the news and contribute to societal well-being. Results indicated that journalists highly value professional roles associated with contextual reporting. Responses revealed new journalistic role functions, including the 'Contextualist', who placed high value on being socially responsible and accurately portraying the world. Analyses showed that younger journalists and female journalists highly valued three genres of contextual reporting: constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative. Additionally, a journalist's belief in activist values such as setting the political agenda and pointing to possible solutions predicted more favorable views of all three forms of contextual journalism, while belief in an adversarial attitude predicted less favorable views of restorative narrative.

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Information transference is the foundation of journalism, especially in a time of crisis or during a large-impact event, such as a natural disaster or a military conflict (Graber, 1984). Audiences rely on the news media to provide information about the unfolding event. The information provider role is a critical journalistic function, satisfying the 'who, what, when, where' model (a 'just the facts approach') of the 'conventional' news story with the occasional details on why and how (Fink and Schudson, 2014). However, research has shown that the last 50 years have seen a decline of these types of news stories and a rise of 'contextual' news stories, which use a 'wide-angle lens' to provide a 'big picture' approach (Fink and Schudson, 2014: 10). David Bornstein, a *New York Times* journalist, describes contextual stories as those that help audiences understand 'the wider circle, deeper roots' of an issue, such as mass incarceration or institutionalized bias and racism (2015, personal communication). An example of a contextual news story is *The Washington Post*'s 2015 piece about a student who survived after being shot in the mass shooting at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon (Saslow and Botsford, 2015). The text and photographs make real for audiences the raw physical and emotional pain, while also showing the resilience of one survivor and her family.

Contextual journalism exemplifies commitment to the social responsibility theory of the press, which asserts that journalists have a duty to consider society's best interests during the newsmaking process with the understanding that our democracy cannot prosper without an informed and engaged populace (Siebert et al., 1963). Regarding this approach to journalism, Merritt (1995) writes, '… journalism must play a role in democracy beyond the bare provision of information, background, and analysis' (p. 263). More recently, Gyldensted (2015) argued that the news media should portray the world accurately and fully, which includes covering not only stories about conflict and disaster but also stories about cooperation and progress.

With this understanding, 'contextual reporting' – genres of journalism that report beyond the immediacy of the news in an effort to contribute to society's well-being – has the potential to greatly enhance public knowledge and enrich the life of our citizenry. Fink and Schudson (2014) cite the work of Forde (2007) and others who argue that although 'contextual' reporting represents the 'most important change in reporting in the past half century', it is a form of journalism with no 'hallowed' or 'standardized' understanding in either the profession or the academy (p. 5).

Answering the call from Fink and Schudson (2014), this study helps us to comprehend 'contextual' reporting and its 'powerful and prevalent' role in assisting audiences to 'understand their world' (p. 18). Additionally, this research extends the work of Johnstone, Weaver, Willnat, and others who have examined the role of the 'American Journalist' during the past five decades (see, for example, Weaver et al., 2007), by determining how new contextual journalism roles relate to more traditional journalistic functions. Using survey data from a national sample of more than 1300 daily print and online newspaper journalists, this research explores journalists' perceptions of their professional roles. In addition, the survey explores journalists' knowledge of and attitudes toward specific emerging contextual genres, including constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative, and what might predict those attitudes. It is critical to note that contextual reporting and the three emerging contextual genres considered in this research are not entirely new; rather, these genres are *recently termed* as we see a growing

movement for this type of reporting (Gyldensted, 2015; Sillesen, 2014b). Additionally, it is not the intention of this research to debate or study whether constructive journalism, solutions journalism, or restorative narrative are properly demarcated or sufficiently similar to or different from other journalistic genres. Rather, the intention is to examine perceptions of these selected journalistic forms that are being increasingly discussed in the industry.

Literature review

Contextual news forms

While digital media and the onset of the information age have led to marked changes for journalism, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) argue that the core elements of journalism in a democracy 'remain fundamental and enduring' (IX). Those core elements, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007), are an obligation to the truth, loyalty to citizens, discipline of verification, independence, watchdog of power, public forum, interesting and relevant storytelling, comprehensive and proportional coverage, responsibility to conscience, and rights and responsibilities to citizens. As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) note, purposefully absent from this list are dated notions of fairness, balance, and objectivity. Citing Gillmor's (2005) essay on journalism, 'objectivity' should be replaced with 'thoroughness, accuracy, fairness, and transparency' (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007: 81). This essay came after the Society of Professional Journalists removed all references to the word 'objectivity' from its Code of Ethics in 1996, replacing them instead with values such as fairness and accountability.

