A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ideology in American Print Media’s Response to the Brian Williams Scandal of 2015

Author: Charles BAILEY (s2303787)

Supervisor: Dr. Robert Prey
Second Reader: Dr. Ansgard Heinrich

December 3, 2018
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ideology in American Print Media’s Response to the Brian Williams Scandal of 2015

by Charles Bailey

In 2015 Brian Williams was revealed to have lied and scandal erupted. In this thesis, I propose that this moment can reveal something about both 2015 and the state of news ideology before the chaos of the 2016 presidential race, and where we find ourselves now. It combines van Dijk’s model of ideology formation and discourse, Bourdieu’s field theory, and a historical context to assess the dominant ideological values in US print media responses to the scandal. Critical discourse analysis through close reading of institutional authors finds that a normative defence objectivity is present as proposed but that each text diverges from it in ways that are revealing in light of field theory. Finally, I consider what it means for American print media to adhere to objectivity in an era of ‘post-truth’ and fake news, and suggest new further research made possible by the theoretical model developed here.
“It’s true that what Trump is saying is false,..., we’re beyond criticizing someone for that. It’s like criticizing an actor for saying a lot of false things.”

Robichaud, in Pazzanese 2016
Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been completed without the support and advice of my supervisor Dr. Robert Prey, the staff of the Media Studies department of RUG, my family, my classmates, and my friends. Thank you Darcy, Elio, Aisling, Rupert, Alice, Shabba, Paula, and many more in Birmingham for all the tea and other essentials. Finally, thank you Elena for everything.
Contents

Abstract i
Acknowledgements iii

1 Introduction 1

2 Theoretical Framework 4
  2.1 Discourse and Ideology ................................. 4
    2.1.1 What is Ideology? ................................... 5
    2.1.2 Ideology, attitude or opinion? ...................... 7
    2.1.3 What is Discourse? How Does it Manifest in Texts? ....... 8
    2.1.4 Defining a ‘Discourse of Print Journalism’ .................. 9
    2.2 Historical context - The Struggle for Objectivity ................. 12
      2.2.1 Identifying Objectivity as an Ideological Norm Today .......... 14
    2.3 Bourdieu’s Field Theory - a journalistic field ................. 16
      2.3.1 Positions and Position-taking ....................... 19
      2.3.2 How Ideology Manifests In the Field ................... 20
      2.3.3 Field theory as the basis for understanding competing discourses .................. 22

3 Methodology 23
  3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis ................................ 23
  3.2 The Role of Social Cognition in CDA ............................. 24
  3.3 What is relevant in a text? ................................ 26
  3.4 Selection Criteria and Practical Considerations .................. 30
  3.5 Experimental Hypotheses .................................. 31

4 Close Reading 32
  4.1 USA Today ........................................ 32
Chapter 1

Introduction

In February 2015 NBC news anchor Brian Williams found himself at the centre of a media storm. The scandal centred on the truthfulness of stories he had reported in 2003 (Steenland and Turness, 2017). Williams had been the host of NBC’s nightly news show since 2004, and he was a prominent media figure in the United States. In January 2015, eyewitnesses came forward to contest specific parts of his reporting during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It later emerged that public statements Williams had made about other stories were also fabrications. Media correspondents and opinion writers from major newspapers soon set to work, and the news cycle churned.

This thesis’ purpose is to assess the state of print news ideology at the time of the scandal. It will do so through consideration of discourses articulated in texts written in response. It seems that a professional truth-telling scandal like Brian Williams’ ought to shine a light on journalists’ own ideological positions. Crisis can open up space for ideological heterodoxy but it can also prompt a hardening of existing values.

A further aim is to undertake an analysis that combines social cognition with critical discourse studies. Doing so will add to the body of critical discourse research, and help others to explore how American print journalism had developed to 2015.

Van Dijk’s model of ideology and discourse forms the basis for analysis, in conjunction with Bourdieu’s field theory. The former provides a comprehensive framework for identifying ideology and discourse in texts. The latter gives us a theoretical basis to comment critically on journalist’s motivations. This approach is then developed with a historical overview of American print journalism’s norms and practices. Doing so helps to situate the analysis in its proper
Chapter 1. Introduction

historical context. The dynamic at the heart of Bourdieu’s field theory is the importance of struggles over time for and against the status quo. Journalists adopted and discarded particular values or techniques whenever the profession needed to. It is vital to foreground this pragmatic opportunism within a historical context.

Critical analysis of the values of “fact-centeredness” (Chalaby, 1996, p.312) and objectivity is vital. This thesis proposes that such ideological values are culturally and historically contingent. It is a misreading of history to view them as either constants or inevitabilities.

Thus, the key questions considered in the textual analysis are:

- Is fact-centredness (objectivity, the primacy of ‘truth’ etc.) the dominant ideological discourse?
- Is there another field-dominant discourse?
- Is there a mixed discourse (or a balance of discourses)?

The first section introduces a theoretical model of discourse and ideology. It draws on Teun van Dijk’s critical discourse framework (1993, 1998, 2011). Media discourse is an important vehicle for ideology, as news texts define everyday reality for millions of Americans. Certain norms and values of that discourse are recognisable features of an ideology.

However, ideology controls the range of acceptable positions on issues and influences field formation. A more critical social approach seemed a necessary approach. Furthermore, ideology demands a critical analysis because journalism has the potential to reproduce undesirable or harmful social relations in its adherence to certain norms: for example, efforts by networks to appear balanced and present both sides of issues have made the findings of climate scientists seem equivalent to the PR efforts of fossil fuel lobbyists.

The second section outlines the historical context of contemporary journalistic ideology. Norms like objectivity have become a key part of what constitutes good journalism. However, scholars have not always understood these values and practices as ideological. Some have characterised them as a technical progression from less, to more, sophisticated practice. This section explains the continued role of objectivity in American journalism by introducing the idea of the financial and societal value of such norms to journalistic practitioners and outlets.
Chapter 1. Introduction

The third section explains Bourdieu’s field theory. This sociological model is an ideal way to understand the relationship between norms and capital. Field theory gives us an intuitive structural model to understand the decisions journalists make and its focus on individual agency helps to connect personal ideology with a professional ideology.

The methodology is discussed in the next section. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was chosen to identify and critique ideological discourses. It is an ideal method to qualitatively assess texts because CDA is well suited to studying discourse dominance. Close reading is combined with Bourdieu to explore the social cognitive means by which journalists communicate ideologically-loaded ideas to audiences. The various levels of analysis in CDA are particularly valuable in the decoding of social cognition and for engaging with journalists’ underlying motivations.

Following the close reading and initial analysis, the concluding section discusses the thesis as a whole, in light of events since 2015. The 2016 US presidential election, in particular, highlighted a need for a critical reappraisal of American media’s attitude toward ideology and discourse. In 2016 The Intercept quoted CBS CEO Les Moonves, speaking at the Morgan Stanley Technology, Media, and Telecom Conference, saying that Donald Trump "may not be good for America, but it’s damn good for CBS, that’s all I got to say" (Fang, Lee, 2016). The confluence of these forces—commercial media corporation CBS being hosted by banking giant Morgan Stanley, and salivating at the lucrative prospect of a presidency of tabloid monstrosity—was the kind of moment that seemed to justify this thesis critical approach. Possible further applications of this thesis’ models and methods in light of recent media events are discussed in the final chapter.
Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Discourse and Ideology

The model of ideology and discourse that this thesis uses draws on work by Teun van Dijk. It also responds to van Dijk’s call to develop a model of ideology that incorporates social cognition (2011, p.193). Van Dijk’s model explains how people or groups relate to each other and reproduce particular norms and practices in speech and texts.

Professional ideology modifies the attitudes and opinions of a group engaged in a form of cultural production. In this case, the group is journalists and the product is journalism. Van Dijk’s work allows us to understand how a professional ideology might be articulated through discourse and why?

What is needed is a "multidisciplinary approach to ideology" (van Dijk, 2011, p.193). This requires an adequate model of social-cognition to identify extra-textual elements and a wider interpretive base than linguistics and/or traditional media studies. It is essential to assess the contextual, historical, political and sociological implications of a text with a wider perspective.

Part of that historical perspective is recognising that the term ‘ideology’ does not entail any inherently negative inference. Ideology’s original significance as a neutral philosophical concept was lost as it became semantically charged by two centuries of disputes between the political left and right. Accusations of ‘ideological motivation’ became an essential tool for disparaging political opponents. Contemporary usage often implies the obsolescence of grand political theories, in the tradition of Bell’s ‘The End of Ideology’ (1965 ed).
In his essays, Bell outlined a definition of ideology to encompass both of the grand 19th Century narratives: Imperialism and Socialism. Both had advocated an entire "system[s] of comprehensive reality...a set of beliefs, infused with passion,...to transform the whole of a way of life" (p.399-400). The post-WWII period saw the collapse of fascism, the end of the European colonial empires, and eventually the apparent end of the last ‘total’ ideology when the Soviet Union collapsed in the 1990s. Bell seemed vindicated but this tendency to focus on ‘total ideologies’ does not acknowledge the ways that ideology operates at multiple levels of society.

It is true that ideologies considered to be negative are those that have been articulated through violence or coercion by those in power. However, contrast this with other ideologies like pacifism, pan-Africanism or the various strands of identity politics (feminism, transgenderism, etc.). These have arisen amongst oppressed social groups and help to bond marginal people and organise resistance. A multidisciplinary approach begins with the understanding that not all ideologies maintain dominance.

2.1.1 What is Ideology?

An ideology is the "identity, actions, norms and values, resources and relations" (van Dijk, 2011, p.193) that contribute to group formation. It develops within groups as a collection of "axiomatic beliefs underlying ... social representations" (ibid). Ideology can be articulated for a variety of purposes: it can be used to dominate or to resist, to rouse people to action or to pacify them.

The beliefs common to American journalism as a professional or social group include freedom of the press and that journalists have professional responsibilities towards "readers, sources, news actors and the state" (ibid). Journalists (I/we) share these beliefs and follow these practices, in contrast to those who do not (he/she/they).

Because he imagined ideology as primarily concerned with group formation, van Dijk identifies it with two different axes: First, emphasis of the positive qualities of the in-group and the negative qualities of the out-group. Second, mitigation of the positive qualities of the out-group and negative qualities of the in-group. Van Dijk refers to this as an "Ideological Square" (1998, p.267), with the four corners composed of the simplest formulation of possible variations:
Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

1. Emphasise our positive properties/actions

2. Emphasise their negative properties/actions

3. Mitigate our negative properties/actions

4. Mitigate their positive properties/actions.

Strategies (1) and (2) are both comparatively easy to identify in ideological discourse. Journalists who step outside the normative boundaries of the profession might be ‘othered’, placed outside of the in-group, and their negative qualities as individuals or professionals emphasised (2). The positive qualities of the in-group: e.g. ‘journalism is too important to do sloppily’ (1)- might be emphasised in contrast to this negative representation of the out-group (e.g. ‘He acted like a cowboy’).

The strategy of mitigation of the other’s good qualities (4) can be found in statements that conspicuously downplay some accepted positive action or property of the out-group (e.g. ‘She has been at the forefront of the profession for over a decade, produced remarkable copy, but that does not excuse even one moment of foolishness’). Strategy (3) can often be detected in discourse that is characterised colloquially as ‘Whataboutism’ (Economist, 2008, [accessed 15/05/2016]). The in-group’s fault is admitted but a more egregious example of the out-group is inserted alongside to obfuscate or distract (e.g. ‘Journalists have acted dishonestly in the past but that does not excuse the serious assault on press freedoms undertaken by this administration’).

However, critical research should recognise ideological discourse in more than explicit cases of group solidarity. The particular social or professional group to which the writer/speaker belongs will have differing attitudes towards specific issues and modify them depending on the communicative situation. For example, the attitudes of journalists from the news desk of a national paper will modify discourse in a different way to those of an opinion writer in a monthly magazine. Likewise, their individual personal opinions will modify discourse in a more specific fashion.
2.1.2 Ideology, attitude or opinion?

Ideology asks "Who are we? What are we not?", attitude asks "How do I feel about this event?" Attitudes inform group members about how they should feel about specific socio-political phenomena. Attitudes are applied as general principles, to form individual opinions on an issue.

For example, Nativism- defined by beliefs like "We are white Anglo-British. We are a proud island nation"- might be the controlling ideology of xenophobic attitudes, which in turn control the articulation of racist opinions. Nativism tends to promote negative attitudes toward incoming refugees and immigrants. Negative opinions form in response to the perceived displacement of native cultures. They then find expression in violent speech and actions. This hierarchy of ideology-to-action is why a critical appraisal of ideology is necessary.

However, it is important to bear in mind that opinions can be formed on the basis of several, sometimes contradictory ideologies. They are also informed by the legacy of personal histories, and consequently, an individual can identify as part of one group, demonstrate an attitude associated with it, and at the same time hold opinions seemingly at odds with both of these.

For example, journalists’ attitudes are controlled by professional ideological values like press freedom and objectivity. American journalistic ideology typically causes practitioners to self-define as truth-tellers and their practices as normatively fact-centred. Thus, a journalist is unlikely to have a positive attitude to legislation introducing press regulation. They might, however, express a personal opinion that contradicts that core belief. For example, in light of the leaking of documents that cause an individual harm or leads to a sustained press attack on them, a journalist might change their opinion to favour some more controls on the press. Identifying contradictory opinions, as well as orthodox ones will be a key part of the analysis.