Discussion surrounding the decline of 'objectivity' as an achievable standard in journalism highlights the fact that journalists do not simply report the news, but rather they create it – a view that media researchers and sociologists have acknowledged since the 1970s (Cohen and Young, 1981; Johnstone et al., 1972; Tuchman, 1978). More recently, Bro (2008) took this idea further by acknowledging the distinction between an active and passive journalist. He defined an active journalist as one who serves more fully as a participant in interpreting the story and who is concerned about the effects of the news, or what happens *after* the report. This is in contrast to a passive journalist, whose primary concern is disseminating stories regardless of their effects, or being concerned only with the information that *precedes* the report. Bro (2008) argues that there is a desire for more active journalism, with reporters attempting to help community members act upon problems rather than simply informing individuals about them. This more active and involved role by the journalist in shaping the story serves as a common thread in the emerging contextual news forms considered in this research: constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative.

Constructive journalism is an emerging way for traditional journalists to report and produce more productive stories that aim to improve individual and societal well-being by applying positive psychology and other behavioral sciences to the field (Gyldensted, 2015). Constructive journalism can be considered a contextual genre because it is 'a more *comprehensive* form of journalism' that accurately portrays the world by covering not only stories about conflict but stories about progress as well (Gyldensted, 2015: 42,

emphasis added). Seán Dagan Wood (2014), editor of UK-based *Positive News*, said constructive journalism 'is about bringing positive elements into conventional reporting, remaining dedicated to accuracy, truth, balance when necessary, and criticism, but reporting in a more engaging and empowering way'. However, constructive journalism and similar forms of journalism have been used inconsistently in the industry and have been largely ignored by academics. In an effort to distinguish these terms and situate them into the larger field, (McIntyre, 2015: 9) defined constructive journalism as 'an emerging form of journalism that involves applying positive psychology techniques to news processes and production in an effort to create productive and engaging coverage, while holding true to journalism's core functions'.

Solutions journalism

> investigates and explains, in a critical and clear-eyed way, examples of people working toward solutions. It focuses not just on what may be working, but how and why it appears to be working, or alternatively, why it may be stumbling. (Solutions Journalism Network, 2015)

Solutions journalism can be considered a contextual genre as it has been defined in terms of putting problems *in context* by reporting on possible solutions. The Solutions Journalism Toolkit specifically advises reporters to 'Provide context, showing that you have an awareness of the range of responses to this particular problem' (Solutions Journalism Toolkit, 2015: 23). Solutions stories are evidence based, and they purposefully intend to have an impact on public discourse (Solutions Journalism Network, 2015). Initial research has shown that articles offering a solution, rather than just focusing on the issue or problem, provoked greater interest in audiences and left audiences feeling positive and encouraged that a solution was possible (Curry and Hammonds, 2014; McIntyre, 2015). Recognizing this genre's growing popularity, the Poynter Institute launched a 'News University' solutions journalism course in partnership with the Solutions Journalism Network (Krueger, 2015).

A recently labeled genre of journalistic storytelling termed 'restorative narrative' intends to help communities move forward in the wake of large-impact events by continuing to report on them long after the news breaks. Restorative narrative fits under the contextual journalism umbrella as its proponents lament that traditional news stories are often 'confined' to the facts of a tragedy and should be broadened to include stories of recovery and resilience (Tenore, 2014). While restorative narratives are generally community-based, they also intend to provide hope and examples of recovery and resilience to larger audiences. Restorative narratives report on problems by showing how people are trying to solve them (Bornstein, in Sillesen, 2014a). In the words of Kenneth Irby (2015), senior faculty member at Poynter, restorative narratives are 'stories that bring communities together, inspire hope, and reveal healing'. Images & Voices of Hope (ivoh), a non-profit media group, has been instrumental in terming, defining, and promoting 'restorative narrative'. These stories have certain characteristics: (1) strength-based with hard truths that show progression without giving false hope, and (2) authentic, sustained inquiries that present universal truths and human connection (Tenore, 2014).

While contextual reporting covers the story beyond the breaking news (and beyond a 'just the facts approach'), these journalistic forms are consistent with journalism's core

values, as defined by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007). Indeed, the 'wide-angle' lens of contextual reporting naturally lends itself to the journalistic values of obligation to the truth and loyalty to citizens. The story, and the need of citizens for verified information, does not end at the 'who, what, when, where'.

The professional roles of journalists

Journalists' opinions are often examined as indicators of their professional values (Cassidy, 2005; Willnat and Weaver, 2014). In addition, Deuze (2005) argues that in order to understand the 'occupational ideology of journalism', we must study how journalists navigate the core values of the profession (p. 458). Four decades ago, Johnstone et al. (1972) conducted the first of the 'American Journalist' surveys, using a battery of eight questions to determine what journalists thought were the most important aspects of their jobs. In this initial 1971 survey of 1300 US news professionals working in different media, the researchers discovered two 'pure' ideological types, or functions: 'Neutrals' preferred detachment and objectivity, while 'Participants' favored involvement and advocacy (Johnstone et al., 1972). The most valued roles were Participant items, including 'investigating government claims' and 'providing analysis of complex problems' (Johnstone et al., 1972).

In subsequent studies, Weaver et al. (2007) added seven measures to Johnstone et al.'s (1972) original survey, and by 2002, four journalistic functions had emerged: the Disseminator (akin to the Neutral journalist), Interpretive (similar to the Participant), Adversarial (reflecting a more combative outlook), and Populist Mobilizer, which reflected the 'civic journalism' movement (giving 'ordinary' citizens a platform and encouraging them to participate in society). The Interpretive function was the strongest among journalists in 2002, followed by the Adversarial, Disseminator, and Populist Mobilizer (Weaver et al., 2007). The Interpretive items of 'investigating government claims' and 'analyzing complex problems' remained strong, with more than 50 percent of respondents saying each of the two was 'extremely important'. More activist journalistic roles (grouped under the Populist Mobilizer function) were less popular – about 40 percent of news professionals rated 'letting people express views' as 'extremely important', while 33 percent of respondents felt the same about 'motivating people to get involved', 24 percent about 'pointing to possible solutions', and just 3 percent indicated that 'setting the political agenda' was 'extremely important' (Weaver et al., 2007).

In the latest 'American Journalist' survey, Willnat and Weaver (2014) surveyed 1080 news professionals working in television, newspapers, radio, news magazines, news services, and online media in 2013. Their findings suggest journalists are increasingly embracing news values inherent in contextual reporting and are moving away from some conventional news roles. Compared to the 2002 survey (51%), a much larger proportion of news professionals in 2013 (69%) indicated that 'analyzing complex problems' was 'extremely important' (Willnat and Weaver, 2014). There was an increase in journalists' emphasis on 'investigating government claims' from 2002 (71%) to 2013 (78%), and the latter percentage was the largest share of journalists to indicate the 'extreme' importance of this role since the first 'American Journalist' survey in 1971 (Willnat and Weaver, 2014). Of all the roles on the survey, journalists in 2013 indicated that these two Interpretive

roles were the most important. Meanwhile, the Disseminator role of 'getting information to the public quickly' dropped in significance. Only 47 percent of news professionals thought this role conception was 'extremely important', which was a 12-percentage-point drop from 2002, and the smallest share ever recorded for this role (Willnat and Weaver, 2014). The authors surmised that because of online competition, journalists have begun recognizing that their strengths lie in in-depth analyses rather than quick reports.

Although studies indicate that journalists frequently identify with one role over another, news workers' perceptions of their professional roles are often multi-dimensional (Deuze, 2002; Johnstone et al., 1972; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996), and a majority of journalists embrace more than one role function (Weaver et al., 2007). Ward (2009) maintained that most journalists see themselves as a 'combination of informer, interpreter, and advocate' (p. 299), and that even the most activist reporters embrace the traditional value of factual accuracy.

Role functions have been helpful in determining attitudes and perceptions among journalists. In a study of Chinese journalists, Chan et al. (2004) found greater job satisfaction among those who identified with the Interpretive function, and Pihl-Thingvad (2015) determined that Danish journalists who embraced the Adversarial function were more committed to their jobs.

Demographic characteristics

Along with role perceptions, journalists' demographic characteristics can affect attitudes, opinions, and news content. Demers (1994) found that older newspaper editors were more satisfied with their jobs, while Knobloch-Westerwick et al. (2008) showed that a journalist's race can affect which stories are selected and which stories a journalist reads. Gender, in particular, has the potential to affect attitudes toward contextual journalism. The gender of a journalist has been associated with role functions (Wu et al., 1996) and attitudes about role functions (Cassidy, 2008). Women in the newsroom have been found to favor contextual stories, 'softer' people-oriented stories, and stories that demonstrate depth and sensitivity rather than detachment (Christmas, 1997; Van Zoonen, 1998). Beam and Di Cicco (2010) discovered that female newspaper editors ran more in-depth features, which stereotypically contain more 'feminized' characteristics, such as issue context and personal narratives, and are more likely to emphasize the positive (p. 403).

The current research builds on theory and literature to understand more fully how professionals working at US daily newspapers in the year 2016 view their profession, their roles, and the role of contextual news forms. Journalists at newspapers (many of whom publish online as well) were chosen for analysis due to evidence suggesting that newspaper reporters conduct the majority of original reporting in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2010). Due to the lack of research on journalists' attitudes toward contextual news forms, we could not confidently predict responses and therefore posed the following research questions:

RQ1. What are US daily print and online newspaper journalists' experiences with and attitudes toward three genres of contextual reporting (constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative)?

RQ2. Which professional roles do US daily print and online newspaper journalists most value in 2016?

RQ3. Are contextual journalism roles important to US daily print and online newspaper journalists in 2016?

RQ4. What role functions characterize US daily print and online newspaper journalists in 2016?

RQ5. Which factors are most predictive of US daily print and online newspaper journalists' attitudes toward three genres of contextual reporting (constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative)?