To detect ideological influence on journalistic opinion writing we must pay close attention to specific mental models that are used by the speaker/writer to refer to concrete events. Proximity is important - e.g. 'I know how hard it is to make that call as a journalist' - as it directly follows from the journalist’s relationship with their professional identity. "Episodic memory" (2011, p.194), which relies on mental models that appeal to collective experience, can also be indicative of ideological control. This often finds representative expression in appeals to ‘we/us’:
e.g. ‘We all remember where we were when we heard the news that ‘X’ had occurred’ in reference to a symbolically powerful event like a terrorist attack.

Other vivid mental models can be found across all levels of analysis: Visuals might utilise powerful signifiers like national flags or photos of black-clad gunmen. Syntax can construct in/out dynamics with informality or dialect as a signifier of solidarity, or as a means to obscure meaning from an out-group. Formal modes might communicate legal or moral authority to assume dominance, or represent an attempt to fight marginalisation in ‘the proper way’. Close attention to rhetoric is especially important, as persuasive strategies like hyperbole or understatement often imply a great deal more than the surface level word-choice (which is itself a powerful level of analysis).

### 2.1.3 What is Discourse? How Does it Manifest in Texts?

Discourse is a linguistic phenomenon that originates in instances of communication, including texts. According to O’Keeffe discourse occurs in news media as "a public, manufactured, on-record form of interaction" (2011, p.441). This definition conveys two vital points. First, discourse is ‘manufactured’. It is a product of a process and applied technique. Second, being a “public” and “on-record form of interaction”, it exists in a social context. It is found in the “natural language” of real-world usage, in “real social situations of interaction and communication” (van Dijk, 2011, p.192). Journalism undoubtedly constitutes a suitably real-world usage for van Dijk’s purposes.

Indeed, discourse research in media studies is vital because news is instrumental in the dissemination of different types of knowledge and ideologies in society. Discourses are understood to be socially reproductive practices. They contribute to the "reproduction of society in general" (van Dijk, 2008, p.192). However, they also affect the ways that particular communities and phenomena are viewed by wider society.

As news discourses are a "complex phenomena in their own right" (idem), analysis takes place at several different levels and incorporates a number of disciplinary elements. As such it is not defined only by formal linguistics. Discourse analysis does not rely on individual word choice as the basis of the study. Studies can incorporate semantics, style, rhetoric, narrative
analysis, analysis of argumentation, semiotics and more. When conducting discourse analysis it is important to understand and elaborate on the relationship between these levels.

For instance, we might ask how does rhetoric contribute to the narrative flow of the text? What semiotic meaning do visual symbols lend the story? Some elements may be the focus of micro-level analysis (e.g. detailed assessment of rhetorical strategies of hyperbole). Others govern more macro-level structures governing the text as a whole (e.g. commenting on news style, the presence of the inverted pyramid model etc). The identification of a particular discourse depends on tracing the accretion of markers of these levels. Coherent patterns of repeatedly utilised strategies must be found at play across the text (idem).

Additionally, van Dijk stresses the importance of "paraverbal and non-verbal dimensions", some of which are not present in written news texts ("intonation, gesture and facework"). However, alternative semiotic elements may be present in texts in a limited form. Newspaper photography and cartoons accompanying texts can fulfil the role of paraverbal elements in texts. Though static, these renderings capture and communicate similar kinds of semiotic knowledge. Consequently, these are under consideration in the analysis.

Because discourse relies on the cognitive connection of textual and extra-verbal content, analysis entails recognising links between content and comprehension. These include "mental models and other representations in memory", innuendo, allusion, and visual shorthand. In effect, discourse relies on communicative strategies that presuppose knowledge to enhance or transform its significance (idem). Discourse analysis, therefore, relies on an appreciation of how a text relates to its context. It does so with the application of multi-disciplinary knowledge to understand and identify relevant contextual relations, in particular: understanding of the historical, political and social relations of a text (idem). The next section defines a discourse of American print journalism based on such a contextual understanding.

2.1.4 Defining a ‘Discourse of Print Journalism’

When a profession acts as an information mediator between individuals and society, its dominant discourses deserve attention. Of special interest are the ways in which news texts reinforce or reproduce ideological values and practices. Defining a discourse of American newspapers
Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

brings us to Benedict Anderson’s work on developments in journalistic language, technique and the social-positioning role of language (Anderson, 2006, p.45).

Anderson’s work helps us to identify three historic developments in American print journalism. These developments, which Anderson attributes to what he calls "print-capitalism", had a powerful effect on the field of journalism in America. All three had come to dominate journalism in the period of commercialisation of newspapers from the late 19th to early 20th Century (Anderson 2006, p.44-45).

First, to distinguish themselves from their partisan forebears and their pamphleteer ancestors, commercial print culture had to create a journalistic lexis and register. The result was a vocabulary and grammar situated linguistically between the two poles: combining technocratic language (of governance, business and science), and the vernacular of everyday speech.

This ‘linguistic unity’ produced "unified fields of exchange and communication" (Idem). This enabled expansion beyond traditional geographic boundaries. For example, on the solidarity produced by the shared ritual of reading the morning papers:

An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000,000-odd fellow-Americans. He has no idea what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity (Anderson, 2006, p.26)

This solidarity is a deliberate feature of the print-capitalist mode of journalism identified by Anderson. It is the desired commercial outcome of the move away from open partisanship. If the news convinces this breakfasting American that his compatriots are not at all like him, he may not buy this newspaper again. The more easily language can generate this feeling of community, the wider the potential readership.

The New York Times is the classic example of this universalising principle succeeding. It was a metropolitan newspaper, previously tied to one city, that began to produce copy pitched to a national audience. As a result, it could be (and still is) easily consumed outside of its geographic place of origin.
Second, commercial print journalism produced what Anderson calls a "new fixity of language" (Idem). The day-after-day reproduction of reporting "fixed" standards. This gave the impression that outlets had always acted in such a way, even when such an idea was easily falsifiable. Media histories tend to eulogise an outlet’s awards for enacting normatively good practice, and memorable exposés. The memory of former standards is forgotten as values shift.

Take the Chicago Tribune, which ran a masthead slogan of "World’s Greatest Newspaper" from the 1910s to the 50s (encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org, 2016). It enjoyed massive commercial success and published Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporting during the 1980s and 90s. The same paper is not judged for decades of virulent anti-Catholic and anti-Irish nativism during the preceding century (Crothers Lockhart, 2000, p.289).

Third, the discourse of print journalism changed to reflect the social position that commercial editors and owners hoped their outlets would gain. By adapting to communicate in the "languages-of-power" (Anderson, 2006, p.45) commercial journalism hoped to position itself as an indispensable conduit between audiences and government. Newly independent newspapers saw opportunities to attain social status by leveraging the importance of good coverage of political candidates and policy agendas. Increasingly, however, news came to reflect the values and norms of American elite society, with the aim of gaining a greater degree of access from powerful strata of society.

Ward (2008), Chalaby (1996), Nerone (2013), and Azeez (2009) have all argued persuasively that news texts are products of their particular historical moment. It is no surprise then that the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century was the period when these trends coalesced. The expansion of industrialised consumption generated advertising revenues that could support large-scale news operations for the first time. It was a shared pursuit of capital that helped to create a degree of commonality across the discourse of commercial outlets. Work that deviated ideologically from this mainstream (i.e. work that was perceived to symbolically diminish ‘the profession’) became anathema. The normative value of objectivity came to the fore just as commercial journalism was becoming established. The reasons for this close association require some unpacking but the historical development of objectivity as a useful discursive tool are illustrative of the way that ideology functions in American print media.
2.2 Historical context - The Struggle for Objectivity

The move towards a commercial model in the late 19th Century demanded a new system of norms and beliefs. New ideological axioms had to replace political allegiance as the group-defining principles of the profession. Sensationalist and socially motivated work was proliferating, and professional PR and mass-media propaganda were developing rapidly. It was by no means a given that objectivity would emerge as a dominant ideological value. However, identification with ‘truth centredness’ allowed journalists to establish their (symbolic) authority and (economic) autonomy.

To appreciate the historical significance of the developments of this time, and to situate them in their proper context, it helps to look to the decades after the American revolution of 1776. America’s founders were acutely aware of the meaning-making potential of the press. Walter Berns makes an illuminating comparison when he asserts "it is probably the case that not even the press of the late 1960’s can match that of the late 1790’s" (1970, p.109).

Meant partly in jest, Berns’ remark is still revealing because it establishes a continuity of ideological pragmatism in American journalism. It shows us that America’s press has always been liable to intemperate speech and blatant partisanship if symbolic and economic conditions allowed. Recognising that a free press does not always serve the stated interests and ‘useful truths’ of a fragile alliance of colonies, the fledgeling Republic enacted the infamous ‘Alien and Sedition Acts’ in 1798 (Daniel, M. 2009, p.15).

The laws set out a series of wide-reaching punitive measures which could be brought into force by government to confiscate and close presses. The Acts amounted to a regime of regulation which Americans today might scarcely think possible of their founding fathers. Yet, the press landscape upon their repeal would be more familiar. What emerged in the aftermath was a press raring to engage in mudslinging and slander.

The height of the discursive shift towards objectivity is often identified with the work of Walter Lippmann in the 1920s. In terms which are full of potent linguistic markers of American nationalism, Lippmann bemoaned the failure of the press to safeguard that most sacred (and most contested) ideal: Liberty. The objective method was "the name we give to measures by which we protect and increase the veracity of the information upon which we act" (Lippmann,
1920, p.68). This was a call to arms for American journalism to illuminate liberal freedoms with the light of truth, to embody liberty with "[the] one kind of unity possible in a world as diverse as ours. It is unity of method" (p.67).


In particular, practitioners had to be mindful of what Lippmann called "the scientific spirit" (1920, p.67) of the age. It was an appeal to rationalism in line with the wider Anglo-American modernity of the period. The move from partisanship to asserting the supremacy of the "rational and disinterested over the emotional and engaged" (Fuller, 2010, p.116) was also a clear signal of journalism’s capacity to adopt the normative standards of the times.

The crucial claim of Lippmann’s work was that a liberal press, working according to routines of verification could successfully arrive at ‘the truth’ (not ‘a truth’, or a biased ‘version of the truth’). As Broersma summarises, the claim is that "If they [journalists] work according to routines that follow from the norm, they will end up with unbiased truth" (2010, p.27). This is a powerful claim that still holds idealistic appeal to practitioners and theorists. However, there were good reasons to adopt objectivity beyond purely idealistic motives.

Principally, outlets were keen to co-opt the kind of symbolic and economic possibilities that objectivity offered. It was a convenient means to pursue mass market appeal after the decoupling from political parties in the late 19th Century (Kaplan, 2008). As more and more outlets switched to a commercial model, their focus expanded beyond elite patronage. Journalism as a profession looked to consolidate prestige and to grow revenues. Adopting objectivity was a means of expanding into new markets, previously walled-off by party-political loyalty.

Kaplan’s work on the objectivity norm solidifies the commercial link between this new discourse and revenues. He claims that "the more objective news organisations were the more successful they became" (Kaplan, 2008, p.11). Objectivity and ‘fact centredness’ became an
essential norm for editors and proprietors to adopt in America’s move to print capitalism, as advertising revenues became the preeminent means of financing newly independent news production in the late 19th/early 20th century.

This is not a controversial suggestion of motive, as other scholars have drawn similar links (Chalaby, 1998; Nerone, 2012; Azeez, 2009). Advertiser funding is dependent on circulation, so it is not surprising that a symbolically valuable norm was taken up by commercial outlets looking to appeal to wider audiences.

This reciprocal relationship of economic-symbolic factors became so entrenched that “[t]he notion of alienating half the reading public by favouring one party or candidate over another went by the wayside” (Kaplan, 2008, p.11). The economic expediency of this norm became undeniable for the commercial press: newspapers could be more easily consumed because of an easily recognisable methodological practice of objectivity. This was applied to depoliticise coverage, thus generating more sales and reinforcing the value of the norm. Increases in sales drew in more advertisers, further boosting revenues and increased reinvestment in content valorising the norm, aiming for ever greater circulation.

We can confidently posit the link between advertising revenue and circulation because historic records (NAA, 2013) show a clear upward trend in both that accelerated before a marked decline occurred during the late 20th Century. The drop-off clearly coincides with the emergence of competitor mediums that diverted advertisers from print. Corporations began to assign marketing budgets elsewhere: initially cable television, and subsequently (and more damaging for print) internet-based news services.

2.2.1 Identifying Objectivity as an Ideological Norm Today

Lippmann’s influence on almost a century of journalism studies highlights just how symbolically potent the appeal of objectivity has been to the profession. However, a critical assessment of its application in media texts is vital at this moment in time.

Recent crises in advertising funding and the undermining of the centrality of print newspapers has thrown into question the orthodoxy of the objectivity norm. Diagnoses of this upset have lamented the impact of electronic communications on the functioning of the press. Critics
complain that technology has "subverted journalistic discipline and the fragile sense of order offered by the mosaic of the newspaper page" (Fuller, 2010, p.110). Fuller, in particular, laments the rise of the digital optimists, who insist that "out of the hum of multitudes something like truth and perhaps even wisdom will inevitably emerge" (ibid, p.116).

For conservative critics, the chaos of the modern news ecosystem has destroyed the ‘mosaic’ of the news. Discipline and order are out the window. If we use van Dijk’s model to assess Fuller’s argument, we find the opinions towards modern journalism are negative, the attitude articulated is, broadly, reactionary and the professional ideology is the conservative form of American journalism’s professional ideology.

In response to Fuller’s conservatism, consider that an ideology is only as potent as the extent to which it "serves underlying epistemic, existential, and relational need" (Jost and Amodio, 2012, p.56) of practitioners. The history of American journalism has encompassed a number of different symbolic and economic standards to meet those needs. Values and practices have come and gone but the profession has survived as a whole. This suggests that the key values of American journalism- the ones that continue to define the in-group status of the profession- are the values and practices that meet the contemporary needs of journalists.

Critical discourse analysis of texts is necessary because of the potential for idealistic sounding values to disguise inherently cynical motives. The continuation of the existing order helps to maintain revenues and status (and, by extension, individuals’ salaries and status etc.) at the expense of challengers and marginal participants.

Interrogating the status quo is vital if the predominant mode of transmitting information is as Broersma states.

"They [journalists] tell them [audiences] ‘how it really is’ and make sense of a complicated and confusing social reality. They want them to transform an interpretation into truth they can act upon." (2010, p.31)

Such a state of affairs demands an interpretive framework that can explore the motivations behind the discourses found in news texts. Social reality requires a framework that recognises the centrality of the relations between actors and audience. Bourdieu’s field theory is exactly
such a model, giving us a means of understanding the interaction of symbolic and economic factors during the production of news.

2.3 Bourdieu’s Field Theory - a journalistic field

For Bourdieu, the role of the ‘social’ in human society is all-encompassing. Bourdieu’s “social world” (1985, p.723) is his formulation of human relations, and how they combine to constitute the world as we understand it. The way in which we exchange, produce, value and consume knowledge, determines the shape of the world:

...‘reality’,..., is social through and through and the most ‘natural’ classifications are based on characteristics which are not in the slightest respect natural and which are to a great extent the product of an arbitrary imposition. (1991, p.222)

The implication of Bourdieu’s social world is that categories of meaning and of knowledge, such as those produced by works of journalism, are artificial. ‘Natural’ seeming rules, codes, and categories do not arise from an external essence or truth. They are the outcome of human attempts to interpret the world through learned signifiers and subjective value judgements. As a result, we should be wary of what is natural-seeming or ‘common sense’ in a socially constructed reality, and we should interrogate the ideological assumptions that underpin it.

The ‘journalistic field’ examined in this thesis encompasses the people, practices, institutions and values that we recognise as American print journalism. It is the system of social relations, links of competition and cooperation between people and groups, that controls the production of newspaper journalism. This interplay of people and institutions constitutes the environment in which journalism “professionally reports and critically investigates social reality” (Broersma, 2010, p.25). Bourdieu’s work also extends beyond this, to the politics, psychology, and history (Calhoun Wacquant, 2002) that make up the culture industries.

Audiences assess the competing claims that emerge from the chaotic mixture of agents and relationships through their relation to shared historical and cultural knowledge. Then they assign these claims value according to how they conform to, or transform, preconceptions about
Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

They and the world. Whether the movie business, publishing, fine arts or television, these industries survive by reproducing or transforming commonly recognised meaning in societies.

Bourdieu developed the category of the ‘Field’ as a term to describe these semi-independent cultural domains, and as a label that conveys their structural similarity. A key point in Bourdieu’s analysis is that, in any field, success is determined by constant competition over two factors:

- **Symbolic, or social capital** is the intangible capital accrued through performing symbolic or socially valued activities or bestowed by societal institutions. News outlets generate social capital by producing work that garners audience approval, academic legitimacy and elite recognition. Journalism reproduces existing norms because these positions are proven to maintain or increase symbolic value. Introducing audiences to novel practices or values risks estranging readers and symbolically delegitimising the outlet.

- **Economic capital** is the material and financial wealth of the outlet. Everything from the illiquid assets (buildings, printing presses etc.) to the cash current accounts of the outlet falls into this category. Journalism requires money at every level to facilitate its physical reproduction and circulation, and to ensure the continued reproduction of those symbolic values and practices. This also includes the non-liquid capital investment in property, technological infrastructure, etc.

Of the two, symbolic capital is the more discrete and harder to measure. Concepts like credibility or trustworthiness are difficult to assess without extensive audience surveying. However, existing Pew Research studies of audience trust in news outlets provide a useful approximation of an outlet’s reputation. In a follow-up to their most recent report of cross-media trust, Pew’s Michael Bartel explained that ‘brand reputation’ heavily influenced positive audience responses. The effect was so pronounced that Bartel hypothesises that “trust or distrust may not actually stem from an individual’s recent exposure to news content”. Instead, it was likely that socialised reputation was the largest determinant of an individual’s attitude to an outlet “whether that comes from friends, family, other media or a past experience with it” (Bartel, M., 2014). Audience trust relies on a judgement made in light of what is known, or assumed, about an outlet.
Indeed, for Bourdieu, success in the field depends on the perception that the outlet is enacting or upgrading existing practices or standards in the field. In this respect, journalism is comparable with the movie industry. In order to operate, an outlet/studio must make enough copy/films aimed at audience expectations. Studio heads, producers, and marketing departments make strategic decisions about how to allocate symbolic and economic capital so as to create and secure more revenue and credibility.

Within a news organisation editors set news agendas, section heads assign particular reporters stories or beats, journalists decide which sources to talk to, the sales team find advertising clients and so on. We expect economic capital (revenues) to reward outlets with well-known journalists, and notable histories. However, revenues can also be directed to outlets with a reputation for ‘straight talk’ and other, less institutional, markers of symbolic value.

Indeed, there is a marked divergence between "culturally rich, but often economically starved, alternative or literary journalism (The Nation, Mother Jones, etc.)" and its antithesis, "culturally poor but economically rich market journalism (commercial television news)" (Benson, 2006, p.190). Organisations that balance, or are seen to balance their economic and cultural imperatives are those that we might call the ‘institutions’ of American print news. According to Benson, the outlets which form the heart of the American print sector (New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, etc) are outlets which could be said to have historically succeeded in this regard. They have been able to accumulate enough economic and social capital to be able to partly define and consolidate the values and practices that dominate American print journalism (Benson, ibid).

Bourdieu’s proposed model of audience-journalist relations is one that can explain this fluid form of supply-and-demand. It is a process mediated by "the correspondence between the space of the producer, and therefore of the products being offered, and the space of the consumer" (1993, p.45). With the field as a theoretical model, we can understand how this correspondence is achieved by journalists and outlets through what Bourdieu terms ‘positioning’.
2.3.1 Positions and Position-taking

At the level of the outlet, the dependent variables used to "position" themselves in the field are the economic/symbolic capital available to the organisation. Without economic capital, the outlet cannot physically circulate and employ labour. Without symbolic capital the outlet will have no means by which to stake a claim to social worth in the field- with no credibility or historic success to base its status on, outlets struggle to maintain, let alone expand, their audiences. Outlets are fundamentally dependent on these resources to sustain themselves and to grow (in normal circumstances).

The independent variables for an outlet are the practices and values which an outlet tries to operationalise through "position-taking". High-level decisions are made by, for example, an editorial committee on how best to cover an event and who is able to represent the outlet.

A significant advantage of field theory is that it acknowledges individual autonomy. Critical scholars have tended to look at news ownership models and the negative impact of over-representation of similar political viewpoints. While the government and external bodies do not directly determine the limits of journalistic output in America, press freedom in a market economy is contested by scholarship.

In her study focusing on British and European news, Doyle warned against the tendency of commercial journalism towards concentration (2002). Commercial forces, she said, encouraged conglomeration which had the potential to severely limit the variety of cultural and political values represented in the media (p.13). Homogeneity was a negative outcome for the political discourse of an increasingly diverse population. Likewise, Noam’s cross-platform study of American media ownership found evidence of increasing ownership concentration and outlined potential policy meant to address it (2009). However, he admitted that American courts had already ruled against "behavioral requirements of content diversity on private media" like the Fair and Balanced doctrine, a conclusion which seems to make the proposal of structuralist legal solutions to the problem rather moot.

The advantage of a critical theory like Bourdieu’s is the parity it grants social capital. The field "cannot be understood by looking only at external factors" (Bourdieu, 1998, p.39), and critique cannot rest solely on factors like ownership. The limits of discursive acceptability in
the field are just influenced by "implicit ‘rules’ or ‘principles of action’" (Benson, 2006, p.188) as by conglomerate structure, government censorship, or regulatory requirements. Individual positions and position-taking do exist in the field and participants are constantly reasserting discursive limits in the face of normative challenges.

Acts of individual journalism positioning are the "microcosm set within the macrocosm" (ibid). As outlets struggle to assert themselves, so too do individuals with micro-level struggles for economic gain (higher pay, better bonus etc.) and social standing (special status, public acclaim, etc.). Within the field, there is a great deal of scope for individual actors to affect the generation of capital and symbolic success. In their rhetorical choices, normative assertions, formal layout decisions and a multitude of identifiable markers, individual actions reproduce or challenge acceptable meaning.

The professional practice and norms that individual journalists develop in these workplace struggles are vital in the shaping of the field. The texts they produce are the actual sites of ongoing struggle over the limits of acceptability. It is vital to bear in mind Bourdieu’s assertion that "the literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces." (Bourdieu, 1993, p.30). Aesthetic, linguistic, moral, stylistic and formal boundaries are constantly defended, challenged or transformed in individual journalists’ position-taking. The implication is that professional ideology is always potentially in flux.

2.3.2 How Ideology Manifests In the Field

Print journalism is a field where ‘good practice’ and the ‘right values’ are not fixed. The constant reproduction and transformation of variables, of position and position-taking, characterises the formation of a field. From this struggle arises a dominant set of norms. Whatever they happen to be constitutes the "fundamental, axiomatic beliefs underlying the social representations" (van Dijk, 2011, p.193) that define the ideology of American print journalism.

Field theory acknowledges this socially determined structure when Bourdieu asserts that "the work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art" (1993, p.35). These factors are also at play in the
judgement of the value or merit of a work of journalism—formal and stylistic precedent, contemporary attitudes, academic discourse, legitimation by public institutions, public visibility and historical canon.

We can easily understand that a text’s value is generated by its reproduction of positively valued norms, so we must also accept that value is also defined by its relation to its opposite—to what it is not. If conflict “over the definition of the legitimate principles of division of the field” (1985, p.743) is essential, then both the orthodox and the unorthodox are vital determinants of normative value.

‘Good’ journalism and the journalist responsible are praised as such because consensus recognises their work as a product of the profession’s dominant values and practices, and these positive ideological qualities are emphasised.

‘Bad’ journalism is rejected for failing to meet these ideologically constructed standards. Critics emphasise the work and the author’s negative qualities, judge them to be unworthy or too destabilising to the self-image of the field. Positive qualities will be minimised so that a work can be ‘othered’ for the sake of protecting the field’s existing revenues and symbolic value.

However, this conservative tendency to preserve field participant’s capital is not immutable. New cultural norms attempt to claim symbolic legitimacy and are opposed by existing participants. American society’s understanding of sexuality, for example, has been an incredibly contentious topic which has been publicly challenged for decades by LGBTQ struggles. Unorthodox positions articulated in opposition to existing norms are derided and declared heretical (Bourdieu, 1993, p.83), often in terms of societal degradation or immorality. However, if these ideas survive long enough that the historical/cultural consensus finds them to be valuable to field participants, they are absorbed into the field’s vision of orthodox values (ibid, p.36).

Despite originating outside of pre-existing standards of journalism, objectivity became part of professional ideology because of its value to participants in the field. Through outlets’ and journalists’ economic and symbolic investment objectivity was transformed into ideological orthodoxy, as it generated greater revenues and prestige for those that adopted it.
2.3.3 Field theory as the basis for understanding competing discourses

Objectivity has survived to the present day because it has proved valuable to field participants. If, however, that is no longer the case, there should be evidence of a competing dominant discourse in news texts. This challenger would be articulated because its pragmatic value to capital accumulation is greater than the defence of objectivity.

Scandals are particularly useful in assessing dominant norms because the inciting incident is an explicit challenge to established norms. Capital concerns prompt participants to respond to perceived deviation from culturally acceptable norms. Journalists and outlets will position their response to a scandal in an economically and symbolically advantageous way.

Given the economic capital flight from commercial print journalism, this thesis suggests that a challenger discourse is most likely to be found in the articulation of intra-media rivalry. Print news (we/us/’good practice’) should position themselves in distinct opposition to TV news (they/ ’bad practice’). Criticism of industry rivals should aim to discredit them personally and their platform in the hopes of appropriating their capital.

Complicating matters is the fact that participants can also be said to be acting in their own self-interest when they use conservative normative defence. Responses to the Brian Williams scandal could encompass instances of a traditionally dominant discourse, commercially driven challenger discourse, and discourse that mixed the two within the same text. Van Dijk’s model accounts for contradictory attitudes and opinions, so long as they are deemed culturally acceptable by audiences and economically advantageous by outlets.