Method

Survey

A multiple-contact survey, as recommended by Dillman et al. (2009), was sent in early 2016 to journalists who worked at US daily newspapers. The population was derived from the Editor & Publisher (2015). When selecting newspapers, only outlets with a circulation of 10,000 or greater were included because they were likely to have full-time staffs with more news production experience (Molyneux, 2014). This yielded 637 (out of 1331) newspapers. Researchers then identified individual journalists by conducting a manual search of each newspaper's website to locate staff lists, which were most frequently found on the 'about' or 'contact' page, and recording the journalists' names, titles, and email addresses.

All editors and reporters, with the exception of sports staff, listed on the websites were included in the sample, including columnists, photography, and video staff. Researchers excluded sports editors and reporters because, while they do gather and report news, sports reporting typically operates in an insulated area of coverage. In addition, sports stories that garner more mainstream coverage, such as those with legal, financial, or health angles, are often covered by general assignment reporters and appear in non-sports sections of a newspaper. Publishers, production managers, web developers, copy editors, and page designers were also excluded because their jobs were not likely to involve news decisions. Most websites provided the names, titles, and email addresses of their staff. However, not all newspapers were transparent with staff lists, especially the newspapers with the largest circulations.

From the individual websites, 9297 journalists were identified. Researchers sent a request for participation email with the Qualtrics online survey link, followed by two reminder emails sent in 1-week increments. A total of 273 email addresses were invalid, so the final sample consisted of 9024 journalists, of which 1404 responded. Several respondents were eliminated from this initial response total because they spent less than 3 minutes on the questionnaire, failed to answer a substantial number of questions, failed to give consent, or requested not to participate following survey submission. Thus, 1318 valid responses were returned for a 15 percent response rate. It should be noted that most individuals in the sample did not open the email; of the 3495 journalists who opened the survey, 38 percent (1318) returned a completed, valid questionnaire.

Measures

The questionnaire measured the extent to which respondents agreed that the 15 journalistic role conceptions from Weaver et al. (2007) and five contextual journalistic role conceptions were 'core functions' of journalism, using a 1–5 scale from 1 = 'Strongly Disagree' to 5 = 'Strongly Agree'. The five contextual roles were created by drawing from language others have used to define contextual news forms. For example, Gyldensted (2015) emphasized that constructive journalists should portray the world accurately by reporting on both threats and opportunities; therefore, roles such as 'Accurately portray the world', 'Alert the public of potential threats,' and 'Alert the public of potential opportunities' were used as contextual role functions. See Table 1 for the five contextual roles and item wording of all roles.

Certain items measured journalists' attitudes toward and familiarity with constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative. Five-point scales were used to measure respondents' familiarity (1 = 'Completely Unfamiliar' to 5 = 'Very Familiar') with these genres and their proclivity toward using the forms in their daily work (1 = 'Strongly Disagree' to 5 = 'Strongly Agree'). A 4-point scale was used to compare respondents' preconceived notions to the provided definitions of the forms (1 = 'Not similar at all' to 4 = 'Completely Similar'); respondents who had not previously heard of these genres were excluded from this item's measurement.

Finally, respondents indicated their attitudes toward three genres of contextual reporting (constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative) by rating each from 1 to 5 on a series of six semantic differential attitude scales (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989): 'Bad' to 'Good', 'Ineffective' to 'Effective', 'Worthless' to 'Worthwhile', 'Unwise' to 'Wise', 'Harmful' to 'Beneficial', and 'Biased' to 'Unbiased'.

Findings

The individuals in this sample were largely White (89.4%), reflecting the racial demographics of current daily newspaper journalists found in Willnat and Weaver's (2014) national survey. Participants were mostly middle aged (M = 43.74 years, standard deviation (SD) = 14.25) and educated (over 90% had a bachelor's or graduate degree), with 60 percent identifying as male. They were experienced journalists, reporting having worked in the news business for an average of 20.38 years (SD = 13.28). Three-fourths of the sample consisted of reporters, writers, and editors (49.9% reporters/writers, 27.7% editors). Another 14.5 percent were photographers or videographers, and the remaining individuals were columnists or worked in digital or social media or community engagement. The most frequently occurring news beat that journalists reported covering was economy or business (30.2%), followed by investigative or watchdog reporting (11.1%) and health (8%). About half the respondents reported working at news organizations with circulations between 10,000 and 50,000, 19 percent reported between 50,000 and 100,000, and 25 percent reported circulations greater than 100,000. The remaining 6 percent either estimated their circulations to be below 10,000 (which would be incorrect according to Editor & Publisher, 2015) or said they weren't sure of their circulation figures.

Table 1. Percentage of respondents who strongly agreed that each professional role item is a core function of journalism.

Professional role (n = 1318)	Strongly agree (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Accurately portray the world	70.4	4.65	.62
Investigate government claims	68.6	4.65	.57
Provide analysis of complex problems	64.6	4.60	.61
Alert the public of potential threats	62.3	4.57	.62
Act in a socially responsible way	62.3	4.52	.71
Avoid stories with unverified content	60.4	4.47	.79
Get information to the public quickly	50.3	4.44	.66
Contribute to society's well-being	49.1	4.31	.81
Alert the public of potential opportunities	40.0	4.28	.70
Discuss national policy	30.5	4.15	.71
Let ordinary people express views	32.6	4.12	.78
Discuss international policy	24.4	4.00	.76
Develop intellectual/cultural interests	24.8	3.97	.78
Point to possible solutions	22.6	3.96	.78
Motivate ordinary people to get involved	24.8	3.82	.89
Provide entertainment	14.3	3.71	.86
Concentrate on widest audience	7.3	3.24	.89
Serve as an adversary of government	5.8	2.88	.97
Set the political agenda	3.4	2.61	1.01
Serve as an adversary of business	2.7	2.60	.91

RQ1 asked about journalists' experiences with and attitudes toward three genres of contextual reporting: Constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative. First, the survey asked how familiar journalists were with the three terms. Media professionals in this survey reported being fairly unfamiliar with the terms, in general. However, a paired-samples t-test revealed that respondents were significantly more familiar with solutions journalism ($M=3.16$, $SD=1.14$) than either constructive journalism ($M=2.69$, $SD=1.07$; $t(1259)=15.39$, $p<.001$) or restorative narrative ($M=2.65$, $SD=1.08$; $t(1269)=15.44$, $p<.001$).

Researchers then asked the extent to which the journalists' preconceived definitions of the above terms matched the definitions they were provided in the survey. This question was asked in an effort to identify any disconnect between professionals and academics when it comes to defining the terms. Paired-samples t-tests revealed that respondents' preconceived ideas about solutions journalism matched significantly more closely with researchers' definition of the term ($M=3.61$, $SD=1.37$) than did journalists' ideas about restorative narrative ($M=2.99$, $SD=1.48$; $t(1251)=15.03$, $p<.001$) or constructive journalism ($M=2.98$, $SD=1.42$; $t(1256)=17.29$, $p<.001$).

The survey also asked whether journalists *had used* each of the contextual reporting genres in their own work (intentionally or unintentionally), and whether they *would consider using* each of them. Journalists reported having used restorative narrative ($M=3.81$,

$SD=.95$; $t(1231)=4.12$, $p<.001$) and solutions journalism ($M=3.75$, $SD=.98$; $t(1235)=2.18, p<.05$) significantly more than they used constructive journalism ($M=3.69$, $SD=.96$), according to paired-samples t-tests. When respondents were asked whether they would consider using these genres after having learned more about them in this survey, the means were significantly higher in every condition ($t_{sol}(1235)=-13.60$, $p<.001$; $t_{res}(1227)=-9.56, p<.001$; $t_{con}(1229)=-12.32, p<.001$). Respondents indicated they were most likely to use solutions journalism ($M=4.09, SD=.91$), followed by restorative narrative ($M=4.06, SD=.84$) and constructive journalism ($M=3.99, SD=.95$). Taken together, these results suggest that some journalists are not familiar with these contextual reporting genres and some discrepancies might exist on the definitions, but that overall, journalists intended to use these genres after learning about them.

Finally, respondents were asked about their attitudes toward constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative. To answer this question, responses from the six-item attitude scales were summed and averaged to create three new combined variables measuring respondents' overall inclination toward each journalistic form. Results indicated that participants had favorable attitudes toward all three. Attitudes were significantly more favorable toward restorative narrative ($M=3.99, SD=.74$) than solutions journalism ($M=3.94, SD=.79$; $t(1176)=2.09, p<.05$) and significantly more favorable toward solutions journalism than constructive journalism ($M=3.77, SD=.82$; $t(1171)=9.53, p<.001$).

RQ2 asked which roles news professionals value. Out of 20 roles, the most valued was accurately portraying the world ($M=4.65, SD=.62$), in which 70.4 percent of respondents strongly agreed. The second most valued role was investigating government claims ($M=4.65, SD=.57$), which 68.6 percent of respondents strongly agreed with as a core journalistic duty. These were followed by the roles of providing analysis of complex problems (64.6% strong agreement; $M=4.60, SD=.61$), alerting the public of potential threats (62.3% strong agreement; $M=4.57, SD=.62$) and acting in a socially responsible way (62.3% strong agreement; $M=4.52, SD=.71$). The least valued roles were setting the political agenda (3.4% strong agreement; $M=2.61, SD=1.01$) and serving as an adversary of business (2.7% strong agreement; $M=2.60, SD=.91$). See Table 1 for how journalists rated all 20 roles.