This potential variety of responses makes it vital to select a suitable methodology to analyse how these manifested in texts and to better qualitatively assess the state of print journalism ideology at the time of the scandal.
Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is concerned with "the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance". Dominance, as defined by van Dijk, is the "exercise of social power... that results in social inequality" (1993, p.249). CDA interrogates how social power is used in discourse, through a range of textual and meta-textual features.

According to O’Keeffe, media discourse is the "interactions that take place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written", which are "orientated to a non-present reader, listener or viewer" (2011, p.441). The ideological media discourse this thesis investigates is an interaction via newspapers (the platform). The discourse is broadcast to a reader. This thesis combines CDA with Bourdieu as the means to understand ideological motive better. Articles capture in a snapshot the strategies used in the field to gain, conserve or transform economic and social capital. In effect, each text functions as a ‘slice’ in time, representing the weight of ideological discourse in the field at this moment in time.

The analysis relies on Bourdieu’s assertion that "reality...is social" (1991, p.222). Journalism is produced, disseminated, and consumed through a series of social relations that help to constitute the lived experience of many people. Most people’s external reality is not wholly constructed by their consumption of news texts. They might rely more on radio, TV or the internet. However, newspapers are still an influential record and constitutive part of contemporary society. As such they deserve to be treated seriously.
The study of dominant discourses in the news and any resulting inequalities is a key concern of this thesis. For CDA, "success is measured by its effectiveness and relevance, that is, by its contribution to change" (van Dijk, 1993, p.253). CDA is used to identify the occurrence of particular ideological discourses and Bourdieu is applied to reflect critically on what this means for the state of journalistic ideology in American print news.

Doing so should yield analysis of the structuring values of commercial journalism and contribute to a wider discussion about the role of commercial journalism in society. Identifying and assessing any occurrence of problematic discourses in the texts will, it is hoped, demonstrate the relevance of this kind of analysis.

3.2 The Role of Social Cognition in CDA

Social cognition is an essential component of CDA. It is the process of a particular discourse being articulated in a text producing particular kinds of knowledge in audiences. Social cognition is the process that mediates our understanding of a text. Beyond the page, social cognition is the range of mental models and methods by which people make sense of knowledge being presented to them.

Imagine for a moment that you are an ‘average’ American watching a report from a journalist in Iraq during the war in 2003. You would intuitively understand that "Saddam" is Saddam Hussein, the former dictator, designated ‘enemy of freedom’ and formidable moustache-wearer.

This part regarding distinctive facial hair is not a joke. It demonstrates the variety of symbolic factors that form part of social cognition. Audiences associated Saddam’s physical appearance with certain news narratives since the 1990s. For people with the visual information retained in their memory, Saddam Hussein’s appearance was a crucial ‘model’ (van Dijk, 1993, p.258) for the internalisation of knowledge. It is vital to take seriously the idea that ‘common knowledge’ - like the appearance of a dictator - can be a part of a story. A news report which showed a portrait photo in the top left of the viewer’s screen (a generic standard in TV news, familiarity with which aids easy cognitive recall) would cause the recollection of a complex network of information regarding Saddam’s position and role in the conflict.
Social cognition is what allows us to understand how discourse is linked with social significance. Communicative acts are complex yet people share in a basic understanding of the makeup of the society they live in. People do not (regardless of their opinion of the individual) misinterpret the act of a President or Prime Minister addressing a crowd as something other than it appears. Analysis with CDA identifies the models that journalists use to orientate audiences toward specific significance, power, or social relations within the text.

Extra-textual elements are also social cognitive features. From the byline attribution (or lack thereof) to the types of image sourcing (in-house or agency), they can say a great deal about the status of the reporter and their outlet. Bourdieu is particularly useful here in drawing together CDA and social cognition. We, the audience, can recognise the reporter’s position in the mental landscape of the field through a variety of stated and unstated features. We can use these to interpret how their professional status and symbolic value relates to the discourses articulated in their writing.

A journalist’s position within the field modifies the range of possible ideologies, attitudes, and opinions that can be expressed. As an audience, we understand that a high-status opinion columnist has communicative freedoms that the unattributed sub-editor of a news desk does not. Recognising positioning for sources in texts is vital as well. Sources can also be revealing of a variety of discursive information. We can understand how the author relates to them and how society does, according to the source’s attribution or nomenclature (titles, honorifics, anonymity).

In a similar fashion, semantics can affect our understanding of subjects and events. The oft-abused "collateral damage" is the most famous military euphemism to have made its way into common usage. But more rhetorically subversive appeals to "we/our" are used as semantic tools to appeal to audiences. Who could possibly disagree when a politician opens their statement with "Everyone here is fully aware…"? To do so would surely be to suggest one’s own ignorance.

Hyperbole and metaphor also alter the relationship between the written word and our understanding of it. We unconsciously attribute their subjects with new and different significance (e.g. view more positively or negatively) according to the social cognition model by which we have interpreted them. For example, "titanic" is a particularly loaded adjective. It can suggest
great effort, Atlas-like strength and endurance. Or, it can suggest hubris, disaster, and wasted lives. In 2016 Boris Johnson described his desire to make Britain’s exit from the EU (Brexit) a "titanic success". He was quickly reminded in person and in print that the ship of that same name had tragically sunk (Bloom, 2016; Dathan, 2016; Elgot, 2016).

All of these textual strategies are indicative of key ideological underpinnings because they are deliberately chosen to emphasise or mitigate particular associations. Choices made by the author are legible signifiers of norms. We can ‘read’ the value-laden practices, organisational hierarchy, and other key variables of a text.

Thus, it is vital that we understand how these principles of textual organisation mediate the "formation of specific social representations" (van Dijk, 1993, p.259) and to go further. We must seek to understand them as embedded in society, as politically meaningful, and culturally potent. Without this wider understanding, we cannot grasp the "situations, contexts, institutions, groups and overall power relations" (ibid) that such structures enable.

### 3.3 What is relevant in a text?

As discussed, a text is a complex web of interpretive models and signifiers. How then are we to decide what is relevant to the analysis? Van Dijk suggests that we must reconstruct "the social and cognitive processes of their production" (1993, p.259). A good starting place is to examine the linguistic and technical means by which discursive dominance is built in a text. Consider the textual variables of discourse. They include:

- **Lexical or syntactic style** - word choice and sentence structure can preference certain individuals or values by virtue of their omission, or presence (e.g. attributing titles or rank).

- **Rhetorical figures** - Elements of ‘style’ designed for the express purpose of persuasion (e.g. repetition, alliteration, irony, and metaphor).

- **Semantic structures** - Symbolic language, jokes, phrases and culturally specific idioms which convey meaning beyond their lexical components (e.g. "herculean task", "unconstitutional")
• Turn-taking strategies - In print journalism: the chronological arrangement of quotes for clarity or the deliberate reorganisation for a specific effect (e.g. taking a quote out of context to discredit a source)

• Politeness phenomena - Forms of address or conventions of reference to individuals and organisations generally understood to be correct in formal situations (e.g. the use of surname when quoted in print)

(van Dijk, 1993, p.261)

Take, for example, the types of language used to establish which attitudes are considered ‘normal’. This can present audiences with the suggestion that the subject is ‘deviant’ from normative standards. Use of language of ‘transgression’ (e.g. "went beyond", "a step too far") creates a strong cognitive sense that the subject has deviated. This opens up space in which the dominant party can insert interpretations such as psychological diagnoses. Introducing doubt about the mental state of the subject casts a negative light on the individual and helps reinforce the existing field order.

In the writing of the piece, the author will probably create a dichotomy of positive and negative associations. Van Dijk outlines the following as key to the creation of negative sentiment in an audience:

(a) Argumentation: the negative evaluation follows from the facts.

(b) Rhetorical figures: hyperbolic enhancement of out-group negative actions and in-group positive actions; euphemisms, denials, understatements of in-group negative actions.

(c) Lexical style: choice of words that imply negative (or positive) evaluations.

(d) Story telling: narrative arrangement of events, especially as personally experienced; giving plausible details above negative features of the events.

(e) Structural emphasis of their negative actions, e.g. in headlines, leads, summaries, or other properties of text schemata (e.g. those of news reports), transactivity structures of sentence syntax (e.g. mentioning negative agents in prominent. topical position).

(f) Quoting credible witnesses, sources or experts, e.g. in news reports. (1993, p.264)
"Positive self-presentation" and "negative other-presentation" (ibid) are key indicators of discursive dominance, although they can vary in relative quantity and quality depending on the group or individual in question.

In our case, Brian Williams was a very senior news anchor, at the top of the profession, with the largest audience of any nightly news anchor in the country. The details of his actions and intentions were not fully known to commentators publishing as the scandal was breaking. They would probably have avoided making assertions which might be libellous. Criticism of him could be limited to his character, and to his conduct. Presenting him as an isolated figure, and not as symptomatic of wider deviant behaviour in the field was important. The inclusion or omission of other examples of similar deviation would have a qualitative impact on the nature of the discourse. The difference between presenting him as one of several ‘bad eggs’, or as a lone man at fault in a virtuous field is a meaningful one. The singling out of Williams as decontextualised deviant is a tactical decision made to bolster the defence of dominance. Beyond this, representations of key participants and interested parties are important in critical analysis, because "one way of enacting power is to control context" (ibid, p.260).

We can better understand the motivations for this kind of positioning strategy using a framework like a field. The following example serves to illustrate how to trace the socio-cognitive reasoning for an author to write an opinion piece attacking Brian Williams for fabrication:

- The journalist works in a profession with a normative expectation of ‘objective reporting’.
- Brian Williams’ actions challenged dominant normative values, as attested to by credible witnesses.
- Williams has no normative justification with which to defend himself.
- The journalist does not risk any capital by defending dominant norms.
- They stand to gain in capital and/or to degrade their competitor medium.

This is the model of a typical institutional newspaper journalist. Their self-image and the perceived status of the subject. Analysis could also be enhanced by engaging with departures from this standard. Embellishments and exaggerations of norms, or deviation from them, will be significant.
Determining if certain groups or individuals have been denied access or minimised is a key question. Access need not be denied for dominance to be established. Restricting context to an acceptable minimum and ‘cherry-picking’ quotes can provide the necessary semblance of balance, while effectively controlling it. In-group members are positioned in relation to the author, properly attributed, and sourced in texts as authorities. Out-group members are made ‘other’ by positioning them negatively, omitting positive context, or introducing inappropriate contextual details. These strategies of access control should follow similar principles to van Dijk’s ‘ideological square’ (1998, p.267):

1. Emphasize ingroup properties/actions
2. Emphasize outgroup properties/actions
3. Mitigate ingroup properties/actions
4. Mitigate outgroup properties/actions.

Establishing which parties the author identifies as the ‘out-group’ enables us to assess the most basic kind of ideological identification in a text. In this case, the out-group parties or individuals we expect to find are:

Brian Williams- As the individual ‘on trial’, his comments might be expected to be aired in his own defence. However doing so might create space for unwanted ambiguity by generating sympathy for Mr Williams. Newspaper journalists would probably wish to minimise this if possible.

Other Journalists charged with similar lapses in objectivity- Authors might hold up these individuals as examples to reinforce the dominant norm, or grant them access as ‘repentant sinners’ for the same purpose.

NBC, Brian Williams’ employer at the time- Intra-media rivalry could be present in the form of emphasis of condemnation by association with Brian Williams, or more covertly in the mitigation of their commercial success with the news anchor.
3.4 Selection Criteria and Practical Considerations

CDA is a qualitative research method which relies on the discursive interpretation of texts through close reading. This contrasts with methods of research which might use strict quantitative models, including lexical counts and the presentation of statistical findings.

The selection process started from the assumption that the number of texts used would be small. As posited in the theoretical framework, the ideological trendsetter outlets were selected from the handful of commercially significant and symbolically prominent organisations, with long-enough histories to have become part of the commonly understood media ‘establishment’.

Newspaper analysis was chosen as the field of study for several reasons. Firstly, newspapers are the most readily identifiable ‘establishment’ media platform, being the oldest and most venerable institutions. Second, the theoretical framework is more appropriate for an analysis of newspaper texts. Using written texts reduced the risk of losing key components of formal arrangement and textual signifiers of dominance compared to transcriptions of televised news.

A more mundane consideration for selection from print is the sheer number of texts produced in a given day, week or year. The range of outlets engaged in a continuous news-cycle generates a huge set of texts for us to consider, impossibly so given the scope of this particular project. Therefore, a set of criteria was established to narrow the range of texts for close reading to a manageable sample size.

Articles were from the three most popular newspaper outlets in America, as determined by national circulation, cross-compared with their online presence. Figures for this were readily available from the Pew Research Center Newspaper Factsheet (Online, accessed 05/12/2015). The results produced the following list of outlets:

- USA Today
- New York Times
- Washington Post

Suitable articles were selected from appropriate opinion subsections, to ensure that the texts
would have the necessary editorial and stylistic freedoms to engage with the normative implications of the case. Checking LexisNexis meta-data enabled this across all three cases.