RQ3 asked how journalists view the roles that are consistent with contextual reporting, such as constructive journalism or solutions journalism. The most highly valued role was portraying the world accurately – a role that is fundamental to constructive journalism, whose proponents argue that practicing more constructive techniques will help reporters produce a more accurate portrayal of the world by bringing attention to stories of growth, progress, and recovery to balance the plethora of stories about corruption, destruction, and conflict (Gyldensted, 2015; McIntyre, 2015). Journalists also valued the roles of acting socially responsible (62.3% strong agreement; $M=4.52, SD=.71$) and contributing to society's well-being (49.1% strong agreement; $M=4.31, SD=.81$) – both of which are consistent with contextual reporting forms that go against the traditional perception of the 'neutral' journalist and share an overarching goal to consider society's best interest when making journalistic decisions. Pointing to possible solutions (22.6% strong agreement; $M=3.96, SD=.78$) was also perceived to be a valued role, which lends support to those practicing solution-based reporting. In addition, respondents said they

think reporting stories that document hope and resiliency are newsworthy (35.9% strong agreement; $M=4.27$, $SD=.64$), which lends support to restorative narrative as a contextual genre.

RQ4 asked which role functions characterize US print and online newspaper journalists in 2016. The role structure of the sample was obtained through a principal component analysis of Weaver et al.'s (2007) 15 role conceptions and the five conceptions developed to represent contextual journalism. Because of our focus on newspaper journalists, and because we added five new role conceptions, we anticipated a different dimensional structure from the surveys conducted by Weaver et al.

Weaver et al.'s (2007) previous work on role structure suggested there is often crossover between functions (i.e. journalists subscribe to more than one job function). Thus, promax rotation, which accounts for interrelated dimensions, was used for interpretation (Brown, 2009). A component correlation matrix confirmed that this oblique rotation was appropriate because several of the factors had correlation scores of more than .32 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013: 651). Upon initial analysis, six factors were found: five were interpretable, but the role item 'concentrating on the widest audience' emerged as a singlet, so this item was dropped from the analysis. 'Letting ordinary people express views' and 'getting ordinary people involved' were cross-listed, and therefore were also dropped (Costello and Osborne, 2005; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). The final analysis of the remaining 17 items explained 62 percent of the variance in responses and produced five dimensions, or functions. Only loadings greater than .45 were used to define factors (Stevens, 2009; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013: 675). See Table 2 for all factor loadings.

Four of the functions were unique to this data set, although there was some overlap with Weaver et al.'s (2007) established functions. The strongest was the Contextualist, which accounted for the most variance in responses (27.8%). This new function included the five roles consistent with contextual reporting: acting socially responsible, alerting the public of threats and opportunities, contributing to society's well-being, and accurately portraying the world. Accounting for the second most variance (10.9%) was the new Intellectual function, which included developing intellectual and cultural interests, and discussing international and national policy. The Hybrid, a cross between Weaver et al.'s (2007) Disseminator and Interpretive functions, included investigating government claims, getting information out quickly, providing analysis to complex problems, and avoiding unverified stories. This new function accounted for 8.6 percent of the variance in responses. The fourth, the Adversarial, was identical to Weaver et al.'s (2007) function. It included being an adversary to business and government, accounting for 8.2 percent of the variance. The fifth function, the Advocate/Entertainer, included one role from Weaver et al.'s (2007) Disseminator (providing entertainment) and two roles from the Populist Mobilizer (setting the political agenda, pointing to solutions). It accounted for the least variance (6.5%).

Items defining each factor were averaged to form role function variables, an approach used by Beam et al. (2009). As seen in Table 3, the most highly valued function among these newspaper reporters was the Hybrid ($\alpha=.60$), with a mean of 4.54 ($SD=.45$). The Contextualist ($\alpha=.80$) was the second most popular function ($M=4.46$, $SD=.52$), followed by the Intellectual ($\alpha=.81$), with a mean of 4.04 ($SD=.63$), and the Advocate/Entertainer ($\alpha=.45$), with a mean of 3.43 ($SD=.61$). The least popular

Table 2. Results of principal components analysis with promax rotation.

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Contextualist					
Act in socially responsible way	.822				
Contribute to society's well-being	.803				
Alert public of threats	.794				
Alert public of opportunities	.725				
Accurately portray the world	.531				
Intellectual					
Discuss international policy		.954			
Discuss national policy		.932			
Develop intellectual/cultural interests		.597			
Interpretive/Disseminator					
Investigate government claims			.709		
Get information to public quickly			.704		
Provide analysis of complex problems			.686		
Avoid stories with unverified content			.630		
Adversarial					
Serve as adversary of business				.910	
Serve as adversary of government				.901	
Advocate/Entertainer					
Set the political agenda					.734
Provide entertainment					.610
Point to possible solutions					.479
Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings	4.725	1.856	1.456	1.388	1.108
Total percentage of variance explained	27.8	10.9	8.6	8.2	6.5
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	27.8	38.7	47.3	55.4	62.0

Factor loadings greater than .320 are displayed.

Table 3. Summed mean scores for the six role functions.