Word count, in conjunction with the section specification, rendered one article of significant length from each outlet. Word count = page space = larger

### 3.5 Experimental Hypotheses

- The discourse defending objectivity will be more dominant than commercial criticism.
  
  - Scholarship suggests that the objectivity norm functions as a dominant normative position in American print media.

- The challenger discourse will be intra-media rivalry aimed at TV news, and NBC as a representative of the competitor medium.

  - Intra-media rivalry is a strong contender for the alternative ideological discourse. It will manifest in highlighting the shortcomings of NBC and implicating the outlet in the personal failings of Brian Williams. Identifying it requires an approach that recognises where institutional blame is clearly foregrounded, and also where individuals are emblematic of the failings of the institution.

- Authors will disguise intra-media rivalry with objectivity through discursive strategies.

  - Determining if, where, how, and why the intra-media rivalry is conjoined with normative defence would all be interesting points of analysis.
Chapter 4

Close Reading

At the time of the scandal, Rem Rieder (fig. 1) was USA Today’s dedicated media columnist and ‘editor at large’. He began his career working at metropolitan newspapers in Florida, Washington DC and Milwaukee. He was, for 22 years, editor and senior vice president at American Journalism Review.

David Brooks (fig. 2) has been a senior op-ed columnist at the New York Times since 2003. His work in journalism has included various posts in the Wall Street Journal, and the conservative magazine the Weekly Standard. He has also held teaching and honorary positions with several universities.

Kathleen Parker (fig. 3) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist whose writing has been nationally syndicated since the 1990s, and published by the Washington Post since 2006. She has contributed articles to popular magazine titles and has published non-fiction work.

Both Brooks and Rieder’s articles were published on the 10th of February 2015, five days after the interview with witnesses that disproved Williams’ account of events. Parker was published on February 11th, following news of Williams’ suspension.

4.1 USA Today

Rem Rieder’s opinion article begins with a robust defence of the dominant discourse. A glance at the opening paragraphs might suggest that the article is entirely conservative in its sentiment. What follows in the text, however, indicates that the elements of classical professional
ideology are ‘front-loaded’. Arranging them close to the opening in very forceful terms, so as to balance the commercially focused discourse later in the text.

What is immediately clear when beginning this article is the forcefulness of the negative sentiment of the piece’s headline. The article opens strongly in defence of the dominant norm, with lexical violence:

"Credibility key to Williams’ job; Tall tales, in any venue, a career killer" (Headline, Appendix fig.1)

Van Dijk’s schematic of negative sentiment suggests that the arrangement of structural components is significant. Prominence and visibility offer straightforward enhancement of sentiment. In this case, it is clearly negatively applied to Brian Williams. The headline conjoins the initial statement with the violence of the following clause: "Tall tales...a career killer".

The author draws a clear connection for audiences between the two statements with a mental model that bridges the semicolon. The logic is simultaneously clear and euphemistically disguised by the lexis and the separate clauses. "Tall tales" is lexically and rhetorically all-but calling Williams a liar.

The subtitle line which follows is a similarly balanced mix of emphatic critique and rhetorical disguise. A statement of fact that sets the scene, drawing the reader in with the apparent authority and confidence of the author beginning in medias res:

"It’s the critical question in the Brian Williams affair." (1; fig.1)

Rhetorical and lexical choices in the headline, sub and opening paragraphs maximise the ‘common sense’, universal-seeming, quality of the normative position. This positioning strategy dominates the opening and conforms with traditional American news values. This norm foregrounds the content the author deems to have the best capital return in the opening, as it is the part likely to be read by most people.

The rhetorical construction is forceful but also enticing- ‘what is the question?’, wonders the reader. It prompts the audience to accept the author’s assertion of experience, qualification
or credibility. The journalist is in a powerful position in the field to be making this claim, supported by their byline attribution as a media correspondent in a major national newspaper.

By articulating this position of authority through argumentation (‘if X, then Y’) Rieder constructs a seemingly benign cause-and-effect in the first two body paragraphs.

Is wildly exaggerating your exploits – or lying about them – on late-night TV interviews and other venues a side issue? Or does it go directly to the heart of the role of the U.S.’ most-watched television news anchor? (2; fig.1)

The first question is addressing an audience, but the "your" is clearly meant to negatively implicate Brian Williams as the referent. Here the argument becomes much bolder than the headline’s innuendo suggested, moving from exaggeration to deceit in the space of a parenthetical enhancement.

The answer implied by the asking is clearly no. Following it up is a second question which marks the beginning of the story-telling function that van Dijk alluded to (1993, p.264): "Or does it go directly to the heart…?". While not a neat narrative arc, it nonetheless functions as storytelling. Identifying Williams with his professional reputation as the top national newsman the author brings to mind familiar cognitive models of other falls from grace. The unfolding ‘script’ is populated with characters like O.J. Simpson, whom Rieder uses as an archetype to illustrate hubris and downfall on the national stage.

Indeed, the author determines to resolve the preceding argumentation by hinting at the narrative they see playing: "Because if the answer is the latter, it means there’s no way Williams can ride this out. He is gone." (3; fig.1)

The rhetorical balance is deliberately unequal: the dominant norm is invoked here by its purposeful omission. The construction of the argument relies on a commonly understood mental model that privileges the idea that it ‘does go directly to the heart’ of the matter. The "if" here is really just a hedge used to demonstrate a kind of ‘fairness’ on the author’s part.

Opinions follow from attitudes, which follow from ideology. The author has constructed an argument that relies on an attitude derived from professional ideology: Brian Williams’ behaviour constituted bad practice because it contravened the group-forming norm of objectivity.
Ergo, he deserves to be punished. To rhetorically reinforce this point the author constructs an accumulation of defences of Brian Williams. The sourcing, authority, and positioning vis-à-vis the author helps inform us about the sentiment being generated and the ideological content of the discourse.

Two sources are presented here in ascending order of field-capital value. Both of which function as a means to artificially widen the debate for the sake of appearing balanced, before a turn that dramatically reverses the direction of discursive travel.

Both are from within the field of journalism. We might expect these two sources to defend the dominant discourse as strongly as the author but both suggest that Brian Williams should not lose his job as a result of the scandal.

The first is Andrew Tyndall, owner of a network news analysis website. We can presume he is deemed of lower socio-economic capital than the author as his comment is third-hand, so the USA Today writer did not speak to Tyndall himself. He is also identified as a "monitor" rather than as a journalist colleague.

"[Tyndall] told my colleague Roger Yu: ‘Reasons [sic] when they fire journalists are for journalistic reasons. This doesn’t rise to the level.’" (4; fig.1)

Rising in field stature, the second source is a New York Times media columnist of higher economic and social position than both the USA Today author and Tyndall. Naming David Carr’s publication makes his credibility implicit to readers, even to those unfamiliar with his name.

According to Carr "[Williams] transgressions were not a fundamental part of his primary responsibilities" (5; fig.1)

Carr and Tyndall argue separately that Williams’ actions do not amount to much as far as professional misconduct goes. These assertions fundamentally challenge the narrative which the article’s author has established up to this point. Interpreting them as a variation of the mitigation of the ideological square proposed by van Dijk makes more sense. Rieder uses them to introduce the possibility of circumstances exonerating Williams. He goes on to develop a sense of opposition to his own position with these defences that rise in public prominence. The rhetorical effect he is trying to generate is the brutal simplicity of undercutting it. The sentence
is set alone in a new paragraph. It looks harsh, and is designed for maximum visual impact on the reader.

"I couldn’t disagree more" (6; fig.1)

This is the first jab in a one-two counter-attack. With the reader off balance, the author steps in to assert the normative position. The attitude is controlled by the dominant ideology in the field. This attitude controls an opinion in favour of sustaining the dominant norm’s reproduction: "Credibility is the fundamental responsibility of the TV anchor" (7; fig.1).

What is interesting to note here is that the rhetorical turn ("I couldn’t disagree more") also marks an unexpected discursive turn. The normative discourse begins to exhibit elements of intra-media criticism, explicit and implicit. Beyond this point, the sense of the article is one of normative complacency. The discourse exhibits a sense that the field-specific attitudes and opinions will prevail. The remaining word count moves towards more self-serving criticism of rival outlets and platforms. While not entirely commercial criticism, where the normative defence recurs, it does so only occasionally. The specific effect is to create instances of mixed discourse: "While network news in the digital era is hardly what it was in the glory days, it’s not nothing" (7: fig.1)

This is print media having its cake and eating it, so to speak. In this sentence Rieder can assert a normative point and a crassly commercial point, winking at the economic downturn of a rival media platform.

The following paragraph is similarly mixed. Though it tends towards the dominant discourse on balance, it includes a sentence to reminds readers that his outlet’s commercial judgement and Brian Williams’ failures are linked:

"They go to the scene of big news, as Williams has: combat zones, natural disasters.

And Williams also is the managing editor of NBC News." (8; fig.1)

This kind of abrupt insertion of intra-media rivalry is not precisely what was envisaged when a mixed discourse was proposed. The bluntness is itself an interesting point but there are more subtle examples in the article.
In the next paragraph, the article introduces the vagaries of the internet news age with its "constant pounding" (9; fig.1) of Brian Williams internet memes. The rhetoric here is a kind of sympathetic nostalgia for a more polite era embodied by Cronkite when news-men were imbued with gravitas. The collection of mental models at play in this particular segment are all targeting Williams and NBC. Mention of "O.J. [Simpson] during the chase" links Williams personally with a controversially exonerated murder suspect, and is a veiled criticism of the kind of media circus that came to define cable news in its (debatable) "glory days".

Similarly, Walter Cronkite is a powerful name to conjure with. Cronkite is perhaps the only universally admired journalist in the history of TV news. He is held as a kind of patrician touchstone by older journalists and audiences. As Rieder writes:

"It’s hard to imagine Walter Cronkite in similar straits – or maybe Uncle Walter was just lucky he toiled in the harsh, primitive days before Twitter" (9; fig.1)

In fact, Cronkite’s own career heyday predates the explosion of cable news, and so his invocation here betrays the intra-media criticism at play. The lexical choice is folksy and humorous, touching on sympathetic. Yet, the criticism in this seemingly benign comment is of Williams and his medium.

Rieder returns the focus more directly to Williams’ travails- "things continue to look bleak for Williams" (11; fig.1). The audience is presented with more evidence of a commercially loaded discourse: NBC is investigating "although it hasn’t been very specific about just what it is looking into" (ibid); Williams departure from the anchor spot is "temporary"; and finally, "New questions continue to be raised about other Williams anecdotes".

As the author states "It’s the classic death of a thousand cuts" (ibid). Here, though, the real punishment is being meted out on behalf of social and economic capital- Rieder’s in USA Today. Williams’ actions are deviant from the field’s norms, true, but the mixed discourse on display betrays the commercial self-interest at play in the criticism of a rival journalist and a competitor medium.
4.2 New York Times

David Brooks’ New York Times op-ed column response to the Brian Williams affair was published under the grandiloquent headline “The Act of Rigorous Forgiveness”. The piece is a mixture of normative discourse making moral pronouncements and a discourse of cod psychology diagnosing pathological behaviour. It is devoid of any discourse of commercial criticism of NBC. Instead, the sole reference to Williams’ broadcaster colours the piece’s discursive purpose as cynically defensive of personal field capital, rather than intra-media rivalry.

The headline itself establishes the register of the piece as being in the tradition of sermonising. The mental model relies on readers recognising the tone of Brooks’ piece conforming to American Christian moral standards. Forgiveness is, in the abstract, a familiar virtue. Lying is, traditionally, an absolute vice. Rigour is what Brooks is prescribing to achieve absolution from this sin. Penitence must be arduous and meticulous or else it means nothing.

It is potentially surprising to the reader when Brooks opens the body of the story with an admonition of Williams and also his critics: "There’s something sad in Brian Williams’s need to puff up his Iraq adventures and something barbaric in the public response" (1; Fig.2).

This is field position-taking at its most opportunistic. Its ideological role conforms with Anderson’s model of commercial journalism’s ideal discourse. It tries to occupy a mediating role between the powerful and the powerless, between the story and news-consumers. Brooks is establishing his journalistic authority and positioning himself with the normative discourse so as to scold the ‘practitioner gone awry’ (Williams) and the public’s too-hasty condemnation.

Brooks diagnoses Williams’ failings in the following paragraph by means of a series of statements designed to pathologise his behaviour:

The sad part is the reminder that no matter how high you go in life and no matter how many accolades you win, it’s never enough. The desire for even more admiration races ahead. Career success never really satisfies. Public love always leaves you hungry. Even very famous people can do self-destructive things in an attempt to seem just a little cooler. (2; fig.2)
Five sentences, five pop-psychology statements, five unsubstantiated claims. The reader knows this segment relates to Williams because the tag word "sad" relates back to the opening line ("There’s something sad...”). Psychological explanations such as these are often used discursively to diminish the public perception of the person in question or to diminish their professional responsibility so as to excuse their behaviour.

In doing so here, Brooks’ position-taking is still in operation. The discourse positions him above this kind of behaviour. There is no instance of a collective ‘we’ or a confessional ‘even I’. Ideologically Brooks externalises Williams’ behaviour, emphasising his out-group status even as he seems to act benevolently.

In almost exactly the same mode of ideologically motivated moral superiority, Brooks makes his critique of the public and externalises their behaviour. Though he introduces a solitary ‘we’ into proceedings here, the rhetorical arrangement of the paragraph designates Brooks as the patrician guardian of decorum and the contemporary public square as unconscionably brutish.

The barbaric part is the way we respond to scandal these days. When somebody violates a public trust, we try to purge and ostracize him. A sort of coliseum culture takes over, leaving no place for mercy. By now, the script is familiar: Some famous person does something wrong. The Internet, the most impersonal of mediums, erupts with contempt and mockery. The offender issues a paltry half-apology, which only inflames the public more. The pounding cry for resignation builds until capitulation comes. Public passion is spent and the spotlight moves on. (3; fig.2)

The narrativisation of position-taking in this paragraph reinforces the sense that the discourse identifies as a moral authority. Negative behaviour occurs outside of the etiquette of the professional space, in the crass "coliseum”.

Brooks’ discursive sentiment is still less hostile to the out-group (strategy 1 of the ideological square) than Rieder’s in USA Today. In that piece, Rieder mixed normative and commercial condemnation. Here, Brooks establishes a narrative of normative and personal failure that might be redeemed. It still functions as an effective rejection of Williams but the mental models it utilises strike a different, and more ‘enlightened’, critique. It serves to demonstrate both
Brooks’ and his outlet’s certainty in their ideological purity through its position-taking strategies.

This is especially evident in the paragraph which begins “I’ve only spoken with Williams a few times, and can’t really speak about the man (though I often appear on NBC News’s “Meet the Press”)” (4; fig.2). The overt positioning of Brooks in relation to Williams in the first half is a distancing move: One assuring readers of Brooks’ lack of contamination and to hedge against the certainty of the pathologising up to this point.

If readers consider this statement for longer than it takes to breeze through it, they might stop to wonder. If Brooks “can’t really speak about the man”, how then can he justify pronouncing on Williams’ character so stridently in the previous paragraphs? The statement contained in parentheses ("though I often...") is perhaps the most revealing in the entire piece. Consider it in relation to the framework of field positioning and an understanding of professional ideology that is more ethically ‘flexible’ than the normative standard. In the midst of a piece that attempts to criticise Williams as a bad practitioner and extend a benevolent hand to this poor sinner, Brooks reveals his own personal-professional reasons for not wishing to condemn Williams in the strongest normative terms.

It could charitably be interpreted as a barely-there disclaimer of a conflict of interest or a peculiarly insipid boast. However, in the context of the ideological discourse being constructed by Brooks, it is the reddest of flags. Anyone reading this piece should spot Brooks discourse of absolution serving to protect his own access to profile-raising tv spots. So, it is not surprising that Brooks follows with his strongest assertion of the necessity of mercy.

"The civic fabric would be stronger if, instead of trying to sever relationships with those who have done wrong, we tried to repair them, if we tried forgiveness instead of exiling” (Idem)

To bolster his point Brooks delegates the heavy lifting to the cognitive models already in operation. He introduces several eminent moral philosophers. From the widely known historical figures- "Hannah Arendt and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King J.” (5; fig.2)- to the contemporary and more niche- "Jeffrie Murphy and L. Gregory Jones" (Ibid). These sources are presented as
unimpeachable intellectual and moral foundations whose prestige Brooks can handily borrow for his own purposes.

This marks the beginning of a narrative of argumentation to establish Brooks’ model of “rigorous forgiveness” (ibid). The discourse borrows heavily from traditions of liberal Christian moral philosophy American audiences will recognise. A healthy dose of universal human frailty, mixed with ‘love the sinner, hate the sin’. Williams’ sin is vanity, his absolution possible only by "extreme self-abasement" (10; fig.2).

A normative discourse is still woven throughout. Take when Brooks invokes the field’s public expectations, and the defence of its ideological purity: "hard questions have to be asked so that in forgiving we don’t lower our standards" (11; fig.2).

The high-register rhetoric of moral philosophy only stretches so far however and the limits of Brooks’ moral narrative is discursively revealing. After having laid out his plan to merely repair the fabric of society, Brooks summarises weakly, and with an appeal to a professional authority rather than a moral one:

I guess I think Brian Williams shouldn’t have to resign, for the reason David Carr emphasized in The Times: Williams’s transgressions were not part of his primary job responsibilities. And because I think good people are stronger when given second chances. (14; fig.2)

After establishing the moral basis for his critique of Williams’ character, Brooks more or less abandons it to excuse him in relativistic professional terms. Williams’ work apparently does not encompass a responsibility to the truth at all times, including as a celebrity talk show guest. The normative discourse is revealed to be illusory. It exhibits the outward appearance of upholding the field’s values. It does so to further the covert discourse excusing NBC and Brian Williams and to position the author advantageously. Doing so enables Brooks to protect the economic and social capital to yet be gained from his existing relationship with NBC as a pundit.
4.3 Washington Post

"Why did he do it?" asks the headline of Kathleen Parker’s editorial for the Washington Post. Readers hoping for a straightforward answer or a polemic might have been disappointed. What Parker provides is a mixed discourse responding to the complexities of normative expectations and recognising the difficulty of balancing professional/commercial realities.

The opening line establishes the in-two-minds discursive tone with a sense of pessimism not found in other reactions to the story. “These are tough times for NBC’s Brian Williams - and tougher times for journalism” (1; fig.3). The discourse advanced here seems to minimise Williams’ deviation but only in the context of challenges to the press establishment. Parker identifies Williams and NBC as the out-group and introduces the commercial criticism that will appear later. The effect is to elicit sympathy for both parties but to privilege the press over Williams.

The establishing paragraphs lay out the details of the case in a balanced, rhetorically plain manner.

The NBC newsman was suspended Tuesday night for six months amid charges that he misremembered or conflated wartime incidents he reported on from Iraq and Israel. He has also come under scrutiny for possible conflations in reporting from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. (2; fig.3)

The register is straight-forward but it does conform to the mixed technocratic/vernacular quality that was proposed by Anderson. Typically, institutions and governments "come under scrutiny", and "misremembered" is rhetorically euphemistic. However, the lexis is generally even-handed, the storytelling quality restrained. The structural arrangement here includes other stories from Williams that were being investigated but doesn’t go into detail until later.

As in the other paragraphs, Parker uses a lexis and register to position herself as relatively down-to-earth. The effectiveness of this position-taking is rather mixed when Parker reaches for a slang term and incorrectly uses it:
Williams told stories that, among other things, misrepresented his proximity to danger or death. Some have called his reportage "humble-bragging," trying to enhance his reputation by focusing on supposed duress. (3; fig.3)

It is unclear who exactly levelled these allegations of humble-bragging against Williams. Moreover, the lack of sourcing contributes to the sense that Parker is using an informal, unremarkable style to disguise a more critical discourse.

Next, the unsourced comments grow to a chorus of unverifiable voices criticising Williams in place of Parker.

Others saw Williams’s false reports as outright lies for self-aggrandizement, while still others conceded that sometimes stories change in the retelling. Over time, don’t we all conflate incidents and mess up details to some degree? (4; fig.3)

The rhetorical question in the final sentence is a humanising touch. Introducing an element of reasonable doubt to the discourse alleviates the implied normative certainty, to make the following reversal more effective.

In a formal news report, we might comment that this article had buried the lead up to this point. Yet, it isn’t until the fifth paragraph that the essential point of argumentation is raised: "...one persistent thought nags like a rude kid yanking on your coat sleeve: ‘Hey, lady, that guy’s a 10-million-buck newsman; he ain’t supposed to get the facts mixed up!’" (5; fig.3).

Finally, Parker voices the point that has been implied throughout up to this moment. The rhetorical accumulation of charges- "some have said", "others saw" and so on- have built to the point where Parker levels a key discursive assertion. Once again the author decides to use another’s voice to make her point, this time a fully fictional simile rather than a succession of innuendos.

This imaginary "rude kid" is ideologically significant in the sense that the simile suggests very clearly that Williams’ actions are not excusable. The matter is so clear that even a child could understand his professional failure. The mental model constructed in the simile attempts to
connect this normative discourse with ideas of innocence, folksy Frank Capra-esque precociousness: The informality in speech ("Hey, lady", "that guy’s", "10-million-buck", "he ain’t"), the vivid, visual quality of this ideologically savvy urchin "yanking on your coat sleeve".

Having laid out the key details and fed them into a relatable, if trite, metaphorical line of argumentation, Parker arrives at her key point. Readers skimming the story could leave after the preceding paragraph and it would have fulfilled the necessary ideological assertions to qualify as normative discourse.

The re-use of the term "misremember" (6; fig.3) here is significant as it functions once again as ideologically significant innuendo. Paragraph 6, 7, and 8 consists of versions of the central story of the Brian Williams case. The helicopter-under-fire report that he had "misremembered". In each case, Parker establishes the differentiating quality and then subverts it simply and effectively to reinforce the normative discourse being established.

"Williams said that the Army Chinook he was riding in was forced down by a rocket-propelled grenade - except that his helicopter wasn’t the one that was hit." (6; fig.3)

"reported on MSNBC that he was flying at about 1,500 feet and could see two rockets launched from about six miles away." (7; fig.3)

"he told Comedy Central’s Jon Stewart that rockets passed 1,500 feet below his helicopter. Then in 2007, he told an audience at Fairfield University that the rockets sailed just beneath him." (8; fig.3)

Nonetheless, Parker allows an element of mitigation to creep back in at this point. After examining these conflicting accounts, she questions the motivation behind the discrepancy: malice, or recollection clouded by the fog of war? "Whether one is hit or not, surely the terror of flying where rockets are near can magnify and distort events" (9; fig.3)

The most revealing question in the article is the one she asks now: "Is an anchor always an anchor, or does Brian Williams get to be just Brian on occasion?" (10; fig.3). The discourse up to this point has been dominated with interjections inserted to make its normative reassertion
more effective. This question, however, gets to the heart of the ambiguity surrounding a case like this. The link between Brian Williams’ professional responsibilities and his life outside of work is important. However, it is a question Parker can’t definitively answer here.

This ambiguity eventually overcomes Parker’s attempts to hold Williams to normative standards. She resorts to pathologising Williams and radically altering the emphasis of the discourse. From this point Parker acknowledges the incomprehensibility of the situation: It is hard to imagine why Williams would falsely report events from his perch in one of broadcast journalism’s most coveted jobs in exchange for slightly louder applause.

Pure ego? Extravagant insecurity? The loss of perspective that often accompanies wealth and celebrity? Were these retellings merely overembellished [sic] anecdotes or evidence of something more pathological in nature? Williams and his therapist will have to soldier through that one.(12-14; fig.3)

The inclusion in the text of Williams’ now-contested account of seeing a body during his reporting on Hurricane Katrina is left open in this section. This unresolved point is significant, in spite of its incongruity. Rhetorically, it relies on its juxtaposition with Parker’s pathologising of Williams. The implication is that it is lurid evidence of Williams’ unsound mind.

When Parker expresses sympathy for Williams in paragraph 16, she does so to simultaneously humanise him and establish the conclusion of this discourse of pathological behaviour: "I’m torn between feeling sorry for Williams and wanting to see him step aside out of respect for what remains of journalistic principle"

However, this discourse of mental fragility does not parse as fundamentally different from professional or moral norms. We have instead a psychological norm. Both are discursively built to demonstrate that Williams is ‘other’ than expected, and consequently is deviant in the field.

The discourse is firmly returned to the professional normative framework when Parker comes to her conclusion:

It isn’t only that news delivery has become more slanted as partisanship displaces objectivity but that high-profile individuals and institutions have squandered trust
in pursuit of something other than truth. (18; fig.3)

The dominant ideological model is reasserted. Credibility is rewarded with trust. Trust is re-
warded with economic and social capital. The position-taking sting in the tail is a bonus. The
implicit criticism is that Williams represents his medium (TV "news delivery") and its partici-
pants ("high-profile individuals and institutions").

Parker’s discourse argumentation here is commercial and normative mixed. Those who have
brought the profession into disrepute are acknowledged as participants. Their medium (specif-
ically TV news) is "more slanted" though, more guilty of straying from objectivity. Parker can
ignore the travails of print journalism here because she can assert that TV news is worse. Her
counterparts in the networks unable to see how far they stray from the norms established by
their virtuous print competitors.
Chapter 5

Discussion of Findings

Close reading with CDA revealed a variety of ideological markers and discursive strategies. The dominant field discourse (objectivity, public duty etc.) was present but so too were intra-media rivalry and self-interest. Some of the most rhetorically forceful elements of the texts were deployed in defence of dominant norms but they were not as frequent or strong as we might have expected.

The first hypothesised feature of the texts was that discourse defending objectivity will be made more rhetorically forceful than commercial criticism. The texts did demonstrate that normative defence provides significant positioning and position-taking value to the authors and their outlets. We can find evidence of this controlling ideology in Rieder, Brooks, and Parker’s work. We can find it articulated in some of the most forceful rhetorical strategies. This suggests that capital in the field is, in part, still strongly directed to outlets’ outward rhetorical adherence to dominant norms.