Role Function	Mean	Standard Deviation
Interpretive/Disseminator	4.54***	.45
Contextualist	4.46***	.52
Intellectual	4.04***	.63
Advocate/Entertainer	3.43***	.61
Adversarial	2.74***	.86

***Mean differences are significant at the $p < .001$ level.

function among newspaper reporters was the Adversarial ($r = .70$), with a mean of 2.74 ($SD = .86$). Paired-samples t-tests showed significant differences between the means for each function.

Table 4. Hierarchical regression predicting newspaper journalists' attitudes toward contextual journalism types.

Predictor variables	Solutions	Constructive	Restorative
Demographics			
Age	−.087**	−.056	−.031
Race (1 = minority)	−.029	−.007	−.037
Gender (1 = female)	.066*	.090**	.165***
Education (1 = BA)	.015	−.013	−.006
[R² for this block]	[.012]	[.012]	[.035]
Role functions			
Contextualist	.196***	.216***	.198***
Intellectual	−.028	−.044	−.024
Interpretive/disseminator	.046	−.023	.014
Adversarial	−.009	−.016	−.061*
Activist/entertainer	.240***	.296***	.155***
[R² for this block]	[.130]	[.152]	[.082]
Cumulative R²	[.142]	[.164]	[.117]

Values not in brackets are standardized partial regression coefficients (betas) for final model. Values in brackets are explained variance.
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

To address RQ5, hierarchical multiple regressions were used to predict journalists' attitudes toward three genres of contextual reporting: constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative. For each of the three analyses, the first block of predictors was composed of four demographic variables, three of which were converted to dichotomous variables (dummy-coded) before being used as predictors: race (1 = Minority), education (1 = Bachelor's degree or higher), and gender (1 = Female). Age remained a continuous predictor variable. The five role functions comprised the second block of predictors: The Contextualist, Intellectual, Hybrid, Adversarial, and Advocate/Entertainer. Secondary analyses showed little multicollinearity among predictors; the lowest tolerance score for any of the predictors was .71 and the highest Variance Inflation Factor score was 1.414. Table 4 shows final betas for each regression.

Demographic characteristics were less predictive of respondents' attitudes toward the three contextual journalism genres, when compared to the predictive power of role functions. In each of the three regressions, demographics explained less than 4 percent of the variance in journalists' perceptions. However, age and gender did significantly affect responses. As Table 4 shows, younger journalists had a more positive outlook on solutions journalism, and female journalists had significantly more favorable views of all three contextual genres. Women responded most positively to restorative journalism, followed by constructive journalism and solutions journalism.

Regarding the second block of predictors in the regressions, role functions accounted for between 8 and 15 percent of the fluctuation in attitudes toward contextual journalism. In particular, respondents' adherence to the Contextualist function and the Advocate/Entertainer function predicted favorable views of all three contextual journalism forms

(see Table 4). Advocate/Entertainers valued these forms more than any other group, with their most favorable views reserved for constructive journalism, followed by solutions journalism and restorative narrative. Contextualists also rated constructive journalism the highest, followed by restorative journalism and solutions journalism. On the flipside, Adversarial journalists held a more negative view of restorative narrative.

Discussion and conclusion

Overall, survey results revealed support among American newspaper journalists for contextual reporting styles. More than any other professional role, journalists in this survey valued their duty to portray the world accurately (70% strong agreement). This lends much support specifically to constructive journalism, which calls on journalists to consider not only negative themes of conflict and dissent but also positive themes of accomplishment and resilience that tend to be overlooked but that are just as much a part of society as the misdeeds that garner more attention (Gyldensted, 2015).

Although journalists in this survey embraced the values inherent in contextual reporting, they were not abundantly familiar with the specific terms used to describe such forms. They were most familiar with solutions journalism, followed by constructive journalism and restorative narrative. One of the purposes of this study was to contribute to a standardized understanding of these concepts among researchers and practitioners. After being provided definitions of various contextual news forms, journalists reported that they were already employing these techniques in their work and that they intended to do so significantly more after learning about them through this survey. Respondents' favorable attitudes toward these reporting genres point to the need for continued study of contextual news forms, especially because this type of work is being well regarded in the profession. Indeed, the aforementioned *Washington Post* article by Eli Saslow about the student survivor from the Umpqua Community College shooting was a 2016 Pulitzer Prize finalist (The Pulitzer Prizes, 2016).

In addition to evaluating journalists' attitudes about contextual reporting forms and individual professional roles, this survey found that journalists in 2016 identify with new role functions. The underlying role structure revealed in this study, which was composed of five dimensions, or functions, was different from (but overlapped with) earlier studies of journalistic functions. One established function, the Adversarial, was replicated in the present study, while four new functions took hold. This is likely the case because the current sample was of newspaper journalists only, whereas the 'American Journalist' surveys included news professionals from all media (Willnat and Weaver, 2014).