An interesting rhetorical feature of normative defence across all the texts was the use of various registers. Rieder (fig.1) tended towards a rhetorical mixture of innuendo and authority. Brooks’ (fig.2) deployed informal sermonising, disguising quite weak moral criticism. Parker’s (fig.3) was perhaps the most varied. She demonstrated balanced reporting in the opening then contrasted it with analysis that featured hints of empathy that were constantly undercut by rhetorical questions.

Take Parker’s “Is an anchor always an anchor, or does Brian Williams get to be just Brian on occasion?” (10; fig.3) question. With van Dijk’s model of ideological control we can break down
Chapter 5. Discussion of Findings

a line like this into its component parts:

- Opinion(s)- An anchor is always an anchor, Brian Williams should always be ‘on’.
- Attitude- Trust is founded on objectivity in all public statements.
- Ideology- Journalistic professionalism.

The construction superficially suggests empathy but rhetorically asserts that the implicit answers (yes, and no) should be self-evident. These ideologically loaded chunks of ‘common sense’ in defence of dominant attitudes were found throughout the texts in a variety of formulation. For example in the first line of Rieder’s text: “It’s the critical question of the Brian Williams affair.” (1; fig.1)

Is it though? The audience is certainly led to believe so. The rhetorical weight stems from the simplicity, the clear authoritative voice, and the fact that they have no reason to doubt Rieder yet as these are the opening lines.

The presence of these authority markers seemed to confirm the linguistic unity proposed by Anderson (2006, p.44). The ‘language of journalism’ typical to American commercial media could be varied in style as long as it was positioned as both familiar (to aid easy cognition) and authoritative (to give the appearance of expertise).

The second hypothesised feature was a discourse of intra-media commercial criticism that was present in Rieder and Parker’s texts. Its absence from Brooks’ text was notable for reasons that require some unpacking.

Demonstrating the presence of intra-media rivalry required identification of criticisms of NBC as a field participant and capital rival of the author and their outlet. Criticism could include openly negative comment on organisational fault (macro) and more implicit attitude/opinion tracing. For example, it also included positioning deviant behaviour by Williams as negatively reflecting on NBC (personal-professional).

Rieder provided perhaps the most comprehensive rhetorical evidence of macro commercial rivalry (12-15; fig.1), situated in the back-end of the text, following the conventional normative defence. The article combines a general rhetorical disdain for cable news as a rival medium
(innuendo, nostalgic invocation of the ghost of Walter Cronkite etc.) with specific criticism of Williams as a network executive. For example, "NBC News President Deborah Turness has had a stormy reign, indeed. Now this" (ibid):

- **Opinion**- NBC’s executive team has plenty scandals to deal with already.
- **Attitude**- Schadenfreude. NBC is a competitor and as such deprives Rieder’s outlet of potential capital.
- **Ideology**- Intra-media rivalry.

Given American newspapers’ inverted-pyramid style paradigm, it is reasonable to suggest that Rieder wished to emphasise a normative criticism to those skimming the article. American audiences’ familiarity with this arrangement would help communicate the normative defence. The front-loading of this discourse seems to confirm this at first glance but considering the extent of the commercial criticism in the latter half, this is ambiguous.

A distinct possibility is that Rieder uses the dominant discourse in the opening to score easy points with his audience. With his position and that of his outlet consolidated, he is free to articulate a more risky discourse in the second half.

It was an interesting stylistic decision to contrast with Parker, whose text tended towards substantial commercial criticism mixed with pathologising Williams. Parker’s opens her article by establishing a cognitive model of Williams as closely linked with his broadcaster, with "...tough times for NBC’s Brian Williams" (1; fig.3).

Parker posed rhetorical questions that queried motive and mental state- “The loss of perspective that often accompanies wealth and celebrity?” (13; fig.3)- and cognitively generated a model of codependence between a damaged individual and their outlet. Parker also used the same rhetorical strategy to reintroduce normative standards that Williams had failed to live up.

David Brooks’ relationship to a discourse of intra-media rivalry is potentially the most complex. The major rhetorical thread of Brooks’ text establishes a historical/cultural narrative of sin and forgiveness in which Williams is the main character: a flawed but redeemable figure. Because of this, the text is the most morally lenient, the least normatively condemnatory.
Thus, it is particularly interesting when Brooks states "I’ve only spoken with Williams a few times, and can’t really speak about the man (though I often appear on NBC News’s ‘Meet the Press’)" (4; fig.2). He opens clear cognitive space for the audience to attribute it to opinions and attitudes governed by self-interest. Maybe he’s trying to establish his authority, admitting to little personal contact with Brian Williams but insider knowledge nonetheless.

However, rather than authorise his position and rhetoric, the admission serves to colour the entirety of the piece as subject to a substantial conflict of interest- "I can’t speak with authority (but did you know I’m on NBC all the time?)". If Brooks considers his insider knowledge to be such that he has authority then it is not unreasonable to infer that there might be a considerable conflict of interest in him absolving Brian Williams. Brooks seems to be positioning himself to keep favourable economic and cultural capital ties with NBC.

Brooks’ piece is also the least condemnatory in part because his position is the most secure. He was, at the time, a senior op-ed columnist at the New York Times, a published author, and a middle-aged white male in a field with a less-than-stellar record on gender imbalance. The normative defence should have been the most straightforward discursive choice in the world. An esteemed conservative at a press institution defends a publicly valued norm which it bases its mass appeal and authority on. Normative virtue and commercial sniping are less valuable to him personally than the exposure and capital to be gained with NBC TV spots.

A mixed discourse was proposed as a third hypothesis because it represents a useful way to think about self-interest in a field. Given the present state of commercial funding, perhaps contemporary symbolic norms conflict with maximising economic capital. It seems likely that pure self-promotion is beyond the present discursive limits of the field but mixed discourse co-opts the cultural legitimacy of objectivity to disguise intra-media rivalry.

On a basic level, both Parker and Rieder attempt to position themselves and their outlet to receive a greater share of capital rewarding normative defence whilst highlighting and denigrating their commercial rivals. Both Parker and Rieder are further from the locus of capital flows than Brooks but for different reasons and at different levels: Parker as a female journalist (personal), and Rieder as a tabloid journalist (institutional).
Indeed, given the variety of rhetorical markers of self-interest it seems an ideal moment to re-examine the ideological square and demonstrate how intra-media rivalry could be represented on the four corners:

1. Emphasise in-group good: Not identifiable in the texts.

2. Emphasise out-group bad: Parker’s pathologising of Williams’ and linking him to NBC.


4. Mitigate out-group good: Rieder’s admission of NBC’s success, but in light of current failings.

We might expect the first to manifest in self-aggrandisement and statements complementing the in-group. Its absence is an interesting feature of the discourses present in the texts and could be attributed to the value of public adherence to a public service ethos. Still, there remains the potential for normative values to be articulated in a consciously or unconsciously cynical fashion.

We can recognise something like cynicism at play in the texts in light of Bourdieu’s contributions to the theoretical model. The field model of a profession like journalism is inherently unstable. In order to differentiate itself, to distinguish itself, and to retain such autonomy as it has, the field must be constantly in a state of struggle. The decision to articulate a normative defence of truth in the face of untruth can be seen as the primary form of struggle undertaken here—whether condemning deviation forcefully as Rieder does, dismissing Williams from public life with a superior tone as Brooks does, or restating ‘common sense’ rhetorically as Parker does.

It is not contradictory to say that journalists can propose a normative defence both for idealistic and cynical reasons. The pragmatic aspect of this ideological defence emerges if we consider that the normative defence discourse contributes to both accruing social/economic capital and keeping the field independent.

What the prevalence of normative discourse in the texts seems to demonstrate is the tension inherent in American journalism. Commercial journalists must demonstrate to their sources of social/economic capital (audiences, advertisers, regulators, etc.) that they (the journalists and
Chapter 5. Discussion of Findings

their outlets), are responsible and worth (re)investing in. The field struggle for journalists to remain independent is really the struggle to appeal to audiences upon which journalists are, paradoxically, dependent.

Compare this with a political actor like Donald Trump. Because he generates enormously positive social capital responses with his base due, in part, to his challenge to norms, he can navigate the current US political field with ease. Institutional actors like legacy media do not have such leeway with audiences. Patronage did not really end with the development of print capitalism. Rather, it became more diffuse. Independence from political parties was achieved in a sense but it was replaced by a different kind of dependence on decorum and not upsetting the status quo.
Chapter 6

Conclusions

In this final section, I want to consider the significance of the analysis in a wider context, and to connect it with emerging trends and events in the years since 2015. Pre-existing professional values and norms seemed to be the basis of ideological group formation articulated in response to the Brian Williams scandal. For reasons we will explore below, this probably has not changed. The analysis seemed to confirm that there were other discourses at play and we will consider what these might be in today’s media climate?

In February 2015 I watched from Europe as Brian Williams took over US Twitter. ‘#BrianWilliamsMemories’ and ‘#BrianWilliamsMisremembers hashtags’ trended, and hastily mocked-up image macros portrayed the newsman claiming all kinds of outlandish things: that he was with Armstrong on the moon landings, that he stormed the Normandy beaches on D-Day, and more. Perhaps his brand of ‘alternative facts’ was simply too ahead of its time?

The years since 2015 have seen something of a public crisis of confidence in media. In November 2016 Oxford Dictionaries announced that their ‘Word of the Year’ would be “Post-truth” (2016). Early 2017 marked the beginning of Donald Trump’s efforts to brand media stories he didn’t like as “Fake News” (Trump, 2017). Even the BBC has been driven to dedicate airtime to asking whether “facts have lost out to feelings” (Fidgen, 2017)?

The media has been unambiguously happy to make use of these labels as Pieter Maeseele notes in a lecture given to the Future of Journalism 2017 conference. News outlets saw the value in these terms as a way to bolster their decreasing relevance, according to Maeseele. For flagging
news institutions the formulation went as follows: Trump’s success was a result of the shrinking role of legacy media in people’s lives. "The implication being, that if only the influence of legacy news media would increase again, people would vote for reasonable politicians again" (Maeseele, 2017). The media positioning themselves as against "fake news" is correctly seen by Maeseele as a reactionary position which tries to portray legacy media as the sole purveyors of truth.

The age we are living through is not a rupture of normal proceedings though. It is not some eruption of deplorable public servants and of previously unconscionable behaviour without precedent. This thesis’ historical context was drawn up to show that the perceived coarsening of American public discourse was not an aberration.

Rather it was an extant facet of American public life that journalism transformed and transmitted because of cultural and economic capital forces that emerged in the late nineteenth century. The cooption of the prestige of scientific empiricism (e.g. the claims of objectivity) for social capital gains was one strand.

The other was the development of norms upholding as broad a political consensus as possible. That vague consensus contributed financially to keep outlets solvent and sometimes remarkably profitable up until the late Twentieth century. It also enshrined racism, sexism, homophobia, and anti-labour attitudes so long as they went unchallenged and only when outrage was great enough outlets relented and reshaped their values as if they had never held them.

It is important to recognise in conclusion that the structuring imperatives of cultural and economic capital are ideal means of conceptualising motives for ideological analysis but they also open up more subtle avenues of future enquiry. Intra-media rivalry legitimised as a valuable parallel discourse is clearly present in the texts, but other potential lines of analysis presented themselves in Parker and Rieder’s texts which would bear further investigation.

A normative defence was interwoven with commercial criticism in the Parker’s and given equal weight, but less immediate visual prominence, in Rieder (being relegated to the backend). Critical analysis lends itself to a reading of these formal choices as suggestive of self-interest, of covering both bases, so to speak.

However, an alternative and more generous critical reading would focus much more on the
extra-textual positioning of the authors. As outlined above, both occupy gendered (Parker as a woman) and institutional (Rieder at a tabloid) outsider status versus Brooks (male/heritage newspaper columnist). This potentially helps to account for their more unforgiving normative defence and more explicit commercial criticism, which was absent from Brooks’ work- they are attempting to wrest discursive control of cultural capital from people exactly like Brooks. They may not be responding to him directly but cultural capital in the field of American news media still bent towards Brooks’ in 2015, and to people very like Brooks: White, middle-aged male columnists with heritage newspapers of note.

Parker and Rieder are not reducible to these power disparities but a more expansive theoretical framework that introduced gender, race, and institutional approaches would be vital in any further work. It has the potential to add fascinating new levels of critical understanding of ideology within the field.

Research might focus on a set of individual journalists, incorporate interview responses surveying attitudes and opinions and compared them with texts. This might also help to disentangle the unseen mediation that often goes ignored in a textual analysis: the role of the news editor in the production of ideology in texts. A large and potentially complex corpus of interviews with journalists and editors, raw texts and published texts would be necessary but it would be interesting whether situated within one institution or comparing between outlets.

Digital avenues of study would also be fruitful. The study of the production or circulation of memetic content (memes) by outlets and individuals might also be a fruitful application of field theory and CDA. These highly adaptive social cognition models are commonly associated with visual material (infographics, screen captures, Pepes, and gifs). However, this category can also encompass written material. For example, the 2016 election created vast swathes of twitter slogans (“Lock her up”, ”Bernie would have won”, “#Imwithher”) and ‘hot take’ texts that are a growing part of the modern news landscape. These are aspects of digital communication that demand fresh eyes compared to traditional textual analysis and a critical cultural model combining field theory and van Dijk seems like a flexible and incisive tool to do so.

There is also the matter of attempting to understand the growth of the state of flux that Fuller identified (2010). The contradictory-seeming discursive impulses identified in these texts from
2015 reflect this underlying instability but it seems to have continued to accelerate in the intervening years. Brian Williams’ minor brush with untruth seems like a fleeting but telling moment compared to the unfolding spectacle of the Trump administration. Susan Glasser, writing in response to findings that Trump made 4,229 "false and misleading claims" in the six months up to August 2018, sounded resigned when she opined that "the falsehoods are as much a part of his political identity as his floppy orange hair" (2018). And yet, Donald Trump enjoys 80 percent approval ratings amongst Republicans. This voting base is consuming media produced by journalists. Given the success of privately funded conservative outlets like Breitbart, future research might investigate whether American journalism is closer now to a pre-commercial partisan model?

Bourdieu’s field and van Dijk’s work used in this thesis would be a useful foundation to build on. The centrality of contestation can help us to understand that truth-telling scandals and chaos in the media landscape is an evolutionary feature, not an aberration. Assessing this febrile mass of evolving signs and signifiers in a coherent fashion will require attempts to understand emerging trends and the asking of fundamental critical questions: What ideologies are in play in American media? Whom does the dominant discourse serve? Why, where, and how is it being articulated?
Chapter 7

Bibliography


Barthel, M. (2014). You don’t really have to know a news outlet to trust (or distrust) it. [online] Pew Research Center. Available at: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/10/you-dont-really-have-to-know-a-news-outlet-to-say-you-trust-it/ [Accessed 01/08/2018].


It’s the critical question in the Brian Williams affair.

Is wildly exaggerating your exploits – or lying about them – on late-night TV interviews and other venues a side issue? Or does it go directly to the heart of the role of the U.S.’ most-watched television news anchor?

Because if the answer is the latter, it means there’s no way Williams can ride this out. He is gone.

But not everyone thinks that’s the case. Andrew Tyndall, who monitors TV news on the Tyndall Report, told my colleague Roger Yu: "Reasons when they fire journalists are for journalistic reasons. This doesn’t rise to the level."

And New York Times media columnist David Carr wrote in his Monday column that he didn’t think Williams should lose his job over his embellishments, because "his transgressions were not a fundamental part of his primary responsibilities."

I couldn’t disagree more.

Credibility is the fundamental responsibility of the TV anchor. Let’s be clear: Anchor Job No. 1
is presenting the news to the American people. While network news in the digital era is hardly what it was in the glory days, it's not nothing: Williams has an audience of about 9 million people. And most of those people tune in because they believe what they are hearing from the anchor. They can trust him (or her).

Sure, anchors have other responsibilities. They go to the scene of big news, as Williams has: combat zones, natural disasters. And Williams also is the managing editor of NBC News. But the major job of the anchor is to convey information, with a style that is appealing, and above all with a persona that is believable.

It’s very difficult to do that if people think you have a tendency to, putting it most kindly, stretch the truth, as Williams admits he did regarding his adventures in Iraq. And now his accounts of his exploits during Hurricane Katrina and in the Middle East have been called into question.

And the constant pounding on the Internet – images of Williams riding with O.J. during The Chase, Williams as World War II hero – doesn’t do much to help the gravitas factor. It’s hard to imagine Walter Cronkite in similar straits – or maybe Uncle Walter was just lucky he toiled in the harsh, primitive days before Twitter.

Meanwhile, things continue to look bleak for Williams, and it’s hard to see how they get brighter. NBC News, as it must, is investigating, although it hasn’t been very specific about just what it is looking into. Williams has taken himself temporarily out of the anchor chair. New questions continue to be raised about other Williams anecdotes, including one about being robbed while selling Christmas trees in Red Bank, N.J., to help a church. It’s the classic death of a thousand cuts.

Williams was wise to cancel a planned appearance Thursday on the Late Show with David Letterman. It was on Letterman, after all, that he told his now-recanted story of being in a chopper that was hit by enemy fire and forced down. Returning to the scene could be filed under the heading, "no good can come of this."

So now NBC is faced with an excruciating decision. Williams has been a rare bright spot for its battered news division, which has been on something of a losing streak. The network has seen its long run as the top morning show come to an end, and it did itself no favors by hanging
popular Today co-host Ann Curry out to dry. Its iconic Meet the Press has tumbled to third place among the Sunday morning talk shows, and the network allowed ratings-challenged host David Gregory to twist slowly, slowly in the wind before mercifully replacing him last year with Chuck Todd.

The Army recently denounced an NBC report that Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl would be charged with desertion as "patently false." And Nancy Snyderman, the network's chief medical correspondent, came under fire last year for violating her voluntary Ebola quarantine.

NBC News President Deborah Turness has had a stormy reign, indeed. Now this.

So does the network – can the network – simply ride out the storm? Or does it ax its glamorous public face, one in which it has invested so much?

It may well be that the situation resolves itself. If the heat gets too intense, Williams may realize it's time to go.
Appendix B

New York Times

February 10, 2015 Tuesday Late Edition - Final

The Act of Rigorous Forgiving

BYLINE: By DAVID BROOKS, OP-ED COLUMNIST

There's something sad in Brian Williams's need to puff up his Iraq adventures and something barbaric in the public response.

The sad part is the reminder that no matter how high you go in life and no matter how many accolades you win, it's never enough. The desire for even more admiration races ahead. Career success never really satisfies. Public love always leaves you hungry. Even very famous people can do self-destructive things in an attempt to seem just a little cooler.

The barbaric part is the way we respond to scandal these days. When somebody violates a public trust, we try to purge and ostracize him. A sort of coliseum culture takes over, leaving no place for mercy. By now, the script is familiar: Some famous person does something wrong. The Internet, the most impersonal of mediums, erupts with contempt and mockery. The offender issues a paltry half-apology, which only inflames the public more. The pounding cry for resignation builds until capitulation comes. Public passion is spent and the spotlight moves on.

I've only spoken with Williams a few times, and can't really speak about the man (though I often appear on NBC News's "Meet the Press"), but I do think we'd all be better off if we reacted to these sorts of scandals in a different way. The civic fabric would be stronger if,
instead of trying to sever relationships with those who have done wrong, we tried to repair them, if we tried forgiveness instead of exiling.

Forgiveness is often spoken of in sentimental terms – as gushy absolution for everything, regardless of right or wrong. But many writers – ranging from Hannah Arendt and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to modern figures like Jeffrie Murphy and L. Gregory Jones – have tried to think hard about rigorous forgiveness, which balances accountability with compassion.

They’ve generally described four different processes involved in forgiveness:

Pre-emptive mercy. Martin Luther King Jr. argued that forgiveness isn’t an act; it’s an attitude. We are all sinners. We expect sin, empathize with sin and are slow to think ourselves superior. The forgiving person is strong enough to display anger and resentment toward the person who has wronged her, but she is also strong enough to give away that anger and resentment. In this view, the forgiving person makes the first move, even before the offender has asked. She resists the natural urge for vengeance. Instead, she creates a welcoming context in which the offender can confess.

Judgment. A wrong is an occasion to re-evaluate. What is the character of the person in question? Should a period of stupidity eclipse a record of decency?

It’s also an occasion to investigate each unique circumstance, the nature of each sin that was committed and the implied remedy to that sin. Some sins, like anger and lust, are like wild beasts. They have to be fought through habits of restraint. Some sins like bigotry are like stains. They can only be expunged by apology and cleansing. Some like stealing are like a debt. They can only be rectified by repaying. Some, like adultery, are more like treason than like crime; they can only be rectified by slowly reweaving relationships. Some sins like vanity – Williams’s sin – can only be treated by extreme self-abasement.

During the judgment phase, hard questions have to be asked so that in forgiving we don’t lower our standards.

Confession and Penitence. At some point the offender has to get out in front of the process, being more self-critical than anyone else around him. He has to probe down to the root of his error, offer a confession more complete than expected. He has to put public reputation
and career on the back burner and come up with a course that will move him toward his own emotional and spiritual recovery, to become strongest in the weakest places.

Reconciliation and re-trust. After judgments have been made and penitence performed, both the offender and offended bend toward each other. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, trust doesn’t have to be immediate, but the wrong act is no longer a barrier to a relationship. The offender endures his season of shame and is better for it. The offended are free from mean emotions like vengeance and are uplifted when they offer kindness. The social fabric is repaired. Community solidarity is strengthened by the reunion.

I guess I think Brian Williams shouldn’t have to resign, for the reason David Carr emphasized in The Times: Williams’s transgressions were not part of his primary job responsibilities. And because I think good people are stronger when given second chances.

But the larger question is how we build community in the face of scandal. Do we exile the offender or heal the relationship? Would you rather become the sort of person who excludes, or one who offers tough but healing love?
Why did he do it?

BYLINE: Kathleen Parker

These are tough times for NBC’s Brian Williams - and tougher times for journalism.

The NBC newsman was suspended Tuesday night for six months amid charges that he misremembered or conflated wartime incidents he reported on from Iraq and Israel. He has also come under scrutiny for possible conflations in reporting from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Williams told stories that, among other things, misrepresented his proximity to danger or death. Some have called his reportage "humble-bragging," trying to enhance his reputation by focusing on supposed duress.

Others saw Williams’s false reports as outright lies for self-aggrandizement, while still others conceded that sometimes stories change in the retelling. Over time, don’t we all conflate incidents and mess up details to some degree?

Some mixture of all this may have been at play in Williams’s case, though one persistent thought nags like a rude kid yanking on your coat sleeve: "Hey, lady, that guy’s a 10-million-buck newsman; he ain’t supposed to get the facts mixed up!"

The first misremembrance, for which Williams apologized last week, pertains to a 2003 incident

Appendix C

Washington Post

February 11, 2015 Wednesday Regional Edition

Why did he do it?

BYLINE: Kathleen Parker

These are tough times for NBC’s Brian Williams - and tougher times for journalism.

The NBC newsman was suspended Tuesday night for six months amid charges that he misremembered or conflated wartime incidents he reported on from Iraq and Israel. He has also come under scrutiny for possible conflations in reporting from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Williams told stories that, among other things, misrepresented his proximity to danger or death. Some have called his reportage "humble-bragging," trying to enhance his reputation by focusing on supposed duress.

Others saw Williams’s false reports as outright lies for self-aggrandizement, while still others conceded that sometimes stories change in the retelling. Over time, don’t we all conflate incidents and mess up details to some degree?

Some mixture of all this may have been at play in Williams’s case, though one persistent thought nags like a rude kid yanking on your coat sleeve: "Hey, lady, that guy’s a 10-million-buck newsman; he ain’t supposed to get the facts mixed up!"

The first misremembrance, for which Williams apologized last week, pertains to a 2003 incident
in Iraq. Williams said that the Army Chinook he was riding in was forced down by a rocket-propelled grenade - except that his helicopter wasn’t the one that was hit.

Then in 2006, while covering the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict, Williams initially reported on MSNBC that he was flying at about 1,500 feet and could see two rockets launched from about six miles away.

A month later, the story changed when he told Comedy Central’s Jon Stewart that rockets passed 1,500 feet below his helicopter. Then in 2007, he told an audience at Fairfield University that the rockets sailed just beneath him.

These are conflicting statements, to be sure, but were they malicious or intentionally misleading? Or, are they just stories that get better in the retelling, as humans tend to do? Our recollection of traumatic events is often flawed in some part because fear alters the brain and memory. Whether one is hit or not, surely the terror of flying where rockets are near can magnify and distort events.

This is not to make excuses for Williams but to put into perspective this particular chapter. He wasn’t officially reporting in subsequent renditions but was entertaining an audience with war stories. Is an anchor always an anchor, or does Brian Williams get to be just Brian on occasion?

Less easily understood or justified is how one could recall being brought down by a grenade when one was not.

More embarrassing than contemptible, these stories can be seen as attempting to add a little sweat and grime rather than egoistic sheen to Williams’s squeaky-clean profile. It is hard to imagine why Williams would falsely report events from his perch in one of broadcast journalism’s most coveted jobs in exchange for slightly louder applause.

Pure ego? Extravagant insecurity? The loss of perspective that often accompanies wealth and celebrity? Were these retellings merely overembellished anecdotes or evidence of something more pathological in nature?

Williams and his therapist will have to soldier through that one.

In the New Orleans incident, Williams reported that he saw a corpse floating down the street
from his hotel window. But Williams was in the Ritz-Carlton on the edge of the French Quarter, where there was little to no flooding.

Unlike so many who are backstroking in schadenfraude, I’m torn between feeling sorry for Williams and wanting to see him step aside out of respect for what remains of journalistic principle. It must be unbearable waking up each day and cringing with despair upon remembering correctly that the nightmare is real.

However.

At the end of the newscast - or the story or column - what matters most in journalism is credibility and public trust, both of which have suffered in recent years. It isn’t only that news delivery has become more slanted as partisanship displaces objectivity but that high-profile individuals and institutions have squandered trust in pursuit of something other than truth.

Williams likely fell into the trap of trying to be part of a story of heroism. His sin was reckless, but is it cause for ending a career?

Many wager that money will determine the answer - Williams makes a bunch for the network - but the bottom line depends entirely on one crucial question: Will people ever trust Williams again?

At the very least, Williams deserves to find out.

kathleenparker@washpost.com