The most prized function (in terms of combined mean scores) was the Hybrid, which combines Interpretive roles with 'just the facts' Disseminator roles. This result strengthens Ward's (2009) claims about the duality of journalists: the largest group of news professionals in the present survey aims for speed and accuracy, yet strive to interpret information for the public. This indicates that although newspaper journalists are holding tight to traditional values, providing context and interpretation is equally important.

Respondents' summed mean scores were second highest (and nearly the highest) for the Contextualist function, indicating the importance journalists ascribe to the roles inherent in this function. Journalists valued portraying the world accurately, acting

socially responsible, contributing to society's well-being, and alerting the public of both potential threats and opportunities, all of which are fundamental values of contextual reporting. This suggests that journalists today – nearly 70 years after the Hutchins Commission concluded that the press had a responsibility to consider society's best interests when making journalistic decisions (Hutchins Commission, 1947) – still strongly acknowledge the social responsibility theory of the press and are committed to respecting that duty. This commitment – despite increasing market pressures and a rapidly evolving field – speaks to the power of contextual news and the value of the Contextualist function.

The Intellectual function ranked third in perceived importance (and was the second strongest dimension in the factor analysis), which was fairly high considering most respondents were local journalists (recall that this function incorporated discussing international and national policy, along with developing intellectual/cultural interests). Fourth most popular was the Advocate/Entertainer, an interesting combination of activist journalist attitudes (pointing to solutions, setting the political agenda) and audience-oriented concerns (providing entertainment). The fact that these three roles formed a single dimension could indicate the growing popularity of activist and/or politically motivated journalism. In other words, many news professionals might think that the most popular journalism is journalism with an agenda or 'slant'.

Meanwhile, the Adversarial function (being an adversary toward government and business) was least valued in this survey. Scholars have argued that small-market reporters tend to be less adversarial toward institutions and conflict-averse (Berkowitz, 2007; Tichenor et al., 1980). This seems to be the case for journalists in the present study, who mostly work for newspapers in small towns with small circulations. Indeed, secondary analyses showed a small but significant positive relationship between circulation size and a journalist's attitude toward the Adversarial function ($\rho = .07$, $p < .01$).

While contextual reporting seems to be gaining favor among journalists in general, regression results indicated that job function heavily influences attitudes toward this reporting style. Interestingly, the Advocate/Entertainer function was the strongest overall predictor of positive attitudes toward contextual journalism genres. Those who subscribed to the Advocate/Entertainer function had more favorable attitudes toward solutions journalism and constructive journalism, even when compared to Contextualists. This is significant because Contextualists would be expected to value contextual journalism roles, but this would not necessarily be the case for 'activist' journalists. This data set indicates that there is some overlap in attitude toward both approaches. Results also showed that Adversarial journalists, who value skepticism toward business and government, could be expected to have negative views toward restorative narrative. This might be because news workers who feel a primary duty to expose negative stories about powerful interests are less concerned with highlighting stories of inspiration and hope.

While demographics were less influential in predicting attitudes toward contextual journalism, age and gender played a role. Younger journalists were more in favor of solutions journalism, showing that this type of reporting could be gaining popularity as news moves farther from its traditional roots. Female journalists held more positive views toward all three contextual genres, especially restorative narrative. This finding strengthens previous research showing that female journalists placed more value in stories that

provided context and accentuated positive aspects (Christmas, 1997; Van Zoonen, 1998). For these reasons, it might be worth exploring whether women are leading the contextual journalism 'movement'.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. The sample was not random, and journalists chose whether to participate. It is possible that individuals who are willing to complete an online survey are more generally open-minded, and therefore more open to contextual journalism. Although we feel the sample accurately represented the individual demographics of US daily newspaper reporters (age, race, education level, gender, etc.), organizational-level variables, such as circulation size, were less representative. About half the journalists in this study worked for newspapers with a circulation of fewer than 50,000, whereas 90 percent of daily US newspapers have circulations of 50,000 or fewer (Editor & Publisher, 2015). It should be further noted that there is some obligatory measurement error inherent in this item because circulation size was self-reported. Additionally, journalists from high-circulation newspapers were somewhat limited because many of the biggest newspapers (i.e. *USA Today*, *The New York Times*) did not provide staff contacts on their websites. Finally, while not necessarily a limitation, it is important to note that the survey measured journalists' *perceptions* of their reporting and not their *actual* reporting.

This study contributed to contextual journalism scholarship by helping bridge the gap between researchers and practitioners. But given the dearth of academic research regarding contextual journalism, and because some of its specific subgenres are recently termed, there is much work to be done. Future research could look at how reporters in other news media, such as TV, or in other countries, view their roles and view contextual news forms. Scholars should continue to define and distinguish various contextual reporting forms to create consistency in conversation among academics and professionals and to facilitate effective study of the impact of such news forms. Finally, research should consider audience consumption, testing such variables as attitudes toward and knowledge gained from contextual reporting.

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